

All A Part: APT10 Professional Engagement Forums: Visibility/Invisibility

Introduction

In March and April 2022, Asialink Arts collaborated with the Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), Griffith Asia Institute and WestSpace Arts to convene a series of three professional development forums on Zoom titled *All A Part*. *All A Part* coincided with the 10th Asia Pacific Triennial exhibition in Brisbane (APT10) at QAGOMA, which took place from December 2021 to April 2022. Curators, writers, academic interlocutors and artists took part in the forums; fostering a dynamic discussion on the key issues and currents that are influencing contemporary art practice today. Twenty bursary recipients from emerging arts backgrounds took part in these forums, funded by the Australia Council for the Arts and presented as a joint initiative between WestSpace Arts and Asialink Arts.

The forums were organised into three distinct themes. The first forum examined ideas of in/visibility in the arts, and the second focused on community and collaboration. The final session focused on futures: the entanglements between art and the future, and the future of art-making within the Asia-Pacific region. Across the three forums, artists' presentations, panels and breakout Zoom-room discussions revealed the many ways that these topics intersect and influence each other. Participants shared thoughts on how art can help to support communities, amplify new voices, and seek out new possibilities in making and telling stories.

Visibilities, communities and futures are topics that have become prominent ideas in recent contemporary art discourse, yet they have a particular resonance for our present moment. In the early days of March 2020, before widespread COVID-19 lockdowns took place in Australia, Asialink Arts convened the *Public Displays of Affection: How Can Artists Rebrand Soft Power?* conference. *Public Displays of Affection* examined notions of 'soft power' in arts and cultural initiatives within the Asia-Pacific region. As noted in the subsequent report,

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after two years the theatres and galleries are once again open, as are Australia's borders for

international travel. Festivals and larger arts events are coming back. Despite the challenges of pandemic contexts, the slow opening-up of the arts has, for many, signalled a new shift, with new opportunities in new contexts.

The themes of ‘futures’ – both as they are represented at APT10 and in the discussions for *All A Part* – show us what is possible in a new chapter for artistic practice. In the process of rebuilding, there is an opportunity for learning and for sharing different perspectives. At the time of writing and publishing this document, these issues are especially pertinent, as work begins on the consultation phase of Australia’s new National Cultural Policy. Whatever is in the final form of the Policy, it likely to have a significant impact on Australia’s artistic engagement with the Asia-Pacific region.

With these contexts in mind, this publication aims to reflect on the intersections and entanglements between visibilities, communities and futures, as they were revealed to forum participants throughout the three discussions. It looks back on *All A Part*, but it also looks forward: to what might be possible for the arts as we navigate change and new opportunities. A series of three thematic reflections follows the three forums, and critically examines a key issue arising from each discussion. Finally, an overall conclusion summarises the main findings from the forums, and asks: ‘where to next?’ in the contexts of the issues and opportunities identified. Through this format, there is a chance to examine the current climate of contemporary arts production in the Asia-Pacific region; and the importance of facilitating access to the arts, engaging community in these spaces, and supporting the next generation of artists and arts professionals.

1. Visibility/Invisibility

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Whose stories and what kinds of stories are made visible through the arts? Why are these narratives amplified, and what is missing or obscured in the process? How can we better understand the structures of invisibility as they manifest in the arts sector – especially through the curatorial, market and art-historical forces – and find new ways to address them?

These were the central questions that emerged in the first *All A Part* forum, centred on visibility and invisibility. Art's visual and multisensory dimensions can be used as a tool that brings attention to hidden issues, but the processes of making-visible sit within an arts ecology centred on judgement and perception. How artists and arts professionals can use their practices to find creative ways to disrupt the binary construction became an important issue for conversation. Through this, there is an opportunity to seek out new ways of seeing the entanglements in in/visibility, and address the issues that reinforce them.

Legacies of invisibility

It is important to acknowledge and address the historical issues that underpin the tension between visibility and invisibility in the arts. As QAGOMA Curator and moderator of the first

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With this viewpoint in mind, he argued that 'a lot of what we are talking about when it

comes to regimes of visibility and invisibility is a legacy of the colonial'. The colonial effects of making-invisible have roots in the museum and gallery, the academy, and the bigger constructions of art-historical thought. How we understand these legacies can help to inform the possible approaches that can be used to break away from such a frame.

