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**Media Release**

**Largest Southeast Asian Modern Art Exhibition  
Displays Rare Masterpieces**

***National Gallery Singapore connects the dots to tell a regional story and history  
in the UOB Southeast Asia Gallery***

**Singapore, 27 October 2015** – An exhibition of around 400 artworks will present a cohesive regional narrative about Southeast Asian modern art. The curatorial direction was announced today as National Gallery Singapore introduced its long-term exhibition *Between Declarations and Dreams* that will be presented at the UOB Southeast Asia Gallery.

Presented chronologically from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 1990s, and conveying shared artistic impulses and historical experiences, the curatorial approach breaks away from national frameworks to tell the story of Southeast Asian modern art. The exhibition draws from Singapore's National Collection as well as significant loans from private and institutional collections. The Gallery is privileged to present a selection of important artworks on long-term loan from collections in the region, including from the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, as well as from the Southeast Asian collections of our MOU partners Fukuoka Asian Art Museum and Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam. The Gallery will also present newly-acquired nineteenth-century masterpieces by Raden Saleh and Juan Luna, as well as new acquisitions of Southeast Asian modern art by Fua Haribhitak, Chuah Thean Teng, and David Medalla, to name a few.

The title *Between Declarations and Dreams* is taken from a 1948 poem by Indonesian author Chairil Anwar, who epitomised the modern artist as a creative individual. The phrase captures the experience of artists in Southeast Asia, working between the

historical, ideological or political markers that frame their practice, and the personal, subjective, expressive and creative motivations in art-making.

“The history of colonisation and the experiences catalysed a whole range of different values with the region’s beliefs, ideas and social structures. By drawing on common themes, we want to introduce fresh perspectives that enable visitors to fully appreciate the richness and complexity of modern art in the context of the entire region, and not just within their respective national histories. This is a bold step we have taken to create a moving and penetrating experience for all our visitors,” said Dr. Eugene Tan, Director of National Gallery Singapore.

The curatorial narrative explores four main themes (see Annex for more details):

- *Authority and Anxiety (19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century)*: The section examines the birth of modern art in Southeast Asia in the significant social changes of the 19th century. Greater cultural contact with the West, often through the colonial experience, influenced the kind of art produced. Local elites used art to assert and defend their status, while artists asserted their cultural prowess by making use of new styles and techniques. The sense of a break from the past, or profound change, can be understood as the beginning of the modern.
- *Imagining Country and Self (1900s to 1940s)*: In the early 20th century, the growth of art schools and institutions led artists to develop a stronger sense of professional identity. Artists began to express a stronger sense of place in their works and actively strove to express their newfound identity through innovative forms.
- *Manifesting the Nation (1950s to 1970s)*: During and after World War II, artists documented political events and issues, and used the style of social realism to awaken feelings of nationalism. At the same time, artists were also eager to be part of the international trend of abstract art. This took place at a time when artists were searching for a national identity as many countries across Southeast Asia gained their independence.
- *Re:Defining Art (post 1970s)*. Artists in this period became more concerned with political and cultural issues, not just the form or appearance of an artwork. Using a wider range of approaches and materials, they experimented with other genres such as installation, video, photography and performance.

Mr Wee Ee Cheong, Deputy Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, UOB Group said, "UOB is honoured to play a part in the telling of Southeast Asia's story to the world – a story of transformation and progress. Although our business first took root in Singapore, we have grown into a bank of more than 500 branches across Southeast Asia that is committed to supporting businesses, and through art, the community. Through the UOB Southeast Asia Gallery, we hope to cultivate a deeper appreciation of Southeast Asia's rich history and heritage and of how far we have developed as a region."

The UOB Southeast Asia Gallery, will occupy three levels of the former Supreme Court building. It will open its doors to the public together with the rest of the Gallery on 24 November 2015. Visitors will also have access to other gallery spaces featuring Singapore modern art and interactive learning facilities. Admission to the Gallery is free during the Opening Celebrations from 24 November to 6 December 2015. Following this period, admission to the permanent galleries will continue to be free for Singaporeans and permanent residents.

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## **ABOUT NATIONAL GALLERY SINGAPORE**

National Gallery Singapore is a new visual arts institution which oversees the largest public collection of modern art of Singapore and Southeast Asia. The Gallery is dedicated to collaborative research, education and exhibitions, highlighting the importance of modern art in Southeast Asia in a global context. The Gallery also provides a unique visitor experience through its art presentations and innovative programming, positioning Singapore as a regional and international hub for the visual arts.

Situated in the heart of the Civic District, the National Gallery Singapore has been beautifully restored and transformed from the former Supreme Court and City Hall buildings – two important heritage buildings of Singapore’s nationhood – into an exciting new visual arts venue. Opening on 24 November 2015, the Gallery will be a leading civic and cultural destination established for the enrichment, enjoyment and engagement of Singapore residents and visitors from all over the world. Information on the National Gallery is available at [www.nationalgallery.sg](http://www.nationalgallery.sg).

