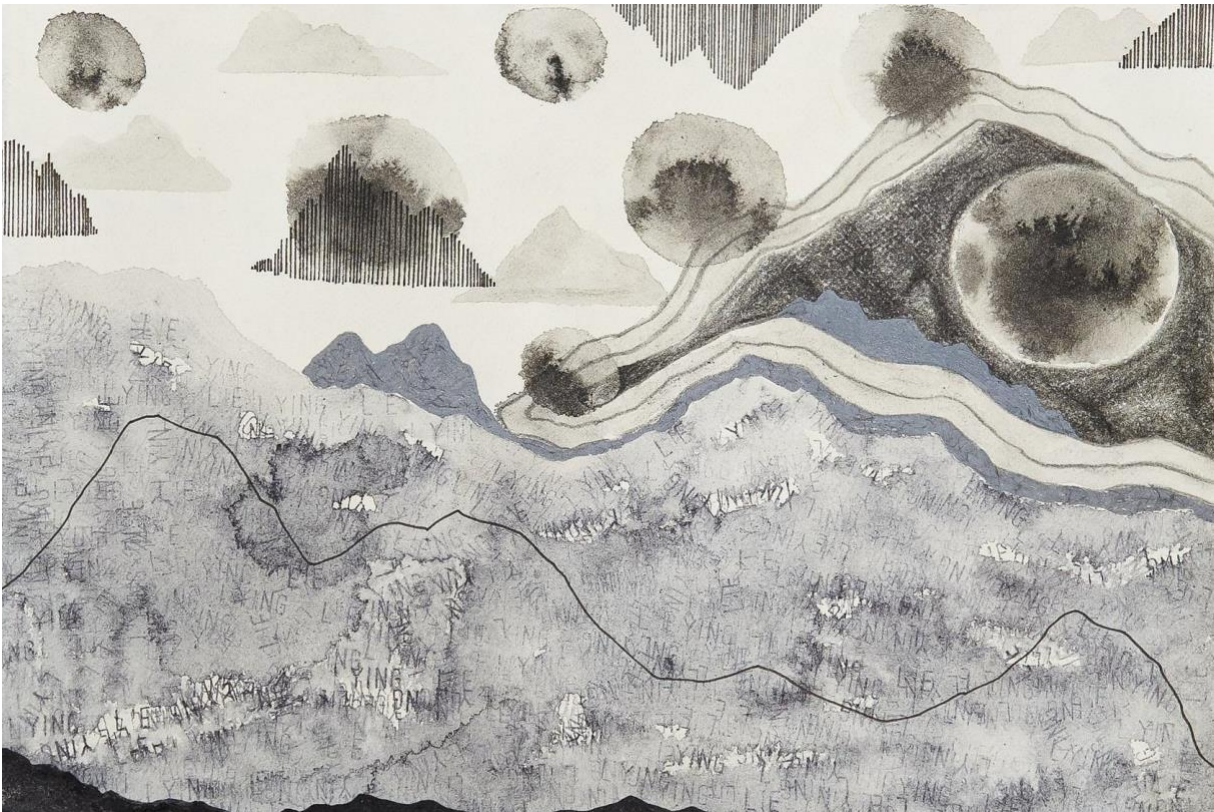


# แผ่นดิน/TANAH/ LAND: SURAJATE TONGCHUA & MARYANTO

## EDUCATION KIT STAGE 5 & 6



Surajate Tongchua, *Lying Mountain No 14* 2023, 310 x 210 mm

### **แผ่นดิน/TANAH/ LAND: SURAJATE TONGCHUA & MARYANTO**

*Provoking disruption, contemplation, and a rethinking to how humans engage with land.*

