

**Linking the Arts to
Environment &
Sustainable
Development**



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Image credit (front cover): “Luxurious Riffraff” by Chinese artist Chen Hangfeng. Recycled plastic, metal, acrylic ball and metal wire, dimension variable, 2008. Chen was a participant of the 7th Asia-Europe Art Camp: Moved, Mutated and Disturbed Identities held in Luxembourg and China in 2009. Chen often works with recycled material in his artwork. Image courtesy of Chen Hangfeng.

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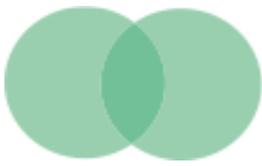
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Linking the Arts to Environment and Sustainable Development

Research commissioned as part of the Asia-Europe Foundation's Connect2Culture programme

Environmental conservation and sustainable development are among the key challenges faced by countries and communities across the world. Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, civil society stakeholders have become increasingly active, alongside Governments, in the global dialogue on environmental issues. More recently, the culture sector has begun to explore and engage with pressing issues of environmental sustainability.

Recognising the important and changing role of culture in contemporary society, the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) initiated a programme called Connect2Culture in 2008. The programme's main objective is to investigate the evolving role of arts and culture in society. To this end, the programme brings together professionals from different sectors including government, arts, science and technology to address pertinent issues from their unique perspectives. Dialogue within the programme was fostered through a variety of formats including artistic projects, workshops, research and policy meetings. Through these encounters, the programme not only fostered cross-disciplinary networks between civil society stakeholders Asia and Europe, but also served to channel recommendations to ASEM governments on the significant role of the arts and culture in addressing the most urgent issues of our times.

The first initiative under Connect2Culture was the Asia-Europe Dialogue on Arts, Culture and Climate Change held in October 2008 in Beijing, China. The Dialogue brought together 45 artists, cultural practitioners, scientists and sociologists from Asia and Europe to exchange cross-disciplinary perspectives on climate change. Important learnings from this Dialogue pointed towards the need to close existing knowledge gaps vis-à-vis best practices linking the arts and sustainable development issues, and for dialogue on arts, culture and the environment to progress from the individual to the institutional level.

In this context, the Department of Cultural Exchange at ASEF commissioned research that would give an overview of 'good practices' linking the arts to sustainable development issues in Asia. The idea of this research was based on the observation that carefully documented case studies can not only provide inspiration for networking and collaboration in and between Asia and Europe but also aid policy making and planning.

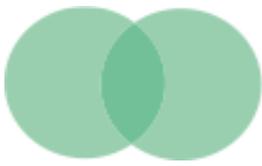
ASEF requested case studies from Asian countries within the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), that were multidisciplinary collaborations bringing together the

culture sector and other stakeholders, including scientists, environmentalists and policy makers.

ASEF was keenly interested in examples that went beyond merely employing the arts as tools for information, rather seeking projects that envisaged art as a catalyst to stimulate discourse and foster change. The initiatives profiled in this research range across a variety of forms of collaboration, such as creative interventions, innovative solutions, public art initiatives, networks, seminars, training and research projects. The final research covered 20 case studies across nine countries of India, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore and Mongolia. These case studies serve as an introduction to practices in the cross-section of arts and environment and by sharing these innovative projects, ASEF hopes to inspire other such examples of diverse and creative connections between art and environment.

Department of Cultural Exchange

Asia-Europe Foundation



India

The profiles for India were researched and written by Deepak Srinivasan, Monica James and Ekta Mittal.

As researcher, artist and media practitioner **Deepak Srinivasan** is currently a member of Maraa Media Collective (<http://maraa.in/>) and also works as a faculty member at Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology, Bangalore. Since 2005, Srinivasan has been training in performing arts & community theatre to understand the role of the artist in community expression. Having worked as content resource & show host with Worldspace Satellite Radio between 2007 and 2009, he is now bringing his skills in art, performance and media together to work with urban communities. As an art practitioner choosing to engage deeper in context centric processes of art and media, he hopes to foster local linkages between practitioner groups, activists, communities and policy consortiums. Srinivasan completed a Bachelor's degree in environmental sciences and a Master's degree in biology.

Monica James is a writer, media practitioner and researcher with maraa- a media and arts collective. Her recent work is centered around community radio, media policy, spectrum reform, creative practices in times of conflict and urban transformation. She is the co-organizer of Pause-in times of Conflict and Theater Jam.

Ekta Mittal is a co-founder of Maraa Media Collective (<http://maraa.in/>). She is also one of the founding members of Masrah, an eight year old theatre group. Prior to this, Mittal worked at VOICES, a media advocacy group in Bangalore, to bring out a publication on Community Media. As a result she stayed with the organisation for two years. During this time, she had the opportunity to get hands-on experience with community radio, video and theatre, both in Bangalore and rural Karnataka. Mittal is passionate about travel, and has also worked as Research Manager for The Blue Yonder, a responsible tourism company where she identified communities to work with in Karnataka and Rajasthan. Mittal studied Social Communication Media in Mumbai.



The Katte Project

Inquiry: Art, activism, negotiations and dialogue on urban ecology

Organizations: Maraa and Salon Emmer

Artists: Deepak Srinivasan, Tanja Dinter, Lisa Lengheimer

Date: 2009 - 2010

Researchers: Monica James, Ekta Mittal

Mapping Dissent

Art activists remap their neighbourhood in a bid to reclaim it, to persuade the citizens of Bangalore to engage in participative protest in an attempt to give voice to bubbling unrest.

Ever since the rapid transformation in appearance, aesthetics, infrastructure and ecology of Bangalore city began, indiscriminate tree felling has stood out as traumatic loss for inhabitants of the city. These trees have many meanings and utilities for different groups - childhood memories, local landmarks, shade, spaces of livelihood and urban identity. Many, from vendors to school going children, from taxi drivers to two wheeler riders, traders to residents, would like to register their discontent with this loss resulting from the non-participative process of development.

Along with various citizen's collectives, Maraa, a community media and arts collective working in the city of Bangalore, chose to respond to the tree felling by registering dissent with the municipal bodies against urban road widening methods and mega infrastructure development projects (like metro rail construction). For their campaign, Maraa helped with poster design, used creative slogans, props and costumes and added energy through performance and song. Small changes in the protest format brought the average activist-on-the-street identity more attention and ensured public engagement.



Site specific rituals where trees had been felled. Image courtesy of Maraa.

Deepak Srinivasan, a core member of Maraa expresses, "While working on the anti-road widening campaigns, we realised that many wanted to voice their thoughts on loss of trees but the space that allowed people to speak about the changing city was not available. The urban environment was so much a part of people's memory of the urbanscape". Srinivasan elaborates, "Maraa has always emphasized on participative media and participative art, it now looked like we were facilitating participative protest!"



The question of non-participative development stayed with the Collective as it grappled with the changing socio-political climate which influenced cultural, ecological and infrastructural changes of the city. During this time, Salon Emmer, a Viennese dance collective consisting of movement artists Elisabeth (Lisa) Lengheimer and Tanja Tinter were in touch with Srinivasan and expressed interest in collaborating on a project focusing on urban ecology. Salon Emmer's methods of using movement and dance for community participation and Maraa's work which used art in public spaces in Bangalore worked well together to provide propelling intent for the beginnings of the Katte Project.

Responding to a call by Khoj International Artists Association (Delhi) for a community/social art project called Negotiating Routes, Maraa proposed exploring participative protest forms in Bangalore between March 2010 and July 2010. Maraa and Salon Emmer chose to work with cartographical mapping of a neighbourhood using the local school as the starting point. Shanthinagar, a neighbourhood in Bangalore with colliding socio-economic classes, conflicting modernities, as well as an internationally famous botanical park, Lalbagh, became a critical focal site to examine changing attitudes towards urban ecology.

"What were people's perceptions of alternate spaces, alternate routes, journeys through the city and the much needed intermittent spaces of pause?" questions Lengheimer. Did Lalbagh constitute this space for pause or were there alternate cultural/ecological markers? Did individual trees or clusters and traditionally grown groves offer such a space? The concept of the Katte began to take form. A Katte (in the local language Kannada) is a traditional community platform built around trees. These platforms had provided spaces for assembly, dialogue, and reflection to communities, functioning as social, cultural and ecological symbol of the past through times of modernising colonial and post-colonial realities.

Activities and workshops done as a part of the Maraa-Salon Emmer collaborations were called the Katte Project. The two primary activities of the residency were:

1. Cartographical Maps

The project, 81 Maps of Shantinagar, rose out of a series of walks and interactions with the areas surrounding Shanthinagar, Bangalore. Peeling off the visible neighbourhood and its landmarks, the attempt was to trace invisible parts of the neighbourhood and get residents from different urban classes in the area to participate in a collective mapping process. While trying to identify willing and participative community members, local school children showed most interest in the exercise. An art and mapping workshop with the school led to different types of maps and perspectives being

shared, and trends of the invisible and sudden geo-cultural change emerged.



A child participating in representing his emotional-spatial map of the neighbourhood. Image courtesy of Maraa.

2. Participative protest: Rootless Rituals

Intending to work with more activists and engage both the activists and artists through a series of workshops, Srinivasan called city activists, artists and interested citizens to work with Maraa. These workshops would propose alternate and creative modes of protest or expression of dissent against the disappearing urban ecology. Such a series of workshops led to the Rootless Rituals activity where participants went out to specific sites with felled trees and demonstrated dissent through movement, visual triggers and facilitated dialogue.

The project, Rootless Rituals, was conducted in several locations to initiate dialogue and to mourn the increasing loss of green-space in the city. From yogic postures and salutations to silent protests holding paper images of tear drops and being roadside substitute trees, all forms of performance and protest generated a spectacle and cause for pause and dialogue. Pedestrians stopped to look curiously and bikers reduced their pace. Many spoke of the difficulties with heat and lack of shade, as well as the inconveniences to pedestrians because of digging and construction. They were willing to share and seemed excited to have a simple avenue where they could voice their opinions and concerns. This form of participative protest seemed to generate more public enthusiasm, interest and need for action.

What began as an inquiry into protest and participation has led to fostering new relationships with the changing city. Renewed dialogues and spaces for reflection for activists has in small ways led to increased enthusiasm and vigour to pursue communicative and alternative dialogue on changing urban ecology. The Katte project experience led to a citywide Urban Tree Festival centred around diverse artists' response to the changing urban ecology.



Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation (LAMO)

**Inquiry: Community participation through
media and the arts**

**Artists: Ravina Aggarwal and Monisha
Ahmed**

Researcher: Deepak Srinivasan

Telling Local Stories

Local organisation Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation re-focuses on the local, restoring an historic house to create a space for contemporary expression and community gatherings.

“In locating the youth in their local and engaging in conversations on their evolving identities, their needs and desires can be dialogued with...”

(Monisha Ahmed, co-founder of LAMO)

It is interesting to ask, what is lost and what is gained when the local is displaced by global, and this is never more so than in the case of the work of the Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation (LAMO <http://www.lamo.org.in/index.html>). Monisha Ahmed, founder of LAMO, speaks of much needed and ongoing inter-generational dialogue that LAMO is trying to facilitate in Old Town of Leh, Jammu and Kashmir. Here, global forces intervene by encouraging the world to turn its back on regions of Ladakh. Residents are drawn outwards in pursuit of opportunity and facilities. In many ways, the neglect propels them towards more “mainstream” aspirations and soon brings about changes to the local environment and living.



LAMO Neighbourhood Project. Image courtesy of LAMO.

Given the rich diversity within communities’ practices and cultural spaces, can retention of identity in times of domination be tapped into in order to revitalise and mobilise? Ethnographer and academic Ravina Aggarwal, co-founder of LAMO, has written about dominant Buddhist-centric articulations and visualisations that have propagated the exotic gaze. In her long engagement with the region, Aggarwal has argued for acknowledgement of Ladakh’s need for independent South Asian identity and cultural diversity. Since the 90s face-off for border power with Kashmiri insurgents and Pakistani armed forces, Indian national forces impose certain dominant perceptions. The state machinery projected the region as an outlawed constituency during



the 1999 Kargil war while national media prompted further disconnections to Ladakh using war zone rhetoric.