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## Annex

The following is an overview of the four themes of *Between Declarations and Dreams* presented at the UOB Southeast Asia Gallery as well as a list of major loans and acquisitions.

- **Authority and Anxiety:**

- This section begins the story of modern art in Southeast Asia with the drastic cultural and political changes of the 19th century. Art was a manifestation of changes in the social structure, and shifting relationships of authority, during a period of widespread colonial domination.
- Greater cultural contact with the West influenced the kind of art produced in Southeast Asia at this time. Local elites used art to assert and defend their status, which could be threatened by a changing social order. Artists asserted their cultural prowess by making use of new styles and techniques in art, breaking with pre-existing cultural practices. This sense of a break, or change, can be understood as the beginnings of the modern.



Nguyen Van Nhan  
(b. circa 1830s — 1840s; Vietnam, d. before 1919)  
*Grande tenue de la Cour d'Annam* (Official Dress of the Court of Annam), 1902,  
watercolour on paper, bound into linen-covered album, 23.6 x 31.8 cm  
Collection of National Gallery Singapore



Raden Kusumadibrata  
(active c. 1872 – 1880s, Indonesia)  
*Raden Adipati Kusumadiningrat, Regent of Galuh*  
1879, oil on canvas  
Collection of Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen

	
<p>Juan Luna  (b. 1857, Philippines; d. 1899, Hong Kong)  <i>España y Filipinas</i> (Spain and the Philippines)  1884, oil on canvas  229.5 x 79.5 cm  Collection of the National Gallery Singapore</p>	<p>Félix Resurrección Hidalgo  (b. 1853, Philippines; d. 1913, Spain)  <i>Expuestas al Populacho</i> (Christian Virgins Exposed to the Populace)  1884, oil on canvas,  115 x 157 cm  Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Collection</p>

- **Imagining Country and Self:**

- In the early 20th century, artists in Southeast Asia became more aware of their identity as artists, and began to express a stronger sense of place in their works. By the 1920s, the consolidation of colonial rule by the Dutch, British, French and Americans was complete for most parts of Southeast Asia. Consequently, the region experienced ever more rapid change and continuing social inequalities. This led to increasing calls for reform and independence, which were echoed by anti-imperialist movements in the West.
- Fuelled by a growing sense of nationalism, local artists expressed a deeper connection to their home in their work. From the popularity of picturesque landscape paintings to a synthesis of local themes and materials with a new visual language, artists showed a heightened sensitivity to place. At the same time, new art academies and exhibition systems were established. This gave rise to the identity of the “professional artist”. As a result, artists actively strove to express their newfound “self” through innovative forms.



U Ba Nyan  
(b. 1897, Myanmar; d. 1945, Myanmar)  
*Rangoon Harbour*  
c. 1930s  
Oil on canvas  
46.0 x 72 cm  
Collection of Mary Ann and Jimmy Chua



Victor Tardieu  
(b. 1870, France; d. 1937, Vietnam)  
*La Tonkinoise au Panier* (Tonkin Woman with a Basket)  
1923  
Oil on canvas  
108 x 80 cm  
Collection of National Gallery Singapore



Nguyen Phan Chanh  
(b. 1892, Vietnam; d. 1984, Vietnam)  
*The Singers in the Countryside*  
1932  
Watercolour and ink on silk  
65.4 x 49.4 cm  
Collection of National Gallery Singapore



Khien Yimsiri  
(b. 1922, Thailand; d. 1977, Thailand)  
*Musical Rhythm*  
1949  
Bronze  
53 x 39 x 36 cm  
Collection of Fukuoka Asian Art Museum

- **Manifesting the Nation:**

- Driven by notions of the nation, internationalism and progress, artists from Southeast Asia continued to examine the role of art in the midst of an increasingly complex environment. Southeast Asia experienced World War II, the struggle for independence and the rise of postwar nationalism in close succession. As fledgling nation-states came into being in an unstable political atmosphere, alliances like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) became a platform for regional cooperation. The subsequent Cold War divided the countries and this, in turn, influenced artistic directions, both directly and indirectly.
- During and after World War II, artists documented political events and issues, and explored the style of social realism to awaken feelings of nationalism and spur people into action. At the same time, artists were also eager to participate in international trends and exhibitions where abstract art held sway. These artists explored formal concerns such as colour, shapes and composition. Simultaneously, they also turned to their roots for inspiration by reinvestigating local traditions, materials and subject matter.
- As the Cold War reached its height, new social-political phenomena like the rise of student movements and popular revolts against authoritarian rule became widespread. A new generation politicised the function of art and the responsibility of the artist.