*แผ่นดิน/Tanah/Land* is a leading example of two contemporary artists engaging with their time and place to critically discuss issues surrounding the landscape. The artworks selected in this education resource bring to the forefront of student enquiry the complex connection contemporaneity has introduced to the relationship between human and land. The artists engage with landscape and place in very different ways. Chiang Mai-based Surajate Tongchua contrasts the massive forms of mountains with ephemeral clouds and freeform linear outlines. Yet, on closer inspection many of the mountains have collaged onto their bulky slopes words, endlessly repeated. An artist with a strong interest in political science and government, Tongchua uses the power of mountains to comment on the doubtful legitimacy of the Thai government. Yogyakarta artist Maryanto uses black scraperboard technique to create large scale paintings depicting the devastation of the Indonesian landscape wrought by the production of palm oil. Land clearing for palm oil has had a devastating effect on both the landscape and the lives of local agrarian communities. Questions and activities invite students to engage with individual artworks and the exhibition in its entirety, to consider themes that emerge from the artists' subjective exploration. Students are encouraged to make significant connections between these artists and the wider study of art history.

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Maryanto, *Sand Miner Bivouac* 2021, scratching, acrylic on canvas, 100 x 200 cm

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## THE EXHIBITION

*แผ่นดิน/Tanah/Land* exhibition presents recent works by Surajate Tongchua and Maryanto, two southeast Asian artists whose work critically engages with landscape, the environment and political authority in the region. The works in *แผ่นดิน/Tanah/Land* show how those in power—government, monarchy, corporations – can be abusive to land. But they also raise important questions: who owns the land? Individual land is owned by individuals, but public land, or land in general? How can it be protected, how can it be cared for, how can it be useful to people equally? Visually, these works convey positive and negative responses. They heighten the collective sense of burden and heaviness but speak with imagery and language which somehow enriches and empowers the viewer.

The exhibition presents the artists' responses both subjectively and politically, using the land as a source of inspiration, conversation, and metaphor to discuss a broader, more than ever present global issue of climate, power, ownership and governing.

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## THE ARTISTS

### Surajate Tongchua

Surajate Tongchua (b 1986, Thailand) is currently based in Chiang Mai, Thailand. He graduated from the Department of Print Making, Faculty of Fine Art at Chiang Mai University in 2010. Tongchua's practice focuses on social power relations that affect state structure (the Organic crisis). Such critical concepts and philosophy of praxis challenge the existing world view, inviting the audience to step away from seeing under the common perception's filter. Tongchua's work reflects sharply on the political situation in Thailand by leaving traces of contention in the field of thought.

Tongchua is interested in contemporary art, conceptual art and installation art, resulting in most of his works utilising multimedia and techniques depending on the issues and content expressed. He applies a strategy of incorporating ready-mades or converting the material into another dimension to openly describe current social phenomena.



Surajate Tongchua (image courtesy of the artist)

### Maryanto

Maryanto (b 1977, Indonesia) is an Indonesian artist who creates black and white paintings and installations that examine socio-political structures through the depiction of landscapes. His work often explores the impact of technological development, industrialisation, pollution, and resource exploitation on the natural world.

Maryanto graduated from the Faculty of Fine Art, Indonesia Institute of Art, Yogyakarta in 2005, and completed a residency at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam in 2013. Maryanto has presented solo exhibitions internationally in countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Amsterdam. He has also recently participated in notable group exhibitions including the Samstag Museum of Art in Adelaide. Maryanto works speak to the contemporary conversations that have led to him being featured at international biennials such as the 2nd Industrial Biennale, Labin, Croatia (2018); the Setouchi Triennale, Naoshima, Japan (2016); the Jakarta and Jogja Biennales, Indonesia (2015); and the Moscow Biennale, Moscow, Russia (2013). Maryanto lives and works in Yogyakarta.



Maryanto (image courtesy of the artist and Yeo workshop)

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## FOR TEACHERS

*แผ่นดิน/Tanah/Land* presents exciting opportunities to integrate new works by contemporary Southeast Asian artists into existing curricula and case study investigations. The exhibition gives insight into practising artists and how they can use contemporary techniques and methodologies to create artworks that question political and governing structures surrounding the ownership of land, ultimately posing questions to provoke diverse perspectives an alternative direction. The artists sternly speak to a powerful message and a timely global environmental issue but demonstrate a strong ability to use subtle imagery and mediums to persuade the audience to feel a sense of compassion, agency and empowerment. Individually the artist communicates ideas personal to current land issues to their specific country and culture. Collectively, the exhibition illustrates how artists irrespective of geographical location, show great concern for the land.