Set in this climate, LAMO locates itself in what is most often described as “harsh yet ravishingly beautiful” landscape, wrought with issues of livelihood, political strife, conflict and ecological hardship. By building a physical cultural node in Leh, the LAMO center hopes to facilitate a re-budding of local networks for art practitioners and activists of the same constituency. This it does through community art and media projects that initiate dialogues on regional post-globalisation changes. Aggarwal has worked in the region for over 20 years, documenting, studying and re-framing discourses on cultural performance in the local context. Monisha Ahmed, also a social ethnographer, has worked on textile interactions and trade in the region and has helped set up LAMO as a registered body. Through their deep-rooted understandings of this region, the researchers hope to foster interactive understanding between ecologies of livelihoods, crafts, expression and prevalent economies for sustenance.

Although globalisation projects operationalize primarily through avenues of economy, emerging aesthetics reshape the architectural and the corporeal (food & clothing related lifestyle practices) and these changes further consumerism and lifestyle shifts. Keeping architecture central to the statement of reinitiating dialogue on the changing local, Ladakh Media and an arts collective began with a restoration project. A crumbling heritage, the Munshi house that stood in the centre of Leh at the foot of King Singge Namgyal’s palace was restored to become the LAMO center.



LAMO Centre before restoration. Image courtesy of LAMO.

It was the residence of the Togoche or Munshi family-ministers to the king; and most likely dates back to the seventeenth century. The historic house, (along with the Gyao house) restored and converted to an arts space with offices, galleries, a library, screening room, conference room, and open-air performance site becomes a nodal space for contemporary expression and

congregation for the people of Leh in Ladakh. Ahmed highlights this as a demonstration of constructive creative dissidence towards unintelligent application of modern architectural design. In the fatal Ladakh landslide of May 2010, where many localities were affected and residences were lost, the resistant LAMO centre additionally demonstrated the strengths of hybrid traditional-modern forms of architectural knowing (structural building and waterproofing).

LAMO’s on-going mapping of neighbourhood histories uses participative media and arts and involves local Ladakhi youth. Stories of the neighbourhood are brought back into conscious realms: ranging from understanding changing landscapes, public spaces, migration and community histories to engaging with histories of evolution and traditional know-how of local water networks. Participants facilitate dialogues amidst their communities on issues like changing landscape, ecology and nomadic livelihoods to enable a dialogical, inquiry prone, critical consciousness. LAMO goes a step further in channelling the produced media and documentation to feed into policy circles.

Acquiring a political edge in its practice, the LAMO community ensures that it deals with contemporary regional issues like communal conflict, and ensures through affirmative action, participation and equal opportunities for under-represented caste groups.



48 Degrees Celsius

Inquiry: Creating interfaces between contemporary visual art practice and public realms

Organisations: Khoj International Artists Association, Goethe-Institut and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)

Artists: Prof. K.T. Ravindran, Arunava Dasgupta and Pooja Sood

Date: December 2008

Researcher: Deepak Srinivasan

Contemporary Art beyond the Gallery

International and local artists involve communities to rediscover neighbourhoods, traditions and public spaces by taking art to the people.

The project 48 Degrees intended to interrogate the teetering ecology of the city through contemporary art. Pooja Sood, curator and creative director of Khoj International Artists Association and artistic director of 48 Degrees (<http://www.48c.org/>), speaks of competition for contemporary art with Bollywood film industry and growing mall cultures. Contemporary art outside the gallery space has a long way to go in terms of demonstrating potential as Sood puts it, and 48 Degrees Celsius (48°C) has been a trial run. The proposals received ranged from research to provocation, dialogue to visual treat, projects set on large-scale canvasses to small activities. The festival also aimed at connecting a 'lay' public to contemporary visual art.

The project situated 24 artists work amidst sprawling metropolis' markets, streets, gullies and gathering corners. Using the geo-architectural cultural area of an urban space like Delhi and its changing ecology and utilising the public rail transport system as the spine of the festival grid, the art festival has attempted to connect the artist back to the public realm.



Chabeel by Atul Bhalla. Image courtesy of 48 Degrees Celsius.

Involving the local community and revisiting narratives of automation, labour and ecology, new media artists Ashok Sukumaran and Shaina Anand put together guided tours through older industrial neighbourhoods of Delhi, the tours being led by trained local cycle-rickshaw riders (rickshaw wallas). Such action aimed at reconnecting with and rediscovering the city neighbourhoods. Interdisciplinary artists like Asim Waqif's work 'Agrasen ki bavdi yahan hai!' (Herein lies the stepwell of King Agrasen) highlighted old practices and heritage sites like neglected stepwell architecture. In the past, communities had functioned around stepwells, both for public life and as source of freshwater. In another example, multimedia artist Navjot Altaf's project, 'Barakhamba in 2008'



explored complex urban interconnections and disconnections between city development programmes, planners and people who use it.

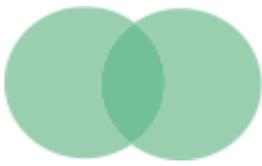
European artists like Sabine Haubitz and Stefanie Zoche's video sculpture work, 'The Yamuna Blues' poetically rendered ecological implications of modernity on Delhi's river, Yamuna, by using public space as a site for an exhibition, projection and interaction. New York-based Mary Miss' work (an artist known for environmentally based artwork) focused on the neglected archaeological site of Roshanara Park to draw out 'relationalities' between urban community awareness and ecology.



Roshanaras Net by Mary Miss. Image courtesy of 48 Degrees Celsius.

Though 48°C seems like a large-scale attempt to connect artistic ways of inquiry to ecological aspects of knowing, the curator Sood feels it was also an experiment to locate the artist in responsible space. Did it matter that contemporary artists and art were on the periphery? Was it possible to create spaces for artists to intervene given the impending ecological crises in many spheres of human existence, and with most mechanisms of communication and dialogue not producing impact? Sood commented that "artists are not only seen as peripheral, but they also make themselves peripheral." Public art allowed the possibilities of putting the artist in the midst of direct negotiations with their audiences, with government agencies, with systemic discourses.

On the policy front, 48°C has brought about an image change for contemporary art in Delhi that has facilitated the possibility of engaging in dialogue with the Indian State. From an impossible, non-comprehending space, local municipal and decision making agents of urban Delhi have been provided a glimpse into possibilities of viewing and understanding art beyond being just a tool for purposes of entertainment.



Soak: Mumbai in an Estuary

Inquiry: Urban ecology and infrastructure design

Artists: Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha

Date: 2009

Researcher: Deepak Srinivasan

The Art of Urban Planning

Artist designers Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha break paradigms by denouncing rigidity and embracing fluidity to inspire harmonious postcolonial contemplation on the relationship between land and sea to better plan urban settlements.

Soak: Mumbai in an Estuary (Soak) is a mediation on urban terrain design. Designers Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha, artists in their own right, produce this postmodernist, interventionist critique of postcolonial India's urban planning. It is an evolving presentation of new visual methodology that reveals metropolis Mumbai's relationship with the rain drenched monsoon ecology. As a re-interpretative commentary of estuary land, this project puts the storyteller of ecology centre stage and maps their stories alongside urban and social terrain. By doing so, it systematically critiques previously codified postcolonial imaginations of Mumbai, a south Asian metropolis.

Mathur and da Cunha speak of "embracing complexity" while they articulate the phenomenon of land inundated by monsoon. The duo map a different imaginative experience from operationally rigidified landscaping and planning, incumbent in local municipal bodies. However, this reality of an estuary falls far from the experienced reality of the Mumbai monsoons. In the past decade, Mumbai experienced a disastrous deluge – the floods of 2005¹. Mathur and da Cunha insist that reconstructing urban water flow infrastructure when designed in conjunction with better understanding of porosities of estuary land might enable a controllable dialogue with the monsoon.



SOAK exhibition. Image courtesy of SOAK.

Placing an emphasis on visualising relationships between elements of lived geography, da Cunha highlights the current problem in envisioning land. The designer duo's visioning exercise works as a critique of colonial, boundary based maps; such maps myopically depict

¹ <http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/content/mumbai-marooned-enquiry-mumbai-floods-2005-final-report>



water bodies as confined containments. Colonial mapping techniques do not facilitate a relationship between water, flora, fauna and humanity with its social practices. Through their reinterpretation, the designers problematise current urban planning approaches.

Visibly excited while articulating a shift in land-water relationship captured in a postcolonial historical-geographic rhetoric such as “land of rivers”, a vision which they claim has led to technological and infrastructural scrambling for control, Mathur and da Cunha propose a paradigmatic movement into visuals evoked by “land of rain”. Soak thus provides new avenues to review Mumbai’s mounting complex relationship with the sea.

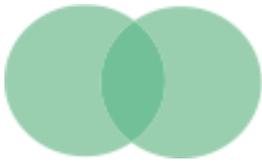
The sea, usually held culpable as a non-spatial entity in conflict with the geo-terrain, is kept out by building non-negotiable land-sea barriers. As inquiry into this conflict, Soak proposes a redesign keeping in mind porosity and dialogical between land and sea.



SOAK exhibition. Image courtesy of SOAK.

Soak takes on revaluation of landscape through sectional viewing which, through varying porosity, allows draining, channelling and containing water, as well as fresh water replenishment. Soak poetically and methodologically attributes a temporality to this land-water inter-relationship and proposes a shift in design, infrastructure and existent municipal and social practices by offering a more fluid elaboration of land usage.

Mathur and da Cunha’s work alludes towards a re-examination of notions of Commons within its new framework of eco-negotiability and urban design. The poetics relocate Commons to a political realm by pitching for an interpretation of utility of occupied space as temporally shifting and elastic, emphasising the importance of temporality and negotiability in thinking and planning. The socio-political responsibility to govern Commons then calls for a re-evaluation in design, maintenance and service in urban systems allowing cost effective visualisations and conversations on technology in urban planning.



Myanmar

The profiles for Myanmar were researched and written by Karen Demavivas.

Karen Demavivas is Program Officer of the Immigrant Artist Project at the New York Foundation for the Arts (<http://www.nyfa.org/>) (NYFA), where she manages a mentoring program for immigrant artists, a master folk artist development program, cultural community events, individual consultations, and a newsletter – all through an arts and social change lens. Beyond NYFA, she acts as Special Advisor on the sustainable cultural and community development initiatives of the social business enterprise Aoka based in Brazil. A two-time Fulbright Fellow, she was initially awarded a Fellowship in 2004 to work as program coordinator, curator, and art critic on community-based art projects in Northern Thailand. This led to serving as the UNESCO-Fulbright Fellow for Culture at UNESCO Paris headquarters, and then working as a consultant on culture and development initiatives at this agency and the UN Population Fund. Her portfolios included heritage conservation, indigenous issues, creative economies, and intercultural/interfaith dialogue. She has also held positions at high-level cultural institutions in New York City. Her art criticism has been featured in publications such as the Brooklyn Rail, the Bangkok Post, Art4D Magazine, and NYFA Current. Demavivas holds an M.A. in Art History and Criticism.

Please note: Due to difficult access to some culture and development initiatives in Myanmar at the time of this research, much of the research was conducted along the Thai-Myanmar border or in Northern Thailand.



Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN)

Inquiry: The intersection of traditional knowledge with environmental education and creativity

Artists: Indigenous communities

Date: 2001 – ongoing

Researcher: Karen Demavivas

Indigenous Know-How and Sustainability

Traditional knowledge intersects with environmental education and creativity to build solidarity.