Carol Yinghua Lu raised several important points on the legacies of invisibility, and how they impact the writing and understanding of art history; arguing that 'narratives in art history determine what is visible and what is invisible'. In the process of assigning visibility to a subject in scholarship or curatorship, these elements of art history are presented both *with* and *as* authority. However, she noted that 'a lot of the authority we assign [to elements of art history] does not really stand', leading to hegemony and canonical constructions.

So that is also a kind of awareness that we are bringing to the art historical narrative: that art history is not only about certain canons of art forms, but actually is a constant flow of ideas, and how these ideas resonate with contemporary ideas simultaneously.

- Carol Yinghua Lu

Finding ways to critique this authority is therefore a crucial first step, but equally, there is a need to look beyond. In doing so, there is an opportunity to find new pathways of understanding, and new approaches for unmapping and re-presenting key ideas in art as part of a bigger picture. Through promoting awareness in art history and curatorship of the processes by which certain aspects of art are made invisible, there can also be strategies to address and reassess these legacies. Museums and art galleries have an important role to play in addressing imbalance; making-visible through curating, as well as unearthing and re/presenting canonical stories for art audiences.

Making stories visible

In acknowledging the colonial legacies of invisibility, how we make art visible – through art practice, curating and writing history – requires an active process of reframing and critique. The methods by which visibility can be achieved in the arts were linked by several panellists to the broader concerns of reframing regionalism and regionality. Vincente Diaz examined these ideas in his presentation, which questioned the perspectives of visibility and invisibility from Micronesia: a region that has 'forever been obscured' in history. Micronesia literally translates to 'tiny islands'; but, as he argued, 'islands are anything but tiny'.

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problematic. It's problematic in the terms of recognition – how we're seen, and much of this

actually has to do with how islands are understood, and how the ocean region has been understood in modern frames. ... [Looking at islands] from the vantage point of ‘canoe cultures’, we can ... begin to see a radically different idea of what it means to be human. And it's connected to radically different ideas of what an island is in relation to the ocean.

- Vincente Diaz



The ideas of ‘obscurity’ and ‘recognition’ can be read in the contexts of broader debates about the ‘centres’ and ‘peripheries’ of the art world and market. Where is ‘central’ for art, where is ‘peripheral’? Who determines these positions, and how is this authority (or lack of authority) assigned? And how do we challenge dominant frames of understanding place and regionality? It is useful to recall comments to a previous Asialink Arts initiative in 2021 titled *Dekat Dekat Jauh (So Close Yet So Far)*, which examined Australia-Indonesia arts engagement through a series of four conversations.[2] In the first panel of that series, artist Tintin Wulia, who was born in Bali, remarked that ‘this [regional] perspective [from Bali] trained me to “see outwards” ... because I’m not in the centre, there are always other centres’.[3]

Finding ways to ‘unmap’ or decentre the dominant frames of regionalism is therefore crucial, if our aim is to find ways of understanding the many different modes of connection that exist between artists, cultures and locations. It opens up possibilities for new narratives

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hegemonies of invisibility – requires a critical evaluation of where and how we assess the

meanings of visibility. As several panellists noted, the idea of relationality between people – and between people and the environment – opens up a number of possible ways to acknowledge the connections and networks across oceans and between islands; through this process, subverting the double-edged frames through which visibility and invisibility are typically understood.

Challenging binary positions

Som Sapurinya's presentation examined ideas of visibility and invisibility in her own art practice; where she has explored the topic as it connects to issues in Thai history. What is important to her practice is the tension between objective and subjective frames of history. Through this contrast between subjectivity and objectivity, there are ways to test the limits of both strategies and perceptions: to reshape understandings and illuminate truths. In the presentation, she raised the idea of intangibility and 'vibrations'; of '[feeling] the different narratives existing, but missing in our perception'. Through these phrases, metaphors and poetics, attention is placed on the multisensory experiences of art beyond visuality.

Later in the panel discussion, artist Brian Fuata returned to the ideas of vibrations; outlining how he has used his practice to draw on diaspora experience, and illustrating how notions of in/visibility can become a powerful creative tool to explore ideas of connection and dislocation, as well as representations of identity and culture. Concepts of vibrations, and playing with the possibilities (or impossibilities) of sight, he argued, 'can become a poetic way of navigating ourselves and our practices'. This, in turn, raises important questions on ideas of representation and relation; on being seen, and how strategies of becoming-visible are articulated.