Consider examining the exhibition as an in-depth focus study within a broader investigation of Art as Disruption, Art & The Landscape, Art Activism, Art & Environmental Issues and Art & Symbolism.

Through these lenses students investigate the exhibition to examine artists as truth seekers, risk-takers, environmentalists, and social provocateurs. The artists, in their own rights, use themes and imagery of land, communicating subtle differences in perspective, but with an overall focus on the positive and negative relationship humans seek with the landscape. Material practice such as the use of manipulated objects and a revisitation to traditional media being used in contemporary boundary pushing ways, allows this exhibition to be both beautiful and disrupting. These contemporary methodologies mentioned in these resources are encouraged to be addressed by teachers throughout the study.

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## CURRICULUM LINKS AND SYLLABUS OUTCOMES

Teachers are encouraged to adapt this education resource for their curriculum, in and outside NSW. This education kit makes the following connections to:

### **Visual Arts NSW Stage 6 Syllabus:**

Art Criticism/Art History Focus area:

- Artist's Practice: ideas and inspiration/risk-taking and material boundary pushing.
- Conceptual Framework: the ways in which the world is communicated through art by the artist
- The Frames: Cultural/Structural/Subjective/Postmodern
- The genre of Landscape and contemporary practices such as Environmentalist, Naturalist artists.
- Marrying of traditional and postmodern material practice

### **Art Criticism and Art History Outcomes:**

Stage 5 Course: 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10

Stage 6 Year 11: P7, P8, P9

Stage 6 HSC Year 12: H7, H8, H9

## International Baccalaureate Diploma Syllabus:

### Theoretical Practice

- *Visual Arts in Context: Students examine artists working in a different cultural contexts and seek to understand the limitation and possibilities to discuss historical events through artmaking.*
- *Visual Arts in Methods: Students look at different techniques for making art. Students investigate and compare how and why different techniques have evolved, and the processes involved.*
- *Communicating Visual Arts: Students explore ways of communicating through visual and written means. Students make artistic choice about how to most effectively communicate knowledge and understanding.*

### Curatorial Practice

- *Visual Arts in Context: Students develop an informed response to work and exhibitions they have seen and experienced.*
- *Visual Arts in Methods: Students consider the nature of "exhibition" and think about the process of selection and the potential impact of work on different audiences.*



Surajate Tongchua *Lying Mountain no 4* 2023, mixed media paper on handmade paper, 310 x 210 mm

## CASE STUDY: ART AS A DISRUPTIVE LANDSCAPE

Students investigate how artists view aspects of the world with divergent perspectives and curiosities, finding connections and conversations between natural and political spheres. Through the artist practice of both Surajate Tongchua and Maryanto, students explore the power of visual metaphor to pose confronting and unresolved questions. They investigate the impact an artist can have when using a personal interest to discuss the link between societal concerns and discover a realm of art and artists that attempt to disrupt and evolve our perception of norms, rules and governing processes. Students can begin by researching relevant art terms to situate Surajate Tongchua and Maryanto's artist practice. Intertwined through this exhibition is a complex web of social, environmental, political, scientific, and humanitarian discourse that will see class conversation going beyond the art sector and into topics surroundings leadership, geography, activism, and international policies. See vocabulary list for appropriate terminology.

The relationship between the Subjective and Structural Frames are very present in the exhibition, as the artist respond to their world with personal opinion and through material experimentation using the landscape as the linking theme. Examining historical works such as Edvard Munch's *Scream* (1893) to critically discuss the expressive use of colour and line in metaphor of Munch's mental state, but also the newfound research linking Munch's painting to the phenomenon and global effects of Krakatoa volcano eruption. Additionally, the investigation into Sir Michael Craig-Martin's *The Oak Tree* (1973), which antagonistically questions religious norms and extremes will benefit students' broader understanding of the relationship between art, visual metaphor and disruption of values and expectations, humans on a daily level engage with.