The call for the perpetuation of traditional knowledge takes on a critical timbre when a people's very cultural fabric and right to ancestral lands have been disrupted. Enter the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN) founded in 2001. Run by ethnic Karen leaders from Myanmar, the organisation counters the challenges of displacement and exclusion by encouraging Karen communities to keep their generations-old knowledge and practices of natural resource management alive. To better serve their community, KESAN is based in Northern Thailand with outreach to refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border as well as the Karen and Kachin States of Myanmar.



Herbal medicine making process, Htee Mat Baw village, Doo playa district. Image from KESAN.

Environmental education enriched by creativity is key to KESAN's strategy of passing down and activating the traditional knowledge of their people. The organisation has collaborated with art teachers to combine experiential learning with art-making in contexts such as forest field trips that lead Karen children and youth on a path of discovery and reverence for their natural surroundings. These efforts have led to a greater consciousness and participation among young people in their community.

Beyond these activities, KESAN prioritises advocacy and strengthening solidarity networks. They partner with local, regional and international organisations to uphold the rights of rural and indigenous peoples to manage their own natural resources. Working with ethnic, environmental and social groups, they explore broad issues that impact Myanmar's diverse communities. Furthermore, KESAN builds the capacity of smaller ethnic initiatives such as the Pan Kachin Development Society and the Karenni Evergreen.

Overall, KESAN educates and empowers communities to protect their environment and their rights as indigenous peoples with a world of wisdom to share.



Studio Xang Art for Migrant Children Project (AMCP)

Inquiry: Encouraging creative impulse to nurture holistic growth

Stakeholders: Estelle Cohenny, Professor Padungsak Kojasamrong

Artists: Migrant children

Date: 2002 – ongoing

Researcher: Karen Demavivas

Art and Holistic Growth

An art education programme encourages the generative capacity and creativity of migrant children to better deal with the challenges of their reality through the arts.

A child-centred approach is at the heart of Studio Xang Art for Migrant Children Project (AMCP <http://www.studioxang.org/>). This daring grass-roots initiative responds to the call of a migrant community, which all too often is left unheard. These migrants are made up of ethnic families from Myanmar who have journeyed to the Thai-Myanmar border and further inland into Northern Thailand in search of decent livelihoods. However, the work they find is often at the cost of basic human rights and access to services and resources that their Thai counterparts hold as a given.

Responding to their right to be respected as human beings, Studio Xang AMCP opened its doors to the children of these migrant workers, using art to help them build their self-esteem, nurture their holistic growth, and make them feel that they are part of a community. The programme was initiated by the determined work of teaching artist and activist Estelle Cohenny and supported by the seasoned advice of Professor Padungsak Kojasamrong. It has since grown to a diverse team of 20 staff members and volunteers, with a robust curriculum in the visual and performing arts. The team is based in Chiang Mai but facilitates projects in the refugee camps of Mae La Oo and Ban Mai Kun Kyaw, and in the town of Mae Sot along the Thai-Myanmar border.

Studio Xang AMCP addresses the complex challenges that migrant children from Myanmar face, such as displacement, alienation and the tug-and-pull influences of Thai culture, which fails to totally embrace them. By providing these children with creative tools for self-expression, Studio Xang AMCP encourages them to overcome these challenges and give voice to their own experiences, needs, and hopes for the future. They are then able to reclaim a healthy understanding of themselves, which was lost in the migration that has left them stateless.

Studio Xang AMCP nurtures migrant children to reach their fullest potential by teaching them a wide range of cognitive, social and emotional skills. The programme also works closely with migrant parents to help them better address their children's needs. This parent-teacher relationship leads to strengthening the family unit and, by extension, the community. In this way, Studio Xang AMCP is a compelling model of art education that combines personal *and* community development to holistically improve the living and working conditions of migrants.

The programme is framed by a number of core values. First of all, they respect the cultural and linguistic background of each child, upholding multiculturalism.



Secondly, they provide equitable learning opportunities for migrant children as they would for non-migrants. Third, they recognise the universal right of all children to a wholesome life regardless of ethnicity, class, gender, religion and legal status. Finally, they propagate a non-violent approach to children and between children in speech, action, and emotions, thereby, encouraging healthy development and peaceful conflict resolution in the future.



Parent-Student Class in Chiang Mai, 2011. Image courtesy of Studio Xang AMCP.

Studio Xang AMCP carries out activities on multiple levels. Team members teach free weekly art classes in the visual and performing arts for migrant children (ages 4 and older), which occur outside of formal school time and curriculum. These classes are also complemented with field trips to cultural and natural sites. For the older children (ages 11 and above), Studio Xang AMCP developed a project called Power Kid, which offers more relevant training in the applied arts and basic business skills that they can use in the work place. In addition, Studio Xang AMCP provides an internship programme that builds leadership among young people along the Thai-Myanmar border and endeavours to extend it to youth who reside *within* the borders of Myanmar.

In the public sphere, Studio Xang AMCP provides visibility for the children's creative accomplishments. They organise art exhibitions at cultural institutions in Chiang Mai to highlight the children's efforts and let their work shine. These exhibitions are open to all and bridge appreciation and understanding among Thai and migrant audiences alike. Another platform that Studio Xang AMCP uses to share news about the children's activities is a quarterly newsletter that is circulated to supporters and communities.

Beyond Studio Xang AMCP's work with the children and their families, they value the critical role of teachers in ensuring the continuity of leadership and quality in their programmes. These teachers often come from the same communities as their students so they already hold

agency and take great responsibility in caring for their own. Thus, Studio Xang AMCP places effort in building the capacity of these teachers through workshops and presentations on art and child development. To complement these trainings, Studio Xang AMCP provides educational materials and a teacher's manual that has been translated into the languages spoken in the communities: Burmese, Shan, Karen and Thai. Moreover, they use a manual on applied drama (in conjunction with a theatre programme they developed), which they have translated into the Burmese and Shan languages.

Moving forward, Studio Xang AMCP aims to go global with its lessons on creativity and migration. To this end, they are developing an art project that involves collaborations among migrant children from different parts of the world, which carries their voices to wider and more diverse audiences. Among the mediums to be explored are storybook making, animation, and video. One project in particular, Picture Pals, is already underway in partnership with a secondary school in Shrewsbury, United Kingdom.

With sustained support, an initiative like Studio Xang AMCP can continue to be a bright beacon for a child's will to grow and flourish not only for their existing students but for many more youth facing similar challenges of migration. Yet at this point, with dwindling funds from the International Rescue Committee and other donors, a rallying cry for solidarity and support to keep Studio Xang AMCP's doors open is more critical than ever.



Women's Education for Advancement and Empowerment (WEAVE)

Inquiry: Applying and expanding traditional crafts to empower artisans

Stakeholders: Ethnic artisans from Myanmar

Date: 1990 – ongoing

Researcher: Karen Demavivas

Weaving Empowerment

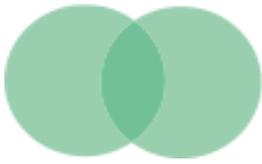
An empowering initiative helps artisans from indigenous communities in Myanmar build self-reliance and generate income for their families by producing and enhancing their traditional crafts.

Offering a comprehensive platform to move communities of women towards self-determination, Women's Education for Advancement and Empowerment (WEAVE <http://www.weave-women.org/>) provides support in the areas of education, economic empowerment, governance, and health. Their focus is on women and children from marginalised, indigenous communities in Myanmar. They also build the capacity of women's organisations within these communities to be empowered in the decision-making process that leads to the well-being of their people.

WEAVE is headquartered in Chiang Mai and holds offices in the border towns of Mae Sot and Mae Hong Son in Northern Thailand. The core of their work lies in the programmes they facilitate in seven different refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border. Many of these initiatives engage with the Karen and Karenni ethnic communities that make up the majority of displaced peoples in these camps. The reach of their programs also extends to the Indo-Myanmar border. To be able to operate in these special zones, WEAVE receives annual approval from the Thai Government's Ministry of the Interior (MOI), and is registered as a non-profit entity with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) of the Philippines.

Among WEAVE's key initiatives is the Economic Empowerment and Development Programme, which transforms the traditional skills of ethnic women in weaving and embroidery into viable ways of earning income for their families. Operating in three different refugee camps, the programme provides training in product design and other business-related skills as well as financial support for women's entrepreneurship projects. It also safely employs these women with the flexibility of letting them weave and embroider their products from home so that they are better able to care for their children. With this newfound earning power to fend for their families while still within camp walls, the women are able to build self-esteem and pride in their position within the community. Furthermore, they have the opportunity to share and apply their traditional knowledge in WEAVE's handicraft production process, thus, ensuring the continuity of their cultural heritage in new and dynamic ways.

The Economic Empowerment and Development Programme also offers the significant step of connecting these women's handicrafts to local and international markets. For instance, they forged a partnership with the fair trade organisation Thai-Tribal Craft (TTC), to sell the



handicrafts generated from its programme at TTC's fair trade shop in Mae Sot. Besides being an entry point to the market, TTC also shares WEAVE's value in promoting opportunities for livelihood among indigenous communities.



Refugee artisans receive regular safe employment with WEAVE and are able to help their families. Image from WEAVE.

The programme's high level of commitment and immersion in these communities is matched by its tremendous impact. Over four hundred women and their families have benefited from the training and income generated. Furthermore, with initial technical and financial support from WEAVE, approximately fifteen women's groups in Thailand and in Myanmar's ethnic states are now empowered to manage and develop their own small business enterprises.

By and large, WEAVE's strategies for empowerment command not only technical know-how, but creative insight into what could be possible even within the most restricted of contexts. Their innovative vision has resulted in a thriving web of well-trained craftswomen and high quality handicrafts that reflect the cultural diversity and rich heritage of Myanmar's ethnic states.



Thailand

The profiles for Thailand were researched and written by Karen Demavivas.

Karen Demavivas is Program Officer of the Immigrant Artist Project at the New York Foundation for the Arts (<http://www.nyfa.org/>) (NYFA), where she manages a mentoring program for immigrant artists, a master folk artist development program, cultural community events, individual consultations, and a newsletter – all through an arts and social change lens. Beyond NYFA, she acts as Special Advisor on the sustainable cultural and community development initiatives of the social business enterprise Aoka based in Brazil. A two-time Fulbright Fellow, she was initially awarded a Fellowship in 2004 to work as program coordinator, curator, and art critic on community-based art projects in Northern Thailand. This led to serving as the UNESCO-Fulbright Fellow for Culture at UNESCO Paris headquarters, and then working as a consultant on culture and development initiatives at this agency and the UN Population Fund. Her portfolios included heritage conservation, indigenous issues, creative economies, and intercultural/interfaith dialogue. She has also held positions at high-level cultural institutions in New York City. Her art criticism has been featured in publications such as the Brooklyn Rail, the Bangkok Post, Art4D Magazine, and NYFA Current. Demavivas holds an M.A. in Art History and Criticism.



ComPeung Artists in Residence Programme

Inquiry: An exploration of shifting perspectives at the intersection of art, everyday life, community, and sustainability

Organisation: ComPeung

Date: 2005 – ongoing

Researcher: Karen Demavivas

An Appropriate Remark

Near a rural village, an artists' residency programme brings together local communities and artists to reflect on diverse facets of everyday life, community, and sustainability.

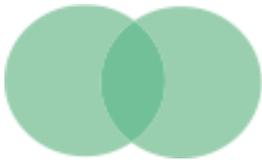
In the Lanna language of the Northern Thais, *com* means a remark and *peung* means appropriate. In bringing these two words together, the artist Pisithpong Siraphisut was able to appropriately name the artist residency programme he founded: ComPeung. As Siraphisut elaborated in an interview with the author, "Our vision and mission for ComPeung is to create appropriate remarks that are suitable to the situations, environments, and communities we deal with."



ComPeung House Building. Image courtesy of ComPeung.