By understanding visibility and invisibility through a relational perspective, it is possible to see the way that these metaphors might not be a binary or opposing construct, but have multilayered and entangled elements instead. Through imaginative, interpretive frameworks, there is the possibility for visibility and invisibility to coexist together; supporting and reinforcing each other through creative practice.



Key issue: In/visibility and access

Throughout the first forum, one issue was alluded to that requires sustained critical attention. This was the overlap between ideas of in/visibility and ideas of access. Whose voices are made visible, and what perspectives remain invisible? How does it link in with the perceptions of the broader arts community, and the access to opportunities that result? Themes of diaspora experiences as well as casteism were some of the issues raised, alongside economic concerns.

One anecdote brought into sharp focus the intersections between invisibility and access; a point by Lingkoni Vaka'uta. He argued that 'when you look at contemporary Pacific art, what the world sees is mostly coming from diaspora artists' in Australia and New Zealand. Meanwhile, the artists who have chosen to remain on the islands and work there are 'totally invisible to the outside world'.

It was noted that this may be due to lack of institutional support or crucial infrastructure for contemporary arts; therefore, artists have chosen to migrate for study and other opportunities. However, these questions of social and economic access still remain,

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described as the ‘bicycle system’ (the smaller arts economies in the Pacific) and the ‘truck system’ (the arts economy in Australia) demonstrates this disparity.

How ideas of access should be addressed is a complex issue, to which – as expected – there is no singular answer. However, as the workshop revealed, a starting point might be to find ways of telling the stories of those communities previously made-invisible, and for curators and art historians to present these stories through creative frameworks that enhance understanding.

See [here](#) for more information on the forums and to watch the videos.

Return to All a Part

1 Asialink Arts. *Public Displays of Affection: How Can Artists Rebrand Soft Power?* [conference report]. (Melbourne: Asialink Arts, 2020).

2 Asialink Arts. ‘Dekat-Dekat Jauh (So Close Yet So Far): A Conversation Series.’ Asialink Arts [online]. 27 February 2022.

<https://asialink.unimelb.edu.au/arts/whats-on/2020/dekat-dekat-jauh-so-close-yet-so-far-a-conversation-series>

3 Caitlin Hughes, ‘Peripheries, encounters and entry points: Artists share perspectives on cross-cultural experiences in Australia and Indonesia.’ Asialink Arts [online]. 07 July 2021.

<https://asialink.unimelb.edu.au/arts/resources/stories-and-insights/peripheries,-encounters,-and-entry-points-artists-share-perspectives-on-cross-cultural-experiences-in-australia-and-indonesia>

Image credits:

1. Som Supaparinya Thailand b.1973 *Collapsing Clouds Form Stars* (video still) 2021 Single channel video, black and white, sound, 16:9, 279 ribbons with embroidered text, ed. 1 of 3 (+2AP) Commissioned for APT10. Purchased 2021 with funds from The Spellbrook Foundation through the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation Image courtesy: The artist.

2. Vincent Diaz, *Paafu Stories* (video still) 2021. Commissioned for and copyrighted by the Air Canoe Exhibit, APT10. Image captured from ‘Paafu Stories 2021. Produced by Vincent M. Diaz, University of Minnesota Twin-Cities’ ‘Youtube video.

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3. Brian Fuata, Aotearoa New Zealand/Australia b.1978 / Performance documentation of filming of Errantucation (mist opportunities) 2021 / Performance improvisations filmed at QAGOMA on 23 June, 31 August and 30 September 2021: three-channel HD video, 16:9, 15 minutes, colour, sound / Commissioned for APT10. Purchased 2021 with funds from the Jennifer Taylor Bequest through the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © Brian Fuata / Photograph: Chloë Callistemon © QAGOMA

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Caitlin is a writer, curator and PhD researcher in Art History and Curatorship at the University of Melbourne. Her research focuses on contemporary Southeast Asian art in cross-cultural contexts, as well as on themes of play, futures, the environment and urban aesthetics in art from across the Asia-Pacific region. She completed a Bachelor of Art History and Curatorship (Honours, First Class) at the Australian National University in 2020.

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