For a historical context students should investigate a brief history of landscape in Asian art by examining works such as Hokusai's *The Great Wave Kanagawa* (1831) and Gu Kaizhi's *Nymph of the Luo* (c. 344-406). This study will help inform students on the traditional techniques of print and mark making derived from the area and used by the exhibiting artists.

Students will then examine the broader contemporary issues pertaining to land, environment, and ownership across Southeast Asia by reading Mankun Liu's article *Confronting land politics at Art Basel Hong Kong* (2023) <https://www.artbasel.com/stories/art-basel-hong-kong-asia-labor-politics-environmental-justice-spirituality?lang=en>. During this lesson, students are encouraged to complete in-depth artist research on one of the artists mentioned in the article, to seek to understand how that artist's practice is questioning concerns and conditions regarding land in their country.

Students are encouraged to consider the questions introduced in *แผ่นดิน/Tanah/Land* and debate their perspectives amongst peers:

- Who owns lands? Dividing land into categories of public, private, unclaimed, universal.
- How can it be protected and how can it be cared for?
- How can it be useful to people equally?

Finally, students will unpack curatorial intentions and the power of the exhibition to influence disruption and change by comparing *แผ่นดิน/Tanah/Land* with two other exhibitions of a similar nature. The Biennale of Sydney 2022 – *RĪVUS*, curated by José Roca <https://www.biennaleofsydney.art/biennale/23rd-biennale-of-sydney-2022/> and Yuki Kihara's *Paradise Camp* exhibition internationally, firstly at the New Zealand Pavillion Venice Biennale (2022) and currently the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney (2023) <https://vimeo.com/727514041>.

They might also look comparatively at works by artists such as Cai Guo-qiang, El Anatsui, Sokari Douglas Camp, William Kentridge, JR, Ai WeiWei, Agnes Denes, Neak Sophal, Jakkai Siributr, Joydeb Roaja, Ngoc Nau, Yuki Kihara, Eng Ritchanchandy, Prum Ero, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Olafur Eliasson, Julie Mehretu, Jonothan Jones.

## EXHIBITION QUESTIONS

The questions provided in this resource may be used for written responses, examination preparation, or for open-ended discussions in the gallery or the classroom.

### Pre-visit Questions for Years 9 – 12

- Brainstorm how artist can engage with the landscape when art making?
- In your own words, define 'Land'. Push the boundaries of yours and your peers understanding.
- Discuss the rising global environmental, land governing and agricultural problems?
- Research the historical contexts of landscapes in Southeast Asian art.
- An artist practice is more than art making. Discuss this statement.
- Does art have the power to disrupt and disturb societal norms and governing policies?
- What are the materials and techniques the artists' use?

### Questions for Written Response Years 11 – 12

#### Frames:

Explain how artists express global concerns in personal ways within the *แผ่นดิน/Tanah/Land* exhibition.

Explain how the artists in *แผ่นดิน/Tanah/Land* use simple yet powerful imagery to portray aspects of the world.

Compare how TWO bodies of work communicate narratives through symbolism.

Use the artists from *แผ่นดิน/Tanah/Land* in your response.

#### Practice:

Discuss how the materials artists use affect the way their ideas and intentions are communicated.

Discuss this statement with reference to artworks from *แผ่นดิน/Tanah/Land*.

Analyse the role of the natural world in artmaking practices.

Discuss this statement with reference to artworks from *แผ่นดิน/Tanah/Land*.

#### Conceptual Framework:

*'Artists' interpretations of the world are constrained by their time and place.'*

Evaluate this statement with reference to *แผ่นดิน/Tanah/Land*.

Investigate ways artists have created significant artworks in response to significant world events.

In your answer, refer to specific artists and artworks from *แผ่นดิน/Tanah/Land*.