At ComPeung, these remarks are expressed through art, among which are the forms of conceptual, visual, performance, architectural, and new media art. The residency gathers local and international artists to live and work together on a rural piece of land where they are in dialogue with one another as well as the surrounding community and natural environment. Through such interaction, the residency provides thrilling potential for locally inspired art-making and collaboration.

ComPeung is located near the village of Doi Saket, which is a short distance from Northern Thailand's largest city Chiang Mai. Growing up in the area, Siraphisut has seen how the landscape has changed over the years in the face of urbanisation. As more and more young people leave small villages like Doi Saket for opportunities in big cities like Bangkok, their migration erodes the vitality of where they come from. In response, Siraphisut established ComPeung to revitalise these rural areas that would otherwise remain in the wayside, relative to urban attractions. On a green plot of land, he created a nesting ground for rich artistic interventions that now provides flourishing visibility and appreciation for local culture and nature.



ComPeung - Ideal School Project in collaboration with artist Rebecca Zorach. Image courtesy of ComPeung.

Since 2005, Siraphisut, with the advisory support of Professor Helen Michaelson, has been running this residency throughout the year. The duration of an artist's stay can span from one to several months with an option to reapply. ComPeung is open to local, regional, and international artists who work in a wide range of disciplines. In order to sustain itself, the programme requires artists to pay a fee. However, ComPeung has been generous in working with artists to secure sponsorship through arts councils, universities, and embassies such as the Japan Foundation, the University of Chicago, the Government of Western Australia, and the Ontario Arts Council in Canada. ComPeung also provides artists with public visibility by collaborating with the Minimal Gallery in Chiang Mai to highlight the work of its residents with over 30 projects and works-in-progress produced thus far.

During the residency, artists often find inspiration in engaging with local people and natural resources, which then inform and sometimes even become central to their projects. For instance, the American artist and academic Rebecca Zorach asked local village children what their ideal school would look like and then had them redesign and visualise their school through drawings and sculptures with the use of natural materials gathered from the surroundings.

Other projects are site-specific and activate public space. In one case, the Japanese artist Tatsuo Inagaki, in collaboration with his university students, conducted interviews with local community members, which then led to the installation of a temporary museum in the Doi Saket village market where vendors sell fruits, vegetables, and other wares. The structure incorporated local materials such as bamboo and grass. On a conceptual level, it reflected on local trade and tourism to the delight of curious sellers, students, and children. Activating the same market, Canadian artist Allison Cummings lured villagers passing by into an edible art exchange. This intervention touched on intimacy through

hospitality when experienced between individuals coming from different cultural points of departure.

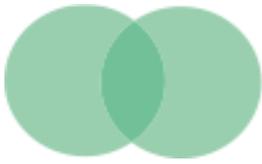
Beyond the value of creativity and local engagement inherent in these residency projects, ComPeung as a site also functions as a sustainable ecosystem. Its low-impact accommodations have their foundation in natural building techniques, which are being propagated by a growing movement of earthen builders in the region. Now counted among these builders, the ComPeung team has applied a great range of techniques and designs to earthen structures at the site, using local materials such as mud, bamboo, wood, grass, rice and coffee husks. ComPeung's philosophy of building for sustainability has influenced residents like Tadasu Takamine. It led this Japanese artist to build an earthen structure for a project that travelled from Bangkok to Japan, shedding positive light on the green building movement along its journey.

The ComPeung ecosystem, as evident in its earthen accommodations, valorises minimal living. It offers basic, communal necessities though lined with comfort and warm hospitality. A definite highlight is the meal home-cooked to perfection for residents three times a day. These meals are made from locally grown and harvested ingredients bought from the village market.



ComPeung – Doi Saket Market Exchange with Allison Cummings. Image courtesy of ComPeung.

Sustainability also extends to ComPeung's signature tours for its resident artists, which are always responsible and sensitive to the local area. Siraphisut is seasoned in sharing his expert knowledge of the nearby village of Doi Saket as well as its surrounding hills, forests and natural lakes. He encourages residents to respectfully interact with the diverse range of ethnic communities that call this area home. Thus, since ComPeung began, the exchange between resident artists and communities has led to a heightened valorisation of local cultural and natural heritage. Such engagement has improved the way local people view themselves by helping them realize through other people's eyes how their traditional ways of life positively contribute to nature and humanity. Furthermore, this perspective directly counters the



pervasive view in the region that rural to urban migration is the only viable option for bettering people's quality of life. In this way, ComPeung encourages visiting artists and locals alike to acutely reflect on the diverse facets of everyday life in this context and gain a more open perspective about their positions in the world.

As for sustaining the programme itself, ComPeung is looking to diversify its ecosystem of support. It continues its fee-based structure, but it has also secured private donations since 2010, enabling the programme to offer free residencies to a select number of artists. Moving forward, ComPeung seeks to secure more public and private donors to expand the initiative. They would like to provide more residencies free of charge to local and regional artists who would otherwise not have the means to participate in the programme. There is also need to build up ComPeung's infrastructure, such as the construction of a multi-purpose adobe centre for exhibitions, performances and other activities. With such ambitions, supporters may be inspired and rest assured in knowing that their assistance to ComPeung would go far beyond appropriate remarks into concrete action for building community.



Osisu

Inquiry: Design at the interface of recycling, traditional craftsmanship, consciousness-raising, and ecological sustainability

Organisation: Osisu

Artists: Dr. Singh Intrachooto and Veeranuch Tanchookiat

Date: 2006 – ongoing

Researcher: Karen Demavivas

Osisu: From Rough Detritus to Elegant Design

An eco-design company is striving to optimise sustainability by recovering, reclaiming and reusing urban construction and manufacturing waste.

Passion, innovation, and commitment place Osisu at the forefront of a design revolution galvanised by an urgency to spread ecological consciousness. Since its founding in 2006 by Dr. Singh Intrachooto and Veeranuch Tanchookiat, the organisation has produced functional art by integrating local age-old craftsmanship and materials with contemporary aesthetics. Now Thailand's leading eco-design company, Osisu's products may be found in local markets and beyond in other parts of Asia and the world.

Osisu's entrance is timely as there is a growing need to mitigate industry's harsh impact on the environment and educate consumers against wasteful excess. The company addresses the fact that a tremendous amount of industrial waste (i.e. materials, chemicals, energy) is generated from building structures and products. Construction debris makes up a staggering 30 to 40% of urban landfills. Although environmentally responsible innovations in construction are being developed, they often cannot catch up to the pace of private companies with their bottom-line production. To exacerbate the situation, curbing urban waste is not a priority for the Thai government at the policy level. Without this political will, the country as a whole is lagging behind in its environmental responsibility to the planet.

In countering these challenges, Osisu's objectives are manifold. The company reclaims industrial waste from construction and manufacturing and handcrafts them into functionally exquisite models. Through this transformative process, it adds value to discarded resources and innovatively extends the life cycle of natural materials. In this fashion, Osisu is able to introduce ecologically sound techniques into good design while meeting high-level functionality. Furthermore, the company promotes a double bottom-line approach of being viable on the financial front while being accountable to the environment.

Through responsible art and design practices, Osisu employs cutting edge, sustainable solutions to reverse the process of industrial degradation. The company develops lines of recycled products and furniture, derived from waste such as steel and plastic, which it then introduces into the market. For example, the PMC collection features the thermal-pressed layering of juice, milk, and sauce cartons to create a rich patina that resembles concrete. Osisu applied similar steps to another set of recycled product lines, which extended the life of natural materials such as discarded wood. In the case of the LINI collection, it transformed pieces made out of reclaimed teak off-cuts (from trees wastefully



uprooted in road construction) into geometrically articulated vernacular design. This articulation, as with other Osisu designs, reflects the merit of regional aesthetic quality: the company meticulously applies traditional Asian techniques of carpentry to contemporary lines.



Scrap Lab Meeting. Image courtesy of Osisu.

In the public arena, Osisu raises awareness about the beauty and function of eco-design by organising exhibitions at the intersection of art, design, and the recycling process. These events have been held at various galleries in Bangkok such as the July 2008 exhibition titled *Why Waste Your Waste?* at Siam Discovery and the September 2008 exhibition *Trashy Design* at Silom Galleria.

Osisu has built a strong network of environmentally conscious clients and collaborators. The company caters to the tastes of a wide range of individuals across sectors. It also serves corporations such as resorts and exporters that practice environmental stewardship. In terms of collaboration in honing new product lines, the company partners with local craftspeople and manufacturers. As far as multi-disciplinary partnerships are concerned, Osisu collaborates with a number of prominent organisations such as the Scrap Lab at Kasetsart University, the National Innovation Agency, and the Department of Environmental Quality Promotion.

However, Dr. Intrachotoo notes that in the beginning the road to critical acclaim and support was an arduous and daunting one. It was very challenging to secure any assistance or research funding for an innovative venture like Osisu. He began by consulting with individual researchers at Kasetsart University. He also sought help from research labs to clarify the technical details of applying new materials. Since then, over the years, he has built up more significant and ambitious collaborations along with the company name. Now Dr. Intrachotoo hopes that with the lessons he's learned, Osisu can pave an easier road for emerging ventures to secure support and recognition.

As a best practice, Osisu is at the forefront of promoting environmentally responsible design that brings together

recycling processes, energy efficiency, functionality, and aesthetic excellence. Osisu's designs educate people about alternative, low-impact ways to consume in the face of growing populations. Bridging a fundamental gap, Osisu is also working to align the time frame of eco-design innovations to the profit-driven schedule of the private sector. Furthermore, the company has been instrumental in expanding the eco-market in Asia. As a double bottom-line venture, Osisu has proven successful at generating profit that sustains its cutting edge production while being environmentally sound.

A key factor in Osisu's success is its design team's value in creative experimentation and collaboration. The team also effectively partners with other designers, technicians, craftspeople, local communities and governing bodies at the intersection of art and sustainability. By working together, Osisu understands that a diverse range of stakeholders can arrive at groundbreaking solutions.

Osisu champions art and design in forging the way for novel ecological practices beyond the dry realm of professional science. With creative tools and insight into consumer behaviour, Osisu's designers have the power to move and shift the critical masses into doing right by the environment through what they choose to consume. In the future, the company aspires to be a brand that certifies eco-sensitivity, striving to transform Thailand into a country, which upholds ecological responsibility as the norm rather than the exception to the rule.



Pun Pun Project

Inquiry: Keeping biodiversity alive through seed-saving, sustainable living and education

Organisation: Pun Pun Centre for Self-reliance

Date: 2003 – ongoing

Researcher: Karen Demavivas

Saving Seeds for a Sustainable Future

A ground-breaking farm and community centre cultivates seeds of sustainability from seed saving to earthen building

Bringing people back to the land, Pun Pun rekindles humanity's connection to holistic well-being and a diversity of natural resources. Functioning as a catalyst on multiple levels, it is an organic farm and centre for seed-saving, sustainable living, and learning. The farm is nestled in the rural Mae Tang region of Northern Thailand but collaborates and exchanges knowledge with projects in other parts of the country. Upholding a self-reliant lifestyle, the Pun Pun community cultivates their own food, builds their own homes, and experiments with low-impact technologies. Furthermore, they are bringing back the tradition among farmers of saving, propagating, and exchanging indigenous and rare varieties of seeds.

In 2003, Pun Pun was co-founded by Jon Jandai, a Thai farmer, and his wife Peggy Reents. Elaborating on why they do the work they do, Reents states:

“I think what we are doing is important in that there is an emerging consciousness as to how we can change the way we each live to be in more harmony with the earth, to have a positive impact on the way we live, and the importance of bringing meaning into our work. We feel that bringing the knowledge on how to supply for our basic needs including shelter and food empowers people to find ways they want to live with the world. Seeds are an essential part of this equation as it brings the selection and conservation of saving seeds back into the hands of growers. This enables them to be in charge of what they are growing, where it comes from, and brings back the trade of the integrity of varieties of seed both for growers and consumers”.