	
<p>S Sudjojono            (b. 1913, Indonesia; d. 1986, Indonesia)  <i>Perusing a Poster</i>            1956            Oil on canvas            109 x 140 cm            Collection of OHD Museum</p>	<p>Chua Mia Tee (蔡名智)            (b. 1931, China)  <i>Epic Poem of Malaya</i>            1955            Oil on canvas            107 x 125.5 cm            Collection of National Gallery Singapore</p>





Nguyen Duc Nung  
(b. 1909, Vietnam; d. 1983, Vietnam)  
*Binh minh tren nong trang* (Dawn on a Farm)  
1958, lacquer on board, 63 x 91.2 cm  
Collection of Vietnam Fine Arts Museum



Fua Haribhitak  
(b. 1910, Thailand; d. 1993, Thailand)  
*Face*, c. 1956, oil on canvas, 55 x 65 cm  
Collection of National Gallery Singapore



Sompot Upa-in  
(b. 1934, Thailand; d. 2014, Thailand)  
*Mother*  
1961, bronze, 64 x 35 x 30 cm  
Collection of National Gallery Singapore



Chuah Thean Teng (蔡天定)  
(b. 1914, China; d. 2008, Malaysia)  
*Morning*  
c. 1960 – 1963, batik on cloth, 112 x 173 cm  
Collection of National Gallery Singapore



Jose Joya  
(b. 1931, Philippines; d. 1995, Philippines)  
*Hills of Nikko*, 1964, oil on canvas, 172 x 198 cm  
Collection of National Museum of the Philippines

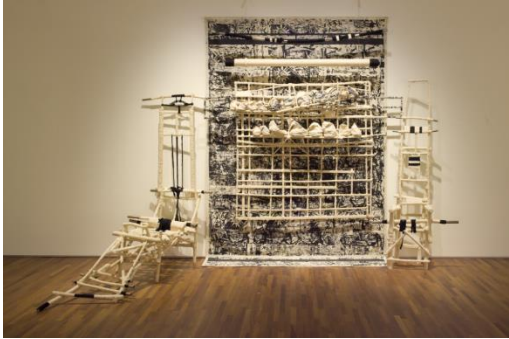



Edgar Talusan Fernandez  
(b. 1955, Philippines)  
*Kinupot*, 1977, moulded canvas over wood  
armature, 165 x 154 x 122 cm  
Gift of the artist, Collection of Ateneo Art Gallery

- **Re:Defining Art:**

- In the decades after 1970, artists challenged the dominance of painting and sculpture. Artists in this period became more concerned with political and cultural issues, not just the form or appearance of an artwork. They asked critical questions about art and the circumstances in which it was created. Using a wider range of approaches and materials, they experimented with other genres such as installation, video, photography and performance. This new impulse in art was prompted by the consequences of militaristic exploits, human and environmental costs of the Vietnam War and other authoritarian dictatorships in the region.

	
<p>David Medalla (b. 1942, Philippines)  <i>Cloud Canyons No. 24</i>, 2015, first version in series          1964, Wood, perspex, compressors, timer, water and detergent          150 cm (base)          Collection of National Gallery Singapore</p>	<p>Svay Ken          (b. 1933, Cambodia; d. 2008, Cambodia)  <i>Monthly Mandatory Meeting, 1975-1979</i>          1994, oil on canvas, 70 x 130 cm          Collection of National Gallery Singapore</p>

	
<p>Zulkifli Yusoff (b. 1962, Malaysia) <i>The Power II</i> 1991, canvas, ink, cloth, wood and metal bars, 240 x 240 x 180 cm Collection of Fukuoka Asian Art Museum</p>	<p>Navin Rawanchaikul (b. 1971, Thailand) Rirkrit Tiravanija (b. 1961, Argentina) <i>Cities on the Move 6, Bangkok</i> 1999, acrylic on canvas Collection of National Gallery Singapore</p>

- The end of the Cold War in 1989 led to shifts in global dynamics. This was also reflected in changing ideas about power, such as critical perspectives in postcolonialism and feminism. Concern for the disappearance of local heritage and disaffection with Western consumer capitalism led artists to incorporate traditional iconography, knowledge and craft into their art. Artists also questioned their own identities, whether national, ethnic, spiritual, gendered or sexual. They made art that re-examined suppressed historical narratives and traumatic memories, thereby providing alternative readings of the past.
- As Southeast Asian artists became part of the global art world from the 1990s, the impact of Euro-American art schools, international biennales and art fairs grew more important. Artists had to work with institutional and market structures, and the inner workings of the international art industry.

- **Major loans:**

Lenders include 15 institutional and 25 private collections from the region and beyond. Selected institutional lenders include:

- Vietnam Fine Arts Museum (the Gallery's MOU partner)
- National Museum of the Philippines
- Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas
- National Gallery Bangkok, Fine Arts Department, Thailand (the Gallery's MOU partner)
- Fukuoka Asian Art Museum (the Gallery's MOU partner)
- Tropenmuseum (the Gallery's MOU partner)/ Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen

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