Maryanto *Illegal Loggers* 2023, scratching on photopaper, 200 x 250 mm

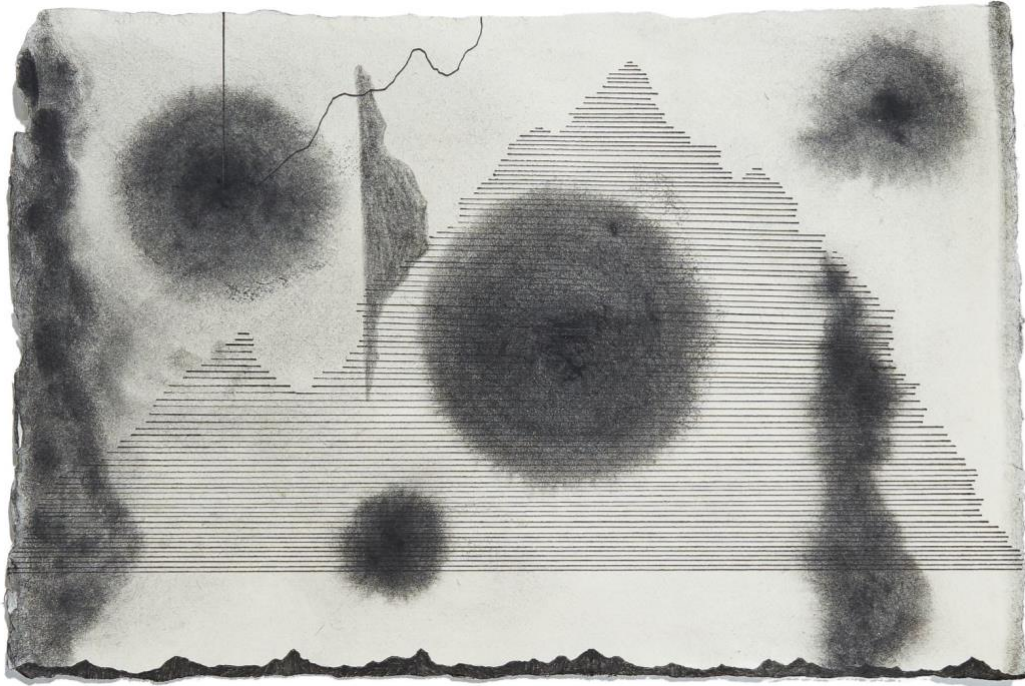
## VOCABULARY

- **Art Activism:** a dynamic practice combining the creative power of the arts to move us emotionally with the strategic planning of activism necessary to bring about social change.
  - **Agrarianism:** a social and political philosophy, perspective that stresses the primacy of family farming, widespread property ownership, and political decentralization. Agrarian ideas are typically justified in terms of how they serve to cultivate moral character and to develop a full and responsible person.
  - **Call to action:** an exhortation or stimulus to do something in order to achieve an aim or deal with a problem.
  - **Cede:** to give up or surrender land, position or authority.
  - **Conceptual Art:** Art for which the idea (or concept) behind the work is more important than the finished art object. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/conceptual-art>
  - **Contention:** Heated disagreement, an assertion, especially one maintained in an argument.
  - **Disrupt:** Alter or destroy the structure of something by causing radical change through innovation.
  - **Ecological crisis:** occurs when changes to the environment of a species or population destabilizes its continued survival.
  - **Environmental Art:** Art that addresses social and political issues relating to the natural and urban environment. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/e/environmental-art>
  - **Intuitive:** using or based on what one feels to be true even without conscious reasoning: instinctive.
  - **Psychogeography:** Describes the effect of a geographical location on the emotion and behaviours of individuals. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/psychogeography>
  - **Land/Earth Art:** Art that is made directly in the landscape, sculpting the land itself into earthworks or making structures in the landscape using natural materials. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/l/land-art>
  - **Mark Making:** refers to the creation of different patterns, lines, textures and shapes through experimentation and to a degree of uncontrolled results.
  - **Ownership:** The act, state or right of possessing something.
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## FOCUS ACTIVITIES

Here you will find focus themes and activities from *แผ่นดิน/Tanah/Land*. Activities have been designed to complement the recommended case study Art as a Disruptive Landscape and can also be completed in isolation through student self-driven inquiry.