The consciousness and empowerment of this movement counters the detrimental environmental impacts of multinational agro-businesses. These companies patent seed varieties and monopolise their control around the world. In this aggressive manner, they are taking away the agency of local growers in choosing and cultivating their own seeds. Furthermore, these monopolies give little consideration to nutritional quality in breeding their hybrid seeds which has led to a decrease in nutritional value among varieties by 30 to 60% in the last few decades. Another alarming fact is that only five multinational companies control approximately 80% of the world's seeds. Ultimately, the very foundation of biodiversity is being threatened by these homogenising influences.

Pun Pun defies this bleak reality through programmes that promote diversity and offer alternatives. The site's living and learning centre has become a knowledge hub for seed-saving and works with farmers to diversify and



cultivate local seeds in their fields. It holds 120 different seed varieties of tomatoes, 20 of lettuce, and dozens of herbs, fruits, and vegetables. Beyond these numbers, a multitude of seeds have been saved, given out, and accessed through Pun Pun's outreach efforts. The community has rediscovered and rescued numerous endemic and rare species of seed from extinction, exponentially expanding the possibilities of what they can grow in their gardens. By extension, the nutritional value of this bounty has led to great implications for public health among farmers and eaters alike.



The Living Seed Festival (2009), Chiang Mai University Art Museum.
Image courtesy of Pun Pun.

Aside from the value of eating healthy food, there is also fair economic trade to be had in the way Pun Pun directly connects farmers in their network with consumers. This entry into the market provides the farmers with cash in hand as well as added incentive to farm responsibly. In turn, consumers gain access to safe local food and have the opportunity to learn about sound agricultural practices.

Pun Pun is a leading proponent of another area of sustainability: the earthen building movement that is taking the region by storm. Since it began, hundreds of earthen structures have been built throughout the countryside of Thailand. Now, Pun Pun's centre offers the

Natural Building Programme, which teaches students how to build earthen structures and apply appropriate technologies in an accessible way. Its focus is not on building for people but rather on *teaching people* how to build. The programme offers internships and workshops on basic green design and foundation principles. Instruction covers adobe methods such as brick making and wall construction with windows and doors. Students can also learn how to make earthen plasters for walls and other surfaces. In addition, low-tech ways to install electrical and plumbing lines are shared.

With added artistry, decorative elements can enhance earthen dwellings such as mosaic windows made out of recycled bottles. These elements not only exude aesthetic quality, but also show the myriad ways that waste can be creatively reused. Overall, the programme's rigorous and conscientious teachings have led to well-designed buildings both in style and function.

At Pun Pun, they understand that great ideas can go a long way with public awareness of their potential. One case in point is their Living Seed Festival to raise awareness about the global food and seed crisis. Held at the Chiang Mai University Art Museum in 2009, the festival offered up an array of compelling activities to grab people's attention: seed exchange, demonstrations and exhibitions on adobe building, and a panel discussion entitled "The Seed Crisis and Food Security." Creative engagement also came into play with the performance of six live bands and the theatre show *Makom Bum*. Organic food and educational materials supplemented all the dynamic activity. The whole festival was open to the public and a groundswell of support ensued and continues to this day.

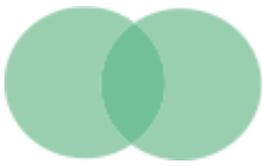
While Pun Pun organises festivals for the masses as magnificent vehicles for advocacy, the community also values welcoming visitors on a quiet day at the farm. On average, they receive about four individual visitors per day and host approximately 40 groups of 30 to 80 people per year. Members of the Pun Pun community also travel to give individual presentations on their work at meetings and events nationwide networks. Media coverage has also highlighted Pun Pun's consciousness-building march in the form of national magazines, newspapers, radio, and television.

While strengthening the sense of community and visibility through all these activities, Pun Pun builds a network of support and knowledge exchange among organic farmers, environmental organisations, and self-reliant communities in the field. Through this network, they're able to forcefully advocate for critical issues such as the seed crisis noted above. Among these stakeholders, they also disseminate good practices such as earthen techniques that then serve to expand the network as with the case of builders. Furthermore, Pun Pun partners with cultural, community-based, governmental, and non-governmental organisations such as the Chiang Mai



University Art Museum, We Love the Forest Community, and The Organic Farmers Group of Mae Tah. Among them, Pun Pun annually provides around 20 trainings for 20 to 100 people, including local, regional, and international participants.

Pun Pun clearly exemplifies a means for a sustainable future that veers away from industrialised agriculture and other ailing global systems. Yet in order for the Pun Pun community to continue their expanding vision and initiatives, intermediary support is still needed. However, they currently receive government and foundation funds as well as income through services and products. If any initiative can survive based on its philosophy and tenacity in tilling the land, Pun Pun can. Indeed, it is at the vanguard of a movement, even a revolution, towards a more robustly built, fed and diversified world.



Womanifesto's Residency Programme

Inquiry: Exploring gender and artistic process in relation to traditional crafts and agrarian life

Organisation: Womanifesto

Date: 1997 – ongoing

Researcher: Karen Demavivas

Rural Dialogue on Art, Gender, and Agrarian Life

An artist residency programme set in the midst of rural life fuels dialogue around gender, traditional knowledge, and contemporary artistic practices.

Engaging local communities in Thailand while cultivating a global network of artists, Womanifesto (<http://www.womanifesto.com/>) provides a unique exploration of gender, artistic process, and emerging themes in contemporary culture. Since it began in 1997, Womanifesto has brought together multi-disciplinary exhibitions, workshops, artist talks, and residencies, which have sparked compelling dialogue among urban and rural communities as well as local and international artists.

Inspired by this prolific network, Varsha Nair and Nitaya Ueareeworakul began the Womanifesto Residency Programme in 2008 at Boonbandarn Farm and the town of Kantharalak in Si Saket province, situated in one of the poorest areas of the country: the Northeastern region of Isaan. The initiative has had a long-standing relationship with this locale since 2001 when it held a dynamic workshop with a group of women artists and culture workers. By way of continuity, this residency now invites women artists to this site to interact with the rural environment and agrarian way of life over a period of six weeks. Artists have the opportunity to appreciate the rich cultural diversity of this area, which is home to ethnic Lao, Khmer, Suay, and Yuea communities. The residency encourages them to learn about local craft traditions and explore their sources of inspiration in the natural resources and landscape of the region.



Open day at Womanifesto, photo courtesy of Womanifesto

This community-based artist residency has come to the fore at a critical moment in Thai history when the rural poor are forced to migrate to cities like Bangkok for work. Most of these migrants come from Isaan and they suffer from poor working conditions and alienation as they are without the grounding support of their rural land and communities. As a result, many of them have joined a popular movement that calls for their rights and a change



in society as a whole. The clash between this movement and other political parties in the country has led to a state of socio-political polarisation.

At a time when dialogue is key, this movement is in need of a platform in order to be understood by the national media and civil society. By valorising the region where these disenfranchised migrants are from, the Womanifesto Residency Programme provides just such a platform. It facilitates greater understanding of the migrants' values and emphasises their need for respect, assistance, and affirmation as Thai citizens.

to leave: the value of their community, way of life, and natural landscape.

As far as sustaining the Programme, the Thai Ministry of Culture in Thailand has funded it in the past, but it would benefit from more long-standing and diversified support from public and private sources. Above and beyond these matters, Womanifesto remains resilient in sustaining a collaborative and generative network of creative individuals and communities.



Open air studio, image courtesy of Womanifesto.

The residency in 2008 engaged six artists, both Thai and international, to connect the traditions and natural resources of the local context with contemporary art and cultural practices and carry out discussions and activities around this intersection. The resident artists were: Pan Parahom, On-Anong Klinsiri, Naruemon Padsamran, Graciela Ovejero, Liliane Zumkemi and Phaptawan Suwannakudt. Their activities included collaborations, public art projects, workshops and seminars. The workshops were held in approximately 20 schools, occupational colleges from Ubon Ratchathani and Kantaralak, and university art schools from Ubon Ratchathani and Maha Sarakham. The artists dialogued with a diverse range of people from the communities including farmers and artisans. The latter provided rich knowledge about handicrafts and the natural materials used to make them.

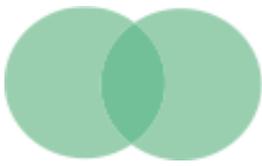
The Womanifesto Residency Programme is exemplary as a community-based, artist driven initiative that recognises women as creators and collaborators. It cultivates multi-disciplinary dialogue at the intersection of art, the environment and agrarian traditions. Celebrating the diversity of local cultures and folkways in Northeastern Thailand, the initiative sheds a positive light on this impoverished region's people. Furthermore, the initiative counters any perceived benefits of urban migration as it highlights what these local people would lose if they were



Laos

The profile for Laos was researched and written by Karen Demavivas.

Karen Demavivas is Program Officer of the Immigrant Artist Project at the New York Foundation for the Arts (<http://www.nyfa.org/>) (NYFA), where she manages a mentoring program for immigrant artists, a master folk artist development program, cultural community events, individual consultations, and a newsletter – all through an arts and social change lens. Beyond NYFA, she acts as Special Advisor on the sustainable cultural and community development initiatives of the social business enterprise Aoka based in Brazil. A two-time Fulbright Fellow, she was initially awarded a Fellowship in 2004 to work as program coordinator, curator, and art critic on community-based art projects in Northern Thailand. This led to serving as the UNESCO-Fulbright Fellow for Culture at UNESCO Paris headquarters, and then working as a consultant on culture and development initiatives at this agency and the UN Population Fund. Her portfolios included heritage conservation, indigenous issues, creative economies, and intercultural/interfaith dialogue. She has also held positions at high-level cultural institutions in New York City. Her art criticism has been featured in publications such as the Brooklyn Rail, the Bangkok Post, Art4D Magazine, and NYFA Current. Demavivas holds an M.A. in Art History and Criticism.



Ock Pop Tok

Inquiry: Traditional craftsmanship made viable through contemporary design, production and marketing strategies

Artists: Rural weavers

Date: 2000 – ongoing

Researcher: Karen Demavivas

Weaving the Modern into Traditional Textiles

A visionary initiative gives a contemporary spin to textiles, inspiring local artisans and advancing traditional skills.

The textile gallery and weaving centre Ock Pop Tok (<http://www.ockpoptok.com/>) has created quite a buzz in sleepy Luang Prabang. In Lao, Ock Pop Tok means “East meets West,” which in this case, can be interpreted as Lao craftsmanship innovatively intersecting with Western design aesthetic or local dynamically bridging overseas markets.

Founded in 2000 by Veomanee Duangdala, a local weaver and entrepreneur, and Joanna Smith, an English photographer, the duo envisioned an initiative that would advance the cultural and socio-economic situations of Northern Lao artisans through their textiles while upholding fair trade principles.

From this starting point, Ock Pop Tok now provides enduring employment to village weavers, who produce a wide range of high quality textiles that combine local craftsmanship with design innovation and market knowledge. Beyond employing these villagers, the initiative builds their capacity in all areas of production through an expert team of weavers, designers, and tailors.



Ock Pop Tok Weaving Community. Image courtesy of Ock Pop Tok.

Of specific note is Ock Pop Tok’s Village Weaver Project, which allows artisans to weave textiles from the comfort of their own homes in the remote villages of Northern Laos. This sensitive business practice thus leaves the social fabric of the village undisturbed and keeps the integrity of these traditions in the domestic sphere where they’ve been carried out for generations. Given the rural remoteness and poor roads around these villages, it also avoids the logistical challenge of travelling to a centralised production site as most enterprises would demand.

Due to the initiative’s expert interplay of craft and design fortified by sustainable business practices, they have built a substantial network of local weavers in seven provinces, providing fair trade textiles for local and international galleries and markets. By generating income from these new market opportunities, Ock Pop Tok has transitioned local artisans from a bartering system into a cash economy.



In sustaining local communities through these unique strategies, Ock Pop Tok has won the respect of the Lao Women's Union, the UN, the EU, development and government agencies, which has led to partnerships on capacity-building activities for artisans. These have tackled areas from product design to business planning. In addition, Ock Pop Tok works with the Lao Women's Union to coordinate field trips to the village weaving sites. All these activities are supported by donors and a percentage of the profit generated by Ock Pop Tok's sales.

Beyond these initiatives that empower rural artisans, Ock Pop Tok's Living Crafts Centre and the non-profit gallery Fibre2Fibre function as hubs for education and community-based tourism. The Centre provides interactive learning experiences for local and international visitors through tours and classes on weaving, natural dyes, and other themes. More immersive sojourns can also be arranged through homestays in local villages. Furthermore, the centre teaches important lessons in harnessing local natural resources onsite for each stage of the weaving process. For instance, visitors can witness how silk is harvested from silk worms or how dyes like indigo are extracted from plants.

Fibre2Fibre is a space with a revolving door of exemplary exhibitions that shed light on the prominent textile heritage of the region. One exhibition in particular, held in 2009, focused on a small Tai-Lue village called Na Nyang in the Nam Bak District of Luang Prabang Province where the tradition of weaving remains strong. The exhibition underscores how its villagers are rooted in self-reliance as they plant, spin, dye, and weave their own cotton. It meticulously laid out the motifs, dyes, and festivals that keep the village rooted in its tradition. These kinds of exhibitions are supported by the rigorous research and documentation of textiles that hail from various regions and ethnicities in Laos. They, therefore, hold great archival value beyond their time on the gallery's walls.

Ock Pop Tok has evolved into a comprehensive operation that sustains not only a community of weavers, but a whole ecosystem with markets beyond its borders. Here what may initially be perceived as binary oppositions – East meets West – merge into a complex blend of cultures, resources, and practices that call for both the old and the new.



Cambodia

The profile for Cambodia was researched and written by Karen Demavivas.

Karen Demavivas is Program Officer of the Immigrant Artist Project at the New York Foundation for the Arts (<http://www.nyfa.org/>) (NYFA), where she manages a mentoring program for immigrant artists, a master folk artist development program, cultural community events, individual consultations, and a newsletter – all through an arts and social change lens. Beyond NYFA, she acts as Special Advisor on the sustainable cultural and community development initiatives of the social business enterprise Aoka based in Brazil. A two-time Fulbright Fellow, she was initially awarded a Fellowship in 2004 to work as program coordinator, curator, and art critic on community-based art projects in Northern Thailand. This led to serving as the UNESCO-Fulbright Fellow for Culture at UNESCO Paris headquarters, and then working as a consultant on culture and development initiatives at this agency and the UN Population Fund. Her portfolios included heritage conservation, indigenous issues, creative economies, and intercultural/interfaith dialogue. She has also held positions at high-level cultural institutions in New York City. Her art criticism has been featured in publications such as the Brooklyn Rail, the Bangkok Post, Art4D Magazine, and NYFA Current. Demavivas holds an M.A. in Art History and Criticism.



Awareness Theatre Group

Inquiry: The power of community-driven theatre in creatively articulating social themes

Organisation: Phare Ponleu Selpak

Artists: Marginalised communities, children

Date: 2000 – ongoing

Researcher: Karen Demavivas

Setting the Stage for Social Themes

The Awareness Theatre Group places social issues such as migration, drug abuse, and trafficking at central stage in rural Cambodia.

Phare Ponleu Selpak (PPS - <http://www.phareps.org/>) exemplifies the resilience of a generation coming out of the trauma of the Khmer Rouge. Since 1986, PPS has flourished as a multi-disciplinary art collective and centre in Battambang. Its founders stepped out of the refugee camps of their youth to forge a generative, healing space for young people in need. They often come from disenfranchised backgrounds, sometimes literally from the streets, due to lack of care from a society still reeling from its past. PPS provides educational and cultural activities such as classes, workshops, and performances in both the visual and performing arts. It also provides social services to its youth along with their families.

PPS especially shines in its performing arts programme, which includes a dynamic circus of rigorously trained young performers that have toured the region and the world. This circus has proven to be unique as an educational and awareness-building vehicle. Out of the collective's great penchant for performance then came the Awareness Theatre Group in 2000.

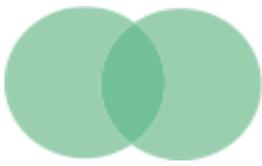
This group provides youth with training by seasoned local and international instructors. They are also sensitised in social challenges that currently impact their own communities. These activities plant the seed that they can make a difference by first opening their eyes to reality and building their self-esteem.



Performance by Phare Ponleu Selpak. Image from PPS.

The theatre and social awareness components of this intensive training are then brought to the fore in performance. Themes that have been set to the stage are migration, trafficking, and drug abuse. While heavily charged in content, these performances aim to entertain as much as provoke thought and reflection.

The Awareness Theatre Group is particularly powerful as a communication platform in rural areas where low



literacy rates prevail. In place of the written word, the group delivers visual and performative forms that people can better access for information and entertainment. Furthermore, by making theatre an interactive experience for its audience, the Group more deeply engages with people's thoughts and senses. Such depth leads to a stronger case for the social message carried by each performance.

The Awareness Theatre Group further amplifies each message through outreach partners that advocate for similar social agendas. For instance, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has sponsored a tour of ten of the Group's theatre performers due to the social message of their travelling show: safe migration among vulnerable populations. Organisations like IOM see the added and unique value of this form of theatre in creatively communicating priority issues for both sides.

Clearly, effective modes of community engagement, communication, and partnership-building are exemplified by the Awareness Theatre Group as one among many innovative initiatives by PPS. Cambodia, as a country still seeking to heal and move forward, would be positively propelled into the future by its expansion.



Vietnam

The profile for Vietnam was researched and written by
Huong Le Thu.

Huong Le Thu is a PhD Candidate in Asia-Pacific Studies at National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan. She was born in Hanoi, Vietnam; lived many years in Poland, where she obtained her BA and MA from Jagiellonian University in International Cultural Studies and East Asian Regional Studies. Huong conducts research in Southeast Asian regionalism and the community building, Asia-Europe cultural inter-regionalism, and the cultural development in Vietnam. She has published a research on ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights and Vietnamese cultural policy as strategy of sustainable development since the Renovation Doi Moi in 1986.

Huong is also a fellow of UNESCO U40 World Forum “Cultural Diversity 2030” and serves as an informal ambassador to the Asian region to promote the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Diversity of Cultural Expressions. She is also a member of Young Researchers Team working for Asia-Pacific Regional Center of the CultureLink Network (APRCCN) in association with Korean National Commission for UNESCO.

She is interested in the practices of cultural diplomacy, sustainable development, and multilateral governance of international institutions, with particular cases of UNESCO, Asia-Europe Foundation, and ASEAN Foundation. She speaks 5 languages and has working experience as interpreter to diplomatic delegations, including Presidential visits. Huong is passionate about travel and art.



The Mirror. What if the River Could Speak

Inquiry: Photographic narratives and community dialogue on river health

Organization: Action for the City

Artists: Collective, young amateur photographers

Date: September 2007 – June 2008

Researcher: Huong Le Thu

The Stories of a River

Young photographers take action and create a visual storyboard to connect the health of a river to the health of a community in Hanoi.

Action for the City, a member of the Global Action Plan International (GAP), is a pioneering environmental organisation in Vietnam who launched a youth focused community based initiative titled The Mirror. What if the River Could Speak to raise awareness about the river To Lich. Once a lifeline of Hanoi, the river is now suffering due to the severe impact of rapid urbanisation and is heavily contaminated. Operational between September 2007 and June 2008 with funding from the SIDA Environmental Fund, the programme saw participation of nineteen young photographers from the Think Quang ward who took an action by photographing the river.

The idea behind the project was to raise awareness among the communities along the river's course about its condition, and to emphasise their role in changing that. Action for the City partnered with the communities to reflect on the real affects of pollution on the quality of their lives. Amateur photographers used low-cost cameras and films to produce community-photography which focused on narratives about the river, rather than on the aesthetic or artistic merit of the images.

Serial workshops were organised before the shoot to train the participants in technique, brainstorm on ideas, and after, to carefully select the photographs so as to ensure that the ensuing exhibition could convey a message. The exhibition which was launched to target the community opened to a large audience at the Vietnamese Ethnographic Museum.

The organisers were encouraged by the strong public interest and hoped that their initiative spoke to policy makers indirectly. Following the exhibition they planned to implement follow-up action in the form of:

- An education programme for primary school children that connects water pollution to health
- A community team to monitor sanitation issues in the markets and public places along the river
- A book compiling good practices that residents could use to protect the river

Such initiatives are still new and rare in Vietnam, but with potential for growth. Being a community driven initiative with relatively low project costs, and high motivation levels of young creators this project has high potential for repetition.



Malaysia

The profile for Malaysia was researched and written by Monica James and Ekta Mittal.

Monica James is a writer, media practitioner and researcher with maraa- a media and arts collective. Her recent work is centered around community radio, media policy, spectrum reform, creative practices in times of conflict and urban transformation. She is the co-organizer of Pause-in times of Conflict and Theater Jam.

Ekta Mittal is a co-founder of Maraa Media Collective (<http://maraa.in/>). She is also one of the founding members of Masrah, an eight year old theatre group. Prior to this, Mittal worked at VOICES, a media advocacy group in Bangalore, to bring out a publication on Community Media. As a result she stayed with the organisation for two years. During this time, she had the opportunity to get hands-on experience with community radio, video and theatre, both in Bangalore and rural Karnataka. Mittal is passionate about travel, and has also worked as Research Manager for The Blue Yonder, a responsible tourism company where she identified communities to work with in Karnataka and Rajasthan. Mittal studied Social Communication Media in Mumbai.



The Bridging Scales and Knowledge Systems Project

Inquiry: Documenting indigenous knowledge in the context of restoration of ecosystems

Organization: Sustainable Development Network Malaysia (SUSDEN)

Date: October 2010

Researcher: Ekta Mittal and Monica James

Bridging Gaps through Native Wisdom

In Tasik Chini, an NGO is building capacity to empower local communities to document their traditional knowledge and actively participate in the management and restoration planning process of their immediate environment.

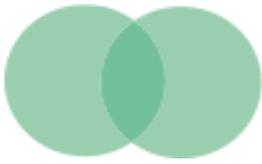
While traditional and non-formal systems of knowledge still struggle to find legitimacy within western, science based discourse on conservation and restoration in most parts of Asia, Bridging Scales and Knowledge Systems is setting out to explore the potential and the role of alternative and indigenous knowledge systems in the task of habitat restoration and community ownership.



Participants in the Bridging Scales and Knowledge Systems project. Image courtesy of SUSDEN.

The Bridging Scales and Knowledge Systems project was initiated by Sustainable Development Network Malaysia (SUSDEN) in October 2010. The project was initiated with the objective of documenting and publishing local knowledge about the importance of Tasik Chini's fast degrading ecosystem. It was also deemed important to empower the local community to actively participate in the management and the planning of Tasik Chini's restoration.

The project proposes to organize the local community into village research groups and provide them the technical tools that will allow them to systematically document their knowledge about specific ecosystem processes that they believe are important. It will also document the use of visual and performing arts as means of storytelling about local cultural practices and the traditional importance of the ecosystem. The project hopes to enable the community to engage in the restoration and planning of the Tasik Chini ecosystem by training them in concepts of Integrated Water Resource Management, updating them about the progress in the restoration process and supporting them in preparation for participation in relevant forums and working group



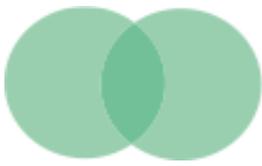
meetings including the restoration planning process itself.