Surajate Tongchua, *Lying Mountain no 8* 2023, mixed media paper on handmade paper, 310 x 210 mm

### Subjective Frame and Intuition – *Lying Mountains*

Surajate's practice is guided by the materials or key ideas he aims to discuss in his work; this informs a range of artistic decisions such as a size and materials. Using soft and muted colours, delicate lines and media his *Lying Mountain* series presents as organic mark making. When asked about his process, Surajate shared that whilst his works are based on initial concepts, he welcomes the possibility of abstraction throughout the creative process. He states: '*While I am fully focused on creating, I avoid having strict control over the final form or ultimate outcome of the work. Similar to conducting an experiment, I prefer to left the work to develop naturally, allowing it to flow and evolve organically until it is complete.*' (Interview with 16albermarle Project Space 2023).

#### Think About/Discuss:

Begin by looking at the series of *Lying Mountains* and listing all the materials you think create the landscape. What elements of his works are left to intuition and organic evolution?

Compare Surajate's practice to the following artists:

- Jackson Pollock
- Helen Frankenthaler
- Gerhard Richter

Written Response:

*'The making of art is an intuitive act, rather than a planned process.'*

In an extended response form, evaluate the above statement using open book research on Surajate's *Lying Mountains* and artworks by one other artist from the above list.



### **Surajate Tanachua**

*Lying Mountain no 10*, 2023, mixed media paper on handmade paper, 310 x 210 mm

### **Artist's Choice: Paper and Lines – *Lying Mountains***

*'I use paper in Lying Mountain because it serves as a fundamental material widely employed in artistic creations. I intentionally utilize wavy lines and zigzag lines along with basic triangular shapes to portray mountains in a way that remind us of how we used to draw them during our childhood. By referencing shared experiences and common hardships encountered by many people, my aim is to present simplified mountain forms on a basic material like paper to enable a broad and accessible understanding.'*

– Surajate, interview with 16albermarle Project Space 2023.

#### **Think About/Discuss:**

Surajate speaks of paper as an 'accessible and basic' material. Why do you think it is important for Surajate to use a material of this nature?

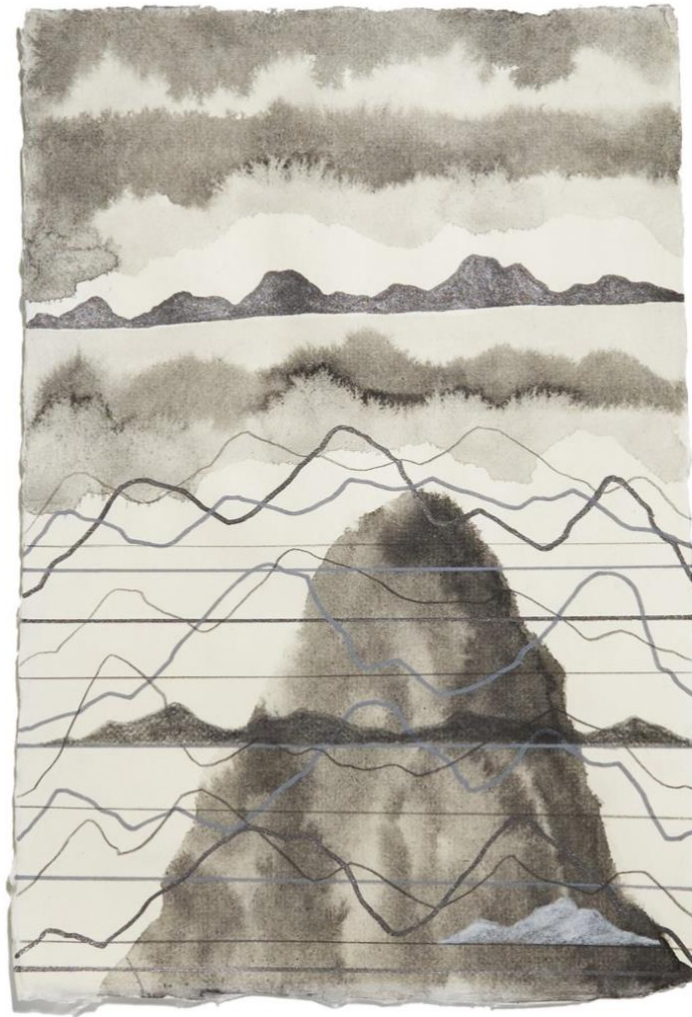
To help unpack this material choice use the *Lying Mountains* series and Surajate's earlier exhibition artwork *Priceless* in 16albermarle's exhibition *Other Possible Worlds* (2022), to examine Surajate's complex use of new, found and recontextualised paper. <https://www.16albermarle.com/ex-10-surajate>