Since the late 1990's, the steady degradation of the Tasik Chini ecosystem has had a harmful effect on the lives of the local communities that depended on it for sustenance through traditional forest based activities including fishing, hunting, and herbs gathering. Tasik Chini was designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 2009. While government bodies and researchers conducted studies with the intent of proposing recommendations and a way forward for the restoration of the area along with a development plan, the local community remained largely peripheral to the process. Located in this context, this project becomes essential for its attempts to work on community capacity building in a way that allows the indigenous community to gain visibility as stakeholders and gives them leverage to participate in the decision making and management of the restoration process. The final output of the project, in the form of a publication, is expected to address policy makers, and feed into public education.



Participants in the Bridging Scales and Knowledge Systems project. Image courtesy of SUSDEN.

While the project aims to enable a community based restoration approach it is important to be cognizant of the tokenism that recognizes traditional, indigenous, or local knowledge claims as an important resource in policy papers but fails to incorporate them into practice. However, the challenge that the Bridging Scales and Knowledge Systems project faces also makes it an important project. What remains to be seen is whether the specificity of scientific restoration can engage with the uncertain and complex patterns of local ecological, cultural and social processes and whether the local community can find a voice in determining processes and plans that could drastically impact their daily lives.



Singapore

The profiles for Singapore were researched and written by Kenneth Wong.

Wong Chong Wai Kenneth studied Social Work at the National University of Singapore and has always struck a balance between his studies and volunteering. Dedicated and passionate about serving the community, Kenneth started to develop a keen interest on Environmental Conservation. Kenneth had volunteered, participated and organized several environmental initiatives in his local constituency, national and international level. After the workshop “Climate Leader Workshop: Release Your Creative Power” Kenneth was provided with a new perspective in addressing our surrounding environmental issues. He is inspired by how culture can a vital role in addressing to Environmental challenges – engaging the local community, garnering the support and most importantly, successfully raising the awareness of the importance of environmental conversation that each individual can play their role in. Among his volunteer responsibilities, Kenneth is Executive Committee of National Youth Achievement Award - Gold Award Holders' Alumni and Chairman of the People's Association Youth Movement - Joo Chiat Community Club Youth Executive Committee and in 2010 won the Stars of Shine at the Shine Youth Festival Award and HSBC NYAA Youth Environmental Award.



NUS Conference on Art and Activism

Inquiry: An arts conference for sharing best practices and building a community to promote sustainability

Organization: National University of Singapore

Date: 2010

Researcher: Kenneth Wong

Art Activism

National University of Singapore advocates the use of art as tool to promote the sustainable development agenda among activists, scholars and students.

A comprehensive museum of teaching and research, that is what National University of Singapore (NUS) Museum aims to be. It focuses on Asian regional art and culture, and seeks to create an enriching experience through its collections and exhibitions.

In 2010, NUS Museum organised the Art Activism Conference in order to create a platform for sharing of knowledge, discuss best practices in art activism and community collaboration at the grassroots level. The Conference hoped to foster multi-disciplinary debate and dialogue on activism in sustainability among reputed artists and art activists from Asia and Europe, and make this available to the masses. With a conference format, Art Activism facilitated sharing with key activities such as post-conference publication, and an exhibition titled An Art Project in Cigondewah by Tisna Sanjaya in the NUS Museum.



Part of An Art Project in Cigondewah by Tisna Sanjaya

To extend the reach of the conference and exhibition through publicity of the event which targeted audience from various sectors such as culture and arts, media, youth, academia, social entrepreneurs, environmentalists and philanthropists, art activism was organised in collaboration with the Centre for Social Entrepreneurship and Philanthropy, NUS and collaborated with NUS Business School and Singapore Biennale.

Art Activism provided a viable approach to ensuring that the conference was educational and addressed issues pertinent to students and scholars of varied fields of learning, ranging from geography to history to architecture to sociology to art. It also adopted multiple models of interactions and intersections by involving



communities and agencies in the region to show the impact of art on social development.

The conference discussed social innovators, global economy and responsibilities of all stakeholders. The Conference invited renowned speakers from across Asia and Europe like Tisna Sanjaya (Indonesia), Reuben Fowkes (Croatia-UK), Alma Quinto (Phillipines) and Soichiro Fukutake (Japan) to offer the audiences the benefits of a variety of perspectives. All the speakers concurred on benefits of using art as a bridge while promoting sustainability among most communities.

In addition, Art Activism set to address environmental challenges posed by rapid urbanisation such as affordable housing, food security, transportation and livelihood. The conference also set to look at the broader issue of sustainability including the urgent need to create a culture of sustainability and the cultural deficit in any conversation relating to the sustainability paradigm, be it ecological, economic or social.

Ultimately, the Conference concluded that it boils down to education on sustainable development and community-based natural resource management.



Ubin of YesterYear

&

Memories of MacRitchie Photo Project

Inquiry: Heritage Conservation, Water Conservation

Researcher: Kenneth Wong

Shooting for the Environment

If a photograph speaks a thousand words, what are they saying and is the verbosity worth much? Photographers in Singapore along with the National Youth Achievement Award Council's Young Photographers' Network answer in the affirmative.

Ever thought of looking at the issues of environmental conservation through photographic lens? That is precisely what National Youth Achievement Award (NYAA) Council's Young Photographers' Network (YPN) hopes to encourage. Ubin of YesterYear and Memories of MacRitchie Photo Project, initiated by NYAA, offer a unique approach to examining environmental concerns. Both these projects attempt to develop and maximize on the potential of young people through selfless community service, and skills development so they may be exceptional individuals who can contribute to society and the environment as photographic artistes.

Ubin of YesterYear

Pulau Ubin, Singapore's last kampong (village), has been preserved from the pressures of modern urban development - concrete buildings and tarmac roads so that its natural flora, fauna, coasts and reserves can be protected from exploitation. In 1998, as part of the Protect and Care for Pulau Ubin Project, many young photographers were invited to capture the beauty of this spellbinding village, and bring back the essence of traditional living through photo memories. Many of the sites captured on film then no longer exist. The government, however, in a bid to protect the natural diversity of Pulau Ubin, has converted the island into a recreational park - where its traditional setting has been preserved - and has implemented several ecological projects.



Boats to Pulau Ubin. Image courtesy of Protect and Care for Pulau Ubin Project.

The Ubin of Yesteryear initiative has persuaded nature enthusiasts to visit the islands, indirectly contributing to help this island regain a significant position in the cultural history of Singapore. Additionally, the initiative



provides a visual narrative documenting Pulau Ubin's transition over years giving us a chance to go down memory lane. Further, photographs were auctioned off by His Excellency, President S R Nathan, during President's Challenge 2007 to raise \$100,000 for beneficiaries in the social service sector.

The initiative has enabled the public to realise the need to maintain the rustic setting of Pulau Ubin, and to ensure that the flora and fauna here continue to flourish over years.

Memories of MacRitchie Photo Project

MacRitchie Reservoir is one of the projects under PUB, Singapore's national water agency's Active, Beautiful, Clean Waters (ABC Waters) programme. Completed in 1868 as an impounding reservoir, this reservoir was the result of an increased demand for water in the mid-19th century. The oldest lake on the island, MacRitchie's, improved in 2009, is now more than just a water catchment area. The number of people visiting MacRitchie Reservoir has increased since and it is now a popular tourist destination.



Leisure activities at MacRitchie Reservoir.

The Phase One of the reservoir's improvements was revealed on 25 July 2009. In celebration of this landmark occasion, the NYAA Council and PUB collected photographs to document the changing faces of this national heritage site, and the Memories of MacRitchie Permanent Photo Exhibition Project was born.

The Exhibition aimed to give the public an overview of the MacRitchie's Reservoir, its history and current developments in the hopes of raising the public aware of how this reservoir is maintained. As an exhibition open for public viewing and one that is permanently open, the initiative serves as a source of information for the public.

In addition to showcasing talented photographers who captured the natural beauty of MacRitchie Reservoir, another important aim of the project was to educate the masses on ways to care for their environment and on the need to keep the local water sources clean so as to sustain the quality of water for the benefit of the country.



Post - Museum

Inquiry: Waste Management through Free Trade Barter

Researcher: Kenneth Wong

Initiative, Independent Art and the Really Free Market

A group of artistes, freethinkers, and concerned citizens of Singapore take on the challenges of waste management by embracing an age old economic system with a creative twist.

Post-Museum is an independent arts organisation and an academic institution representing non-governmental, community bottom-up initiative, dedicated to examining contemporary life, promoting the arts and connecting people. Established in 2007, Post-Museum was initiated by Singaporean curatorial team p-10 to work on several key initiatives based on four broad objectives - Engagement, Education, Environment, and Economy.



A Midwinter Night's Dream by Vox Camerata. Image courtesy of the Post-Museum.

Post-Museum is a self-funded initiative and raises 100% of their operation costs through rental charges, public and corporate donations, and supplementary sponsorship from the government, individual partners and supporters. Little funding from the government or the corporate sector notwithstanding, Post-Museum has successfully organised not just one or two but several successful events such as NGO Fund-raising, talks, films, art, theatre, among others. The organisation aims to be sustainable with support from past partners and donation from the public; with good response, they managed to sustain this project for four years with remarkable success.

In their continued efforts to ensure self-reliance, Post Museum adopted the alternative gift economy concept showcasing one of the best examples of the bottom-up approach they advocate. Adopting the concept of Free Market – Barter Trade concept, Post-Museum hopes to encourage the community and the general public to trade the items that they no longer want for something that they may need.



One of Post-Museum's primary aims is to respond to its location and community while serving as a hub for local and international cultures. They hope to inculcate the concept of recycling and waste minimisation and as such, they encourage the community not to overbuy items increasing unnecessary wastage.

Singapore, being one of the smaller countries in the world, has insufficient natural landfills. Pulau Semakau, one of the key initiatives by the National Environment Agency, was created for the purpose of dumping incinerated waste into the island in order to dispose of the waste from the Singapore mainland. However, this landfill will be fully filled by 2045 and Singapore will face a huge waste management crisis. Therefore projects such as Post-Museum which propagate waste minimisation and resource conservation initiatives play a pivotal role in postponing that deadline.



Internal External by Ina Conradi. Image courtesy of the Post-Museum.

Post-Museum is not just a great example of the bottom-up approach, where the community endeavours to solve an imminent urban crisis through a sustainable economy business format, but also carries a very important social message on the importance of waste minimisation and conservation. The message is imparted by fostering performing, literary, and visual arts, new media, and other modes of expression so as to examine contemporary life, promote the arts, and connect people. The Organisation also actively encourages art, design, architecture and work by NGOs, engages in research and publishing, runs residency programmes for local and international talents, facilitates talks by local and global talent, and organises local and International Exhibitions, workshops and classes. They support other programmes by motivated individuals who have expertise and interest in areas such as free market, films, NGO Fund-Raising and Role-Playing Game (RPG).



WORK-LIFE Project

Inquiry: Art in community-building

Organization: British Council Singapore

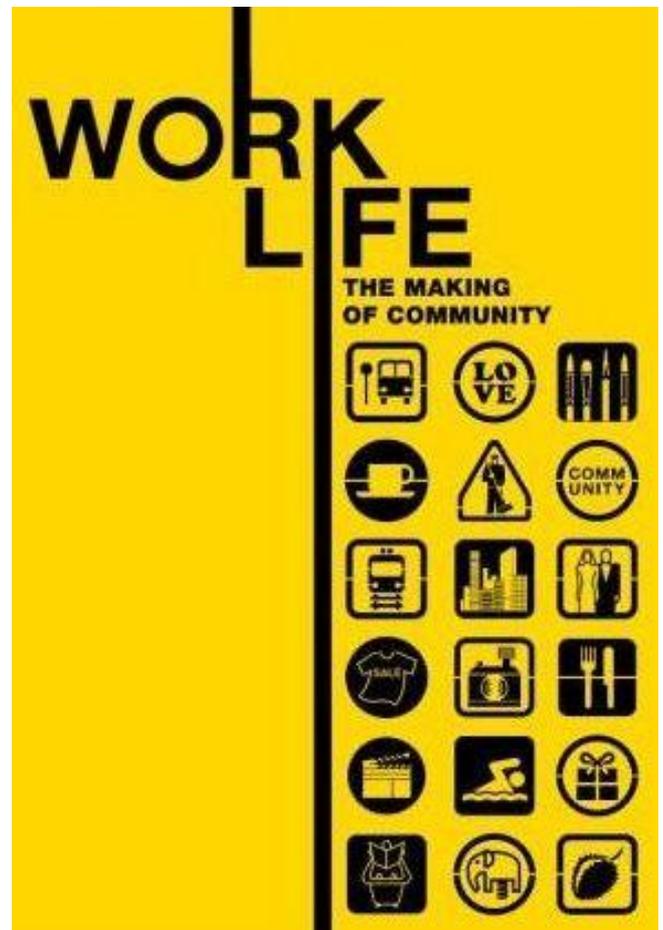
Date: 5-6 March 2010

Researcher: Kenneth Wong

The Making of a Community

The British Council, Singapore, brings together an assorted bunch, from experts to artists to the regular Joe, to build a sense of community through art.

WORK-LIFE started off as two-day forum in Singapore held on the 5th and the 6th of March 2010 which brought together a team of sixteen leading artists from the United Kingdom, Singapore, New Zealand and Australia. The audience was made up of educators, artistes, community workers, and governmental (both local and national) representatives. The forum was a collaboration between the Theatre Training and Research Programme (TTRP), the British Council (BC), and the National Museum of Singapore, to create a special space in Singapore for the sharing of best practice, the discussion of key areas and the founding of future working relationships.



WORK-LIFE Project poster. Image from National Museum of Singapore.

The group's mission was to engage the community, to discuss, debate, and develop ideas on how art can be effectively and responsibly used to create greater understanding, tolerance and appreciation of community in an increasingly intercultural and environmentally unsustainable world.



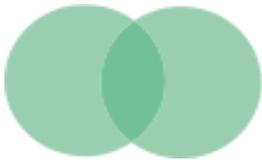
The project was a result of BC's Creative Cities Project which explored new ways to improve the quality of life in urban communities by involving young professionals from diverse backgrounds. The project enabled them to acquire knowledge, skills and tools, and network so as to have a say in decisions affecting the environment they live in. Discussions covered a range of issues, including public spaces, arts and social activities, the contribution of creative industries to city development, and the role of cultural policy.

In developing this programme, BC held discussions with various groups of people within the community including experts & practitioners. Feedback from these focus groups brought attention to the lack of an information one-stop-shop; a similar response has been previously received from various communities that are currently facing social or ethnic or race or language or religious concerns.

A lesson learnt from these discussions was art's raising popularity in bridge building attempts due to its unique ability to breakdown norms and push boundaries – especially in languages. Information gathered also alerted BC to the need for a suitable networking platform to generate healthy discussions. The organisation initiated and organised the forum after discussions with colleagues in the region. In fact, speakers to the forum were a result of consultation with colleagues in the region.

Working with regional colleagues provided BC with an opportunity to access their regional funds ensuring that regional speakers and interested participants from the East Asia & UK could be accommodated, strengthening the platform further enhance the network between the Asia and Europe contingents.

To better facilitate the requirements of the delegates to the forum and document the journey, a dedicated WORK-LIFE website was set up but due to an overwhelming response to the event this website now serves as a platform upon which to develop and nurture the dialogue the forum fostered. The project has now morphed into the CIVIC Life project (<http://civiclife.sg/>) engaging the community in artistic pursuit while opening up opportunity for experts to engage with a diverse audience.



Mongolia

The profiles for Mongolia were researched and written by Monica James and Ekta Mittal.

Monica James is a writer, media practitioner and researcher with maraa- a media and arts collective. Her recent work is centered around community radio, media policy, spectrum reform, creative practices in times of conflict and urban transformation. She is the co-organizer of Pause-in times of Conflict and Theater Jam.

Ekta Mittal is a co-founder of Maraa Media Collective (<http://maraa.in/>). She is also one of the founding members of Masrah, an eight year old theatre group. Prior to this, Mittal worked at VOICES, a media advocacy group in Bangalore, to bring out a publication on Community Media. As a result she stayed with the organisation for two years. During this time, she had the opportunity to get hands-on experience with community radio, video and theatre, both in Bangalore and rural Karnataka. Mittal is passionate about travel, and has also worked as Research Manager for The Blue Yonder, a responsible tourism company where she identified communities to work with in Karnataka and Rajasthan. Mittal studied Social Communication Media in Mumbai.



Land Art Mongolia 360° Biennale

Inquiry: A meditation on landscapes in transition

Organization: Land Art Mongolia 360° (LAM)

Artists: Anibal Catalan, Asaki Kan, Batzorig Dugarsuen, Beatrice Catanzaro, Cheng Ran, Chimeddorj Shagdarjav, Dolgor Ser-Od, Dagvadorj Sereeter, Guido Canziani Jona, Huang Rui, Kim Young-ik, Lap Yip Wing, Lea Rekow, Karin van der Molen, Marc Schmitz, Nicole Dextras, Sabina Shikhlinskaya, Su-Chen Hung, Michael Straub, Shinji Turner Yamamoto, Tan Xun, Tony Ng, Michael Müller, Yeşim Ağaoğlu, Megumi Shimizu

Date: 8-25 August 2010

Researcher: Ekta Mittal and Monica James

Reflections on Land

The harsh landscapes of Mongolia inspire a group of artists who use art to make sense of their ever changing relationship with the natural world.

The philosophy underlying the 360° Land Art Biennale 2010, organized by the Mongolian National Modern Art Gallery in Ulaanbaatar, can perhaps be best summarized by a quote from Walter de Maria, "The land is not the setting for the work but a part of the work".

Land Art Mongolia (LAM) was located in the unique context of Mongolia – a modern country marked by a landscape and terrain which by necessity has a proximity to nature, reflected in the relationship to the idea of space, openness and freedom. The primary motivation behind the project was to look at a landscape in transition, where it is simultaneously the guardian of centuries of natural history, and at the same time, the terrain of conflict over modern impulses and desires to tame it. As such the project invited 25 artists from diverse backgrounds and practices to reflect on the relationship between man and nature by situating their work within the hostile and yet fragile terrain of Mongolia. All the interventions were situated in Situ within the landscape in an attempt to reflect on the proximate relationship that Mongolians have with their barren landscape and the attendant social context and spiritual relations.



Angela Volkmer working at the Land Art Biennale. Image courtesy of the Mongolian national Art Gallery.

According to Marc Schmitz, German artist participating in LAM,

"The outputs of the project were transitory, mainly the personal experience and the artworks that did not last...the focus of LAM was less on works that sustain in a common understanding. Works were temporary vanishing with time, and specific implemented into the nature environment. It was about a new understanding of



environment, face nature as alive, and discussions about art as well.”

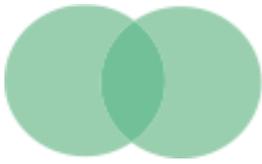
To supplement this transitory nature, LAM was also documented in a catalogue and showcased in a documentary exhibition of the works in the Mongolian National Modern Art Gallery. The project culminated with a 3 days symposium about art and politics in Ulaanbaatar where the audience interacted with politicians about government programs concerning sustainability.



Megumi Shimizu, “The wind is strong” performance, white sheet, image courtesy of the Modern Mongolian National Art Gallery

The importance of the project lies in the way in which it unified the correlational elements of experimentation, spatial site-specific creation, and environmentally sound practice. It also opened out ways to explore potential intersections of contemporary art with the pertinent discourse of environmental sustainability in the Mongolian context. LAM is an inspiring initiative that can be replicated in countries with a similar terrain, whether it is in a place like Ladakh in India or in the Kalahari Desert in Africa. The project reminds us of the possibility that people can live in harmony with hostile terrains, not through attempts at overcoming nature but by being one with it. If eco art projects seek to change the world by changing our relation to nature, this project serves as model for how to initiate a conversation between our aesthetic commitments and our commitments to fragile forms of life.

LAM continues to engage in this debate through holding a symposium on “Art and Politics – Contemporary art as spatial politics in light of emerging urbanism in Mongolia” in August 2011. The symposium addressed questions of sustainability in a broader perspective of cultural change in Central Asia. The second Land Art Biennial takes place in August 2012.



Beatrice Catanzaro, "ad infinitum (an homage to invisible labor)"

Nicole Dextras, "EAST/WEST FIR"

Marc Schmitz, "Moon Cuckoo"

Images courtesy of the Mongolian National Modern Art Gallery





Nomad Green Citizen Media Project

Inquiry: Impact of independent journalism on ecology

Organization: Nomad Green

Date: 2005 – ongoing

Researcher: Ekta Mittal and Monica James

Green Minded and Independent

Push-Button-Publishing and independent journalists document a changing country by voicing the concerns of the voiceless and mapping the impact of rapid industrialisation on the environment.

In the epic clamour of a nation rushing towards progress what happens to the voices of those who doubt, who question, who are left behind or fall through the gaps? Nomad Green is a citizen media project that is attempting to amplify these voices. Conceptualised as a platform that allows citizens to respond to the environmental deterioration that is plaguing Mongolia due to rapid urbanisation, industrial growth, and increased coal consumption, it trains citizen journalists to use blogs, digital videos, podcasts, and map mash-ups to report on environmental news.



Participants of the Nomad Green Media Project. Image courtesy of Nomad Green.

The project was conceptualised in 2005 when Lin Chenghsiou from the Taiwanese Green Party met Boum-Yalagch of Mongolian Green Party at a conference of Asia Green Parties in Ulaanbaatar Mongolia. Nomad Green was born out of their mutual belief in the importance of the role Mongolian citizens could play in bringing visibility to environmental issues that were being marginalised the mainstream media.

The project was implemented in 2008 with the financial support from Rising Voices and Mongolian Tibetan Foundation. Since 2008 it has held close to one hundred workshops across Mongolia and has trained three hundred citizen journalists who are contributing to the Nomad Green website. According to Olzod Boum-Yalagch, an official advisor, Nomad Green,

“The project is committed to amplifying the voices of its local reporters in an attempt to promote regional and international cooperation. It is making locally generated content accessible to the international community by translating it into Chinese and English.”



Nomad Green locates itself in a context where alternative voices are unable to find a space in the mainstream media.

As Mongolia struggles to orient itself in the wake of a strained transition from its communist past to a democratic free market economy, it finds itself having to choose between economic sustainability and ecological sustainability. And, in its attempt to undo decades of soviet style market restrictions the government has opted for a developmental paradigm that privileges rapid privatisation, and industrial growth at the cost of environmental degradation.

As part of its plan to ensure an economic growth rate of fourteen per cent between 2007 and 2015 through the mining sector, the government has laid the vast mineral deposits of the country open to multinational firms without stringent environmental laws in place. The mining boom marked a shift in the traditional agro-based economy and triggered water and land degradation that have made it very difficult for traditional nomads to continue their way of life. As the country moves towards an urban modernity the concerns of almost forty per cent of its nomadic population are being swept under the carpet. Climatic change and desertification are slowly destroying the traditional way of life of nomadic families who have historically depended on the vast land for their livelihood.

While there is no shortage of the accounts of a new Mongolia riding the mining boom towards a more prosperous future, there are few who are willing to talk about the environmental price it has to pay. Nomad Green becomes an important initiative not just because of its commitment to bring out stories of environmental degradation that are routinely overlooked and suppressed by the dominant logic of globalisation and industrial development but also because it provides a platform for dissent of a certain kind which is vital for a fairly new democracy.



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