Surajate draws a strong attention to the relationship between childhood memory and the landscape. In his quote he talks to an artistic choice to use simple shapes reminiscent of childhood drawings and the way in which he viewed the world at a younger age. In many of Surajate's works there is little separation between the understanding and remembering of his physical world and his experiences as a Thai citizen.

How is our worldview shaped by own past experiences and upbringings?

Individually or as a class brainstorm some of the values and beliefs that are similar or different to you and identify the origin of their existence.

With simple drawing materials and a piece of paper, as a class, choose a natural object such as a tree or body of water. Each spend a few minutes creating an artwork that illustrates your version of this natural object. Afterwards, spend a moment reflecting and then discussing why, where and how you learnt to use the shapes and lines that formed that object.



Surajate Tongchua, *Lying Mountain no 7* 2023, mixed media paper on handmade paper, 310 x 210 mm

## **Audience, Interpretation and Symbolism – *Lying Mountains***

Each of Surajate's works contain a primary context and a sub context. The artist invites his audience to experience the work at first glance, unknowing to prior knowledge of the themes subtle spoken through the metaphoric landscape such as food, tax, power structures, oppression and fear. The audience's experiences come first, followed by the artists commitment to education through subject composition and points of communication.

Symbolism is crucial to Surajate's conceptual practice. *Lying Mountain* visually portrays the grandeur of mountains, but It also holds a deeper connotation relation to the earth beneath. This symbolises the societal positions of the Thai people, specifically royalists, who perceive themselves as the '*people underneath the first of your feet.*'

### **Think About/Discuss:**

View the *Lying Mountain* series and consider the following artist choices and how they contribute to the metaphor of hierarchy in the Thai society:

- Floating mountains
- Mountains made of broken lines
- Mountains made from thin lines
- Circular formations

Compare and contrast Surajate Tongchua's artist practice with Julie Mehretu's *Politicized Landscapes* (2017).

*What does it mean to paint a landscape and be an artist in this political moment?* – Julie Mehretu

<https://art21.org/watch/extended-play/julie-mehretu-politicized-landscapes-short/>



Maryanto, *Palm Oil in Daily Life*, 2023, silkscreen print on paper, 510 x 355 mm

## Material Practice – Text, Colour and Appropriation

Maryanto's work are centred around his involvement in the Yogyakarta community and the ecological issues they face due to mining and deforestation. *Palm Oil in Daily Life* experiments with silk screen and uses postmodern techniques to convey messages about these local issues as a result of global greed.

### Think About/Discuss:

Section 1 Practise:

Choose from one of the below questions, or if time permits answer all questions as a Section 1 practise examination.

Outline the way appropriation further communicates the artists ideas about his world. (5 marks)

Examine the effectiveness of text and composition to convey ideas of environmental concern and harm. (8 marks)

Analyse the impact of Andy Warhol's *Soup Cans* (1962) Banksy's *Trolley* (2006) and Maryanto's *Palm Oil in Daily Life* (2023) on the audiences' perception of daily life and household products. (12 marks)



Maryanto, *Sand Miner Bivouac* 2021, scratching, acrylic on canvas, 100 x 200 cm

## Artist Process – Revealing Thought

Maryanto is deeply concerned by the geo-political and environmental issues around Southeast Asia, specifically his home in Indonesia. He creates monochromatic images as paintings, drawings and installations at varying sizes to evoke a dramatic response and call to action from his audience. Themes discussed in Maryanto's works underly power hierarchies that invisibly determine the physical land and its connection to political, governing rights and allowances.

Maryanto's makes many material choices including a common decision to only use black and white, removing any distraction from colour. His process of revealing images through the scraperboard processes takes two forms. As a child, Maryanto was interested in manual photography and discovered a technique of wetting black photographic paper to easily scratch textures, lines and shapes, removing aspects of the picture or creating an entirely new picture from the blackness. In later experimentation, Maryanto makes works on canvas, painting the canvas with thick black gesso and acrylic paint. He then scratches away his intended image which is informed by a reference photograph.

Maryanto connects this material process to his conceptual and mental process; acknowledging the action of creating something from dark to light and discovering something along with conversations in his mind, talking with himself as he draws.

### Think About/Discuss:

In *Sand Miner Bivouac* Maryanto depicts a landscape in flux. What are some of the events and interventions that have led to this landscape's current state?

Discuss the how Maryanto has depicted devastation and destruction in the artwork and similarly how he depicts hope. As a class critically argue what is the strong mood of the piece.

A suggested activity would be to create a mini Maryanto using premade scraperboard. Each student can research and choose a landscape from their local environment that has been affected positively or negatively by human intervention. This reference image will need to be printed in black and white. Dedicate a lesson to Maryanto's process of revealing an image from dark to light and encourage students to consciously draw attention to the thoughts and feelings they experience as they create.

- Their thoughts and feelings may be linked to the material process.
- Their thoughts and feelings may be part of processes a personal experience they are currently facing.
- Their thoughts and feelings may be related to the context of the image they are creating.

All are appropriate and should be individual acknowledged as achieving the outcome of the activity.



Maryanto, 'Mulung' in Belian ritual 2023, scratching on photo paper, 200 x 250 mm

## Artist and the Community

Maryanto's *Mulung* series of scratching on photo paper comprise of 9 small works to inform a larger collective story. His intention is for the audience to engage with the works, creating their own interpretation and stories to seek further curiosity and information. Storytelling and narrative are important aspects of Maryanto's practice, driving conversation and exposure to local communities and issues faced by the Indonesian people.

### Think About/Discuss:

Existing within community and acquiring knowledge firsthand was a crucial step in creating this series. Maryanto spent time researching in campsites with local communities, staying for days and walking around to see the forest and mangroves. Surveying the impact of coal mining and collecting stories and materials from people. To continue his research Maryanto also collected news and other documentation to support his perspective. The works are comprised of images of devastating and environment damage, as well as moments of community, celebration and ritual.

Compare and contrast Maryanto's community research based practice to other artists seeking to disrupt and exposure social, political and environment issues to the wider world:

Jason DeCaires Taylor, *Underwater Sculptures*, Mexico <https://www.underwatersculpture.com/>  
JR, *Women Are Heroes*, Cambodia, Kenya, India etc. <https://www.jr-art.net/project-list/woman-are-heroes>  
Ruangrupa, *Collecting Memories: The Village of Paper-Making For Thousands of Years*, China  
<https://ruangrupa.id/en/2018/11/02/collecting-memories-the-village-of-paper-making-for-thousands-of-years/>

To view more *Mulung* works from this series being exhibited in *แผ่นดิน/Tanah/Land*, please visit [https://www.16albermarle.com/ex14\\_artworks](https://www.16albermarle.com/ex14_artworks)

## REFERENCES (Useful Links)

<https://artark.com.au/blogs/news/friday-essay-land-kinship-and-ownership-of-dreamings>

<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-10-female-land-artists>

<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-market-land-art-challenges-collecting-differently>

<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-10-artists-making-urgent-work-environment>

<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/what-is-the-land-back-movement>

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/sep/23/all-aboriginal-art-is-political-you-just-need-to-learn-how-to-read-it>



A 16albermarle Project Space resource to support Australian teachers and students in the education of Contemporary South-east Asian art.