

Gotong Royong: Community spirit in contemporary southeast Asian art

EDUCATION KIT
STAGE 5 & 6



Kusofiyah Nibuesa, *Deep South Market #2 2022*, assembled cut paper 160 x 156 x 18 cm

THE EXHIBITION

Gotong Royong: community spirit in contemporary southeast Asian art

The eight artists explore and explore the enduring cultural concept of 'gotong royong,' a term rooted in ancient customs of the Malay Archipelago, where collaborative efforts symbolise the collective spirit of cultural identity. This cultural concept has profound significance across the diverse ethnic groups of the Malay Archipelago, spanning nations like Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, southern Thailand and the Philippines. An articulate expression of communal efforts and mutual exchange through the diverse artworks of eight contemporary artists from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. Featuring painting, textile installation, sculpture, ceramics, photography and prints, the exhibition spans awareness of narratives of women in domestic life, nostalgia for past history and landscapes, the need for environmental preservation, connections through traditional activities, various religious and spiritual practices, mythical creatures and an overview of daily life in the kampung, or village. The artists seamlessly integrate traditional techniques with contemporary concerns, embodying the dynamic nature of southeast Asian art. *Gotong Royong: Community spirit in contemporary southeast Asian art* invites viewers to traverse the rich tapestry of southeast Asian art — a space where tradition and modernity converge, prompting thoughtful reflections on the evolving identity of the region in the face of globalisation and other contemporary challenges. The exhibition

encourages introspection about one's role within the collective and how one can actively contribute to the practice of 'gotong royong' in their community.

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Anang Saptoto, *Customers 4.0: Credit Demon Cayenne Pepper* 2020, photographic print on poster paper, 72 x 53 cm

CURRICULUM AND SYLLABUS LINKS

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 5 and 6 Syllabus:

Art Criticism/Art History Focus area:

- Practice: Artists and their experience with citizenship / Artist collectives, grassroots organisation and collaborative projects / Curators and their role in social discussions
- Conceptual Framework: the ways in which the personal and wider world is communicated through art by the artist
- The Frames: The old with the new: incorporation of traditional art customs with contemporary ideas and processes
- Collective belief, experience and voice as a curatorial theme

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 different cultural contexts and seek to understand the limitations 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.*

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.*

VOCABULARY

Further information on these terms can be found on the Tate Modern Art Term Glossary

Activist Art: describes art that is grounded in the act of ‘doing’ and addresses political or social issues.

Community Art: artistic activity that is based in a community setting, characterised by interactions or dialogue with the community and often involving a professional artist collaborating with people who may not otherwise engage in the arts.

Gorong Royong: Derived from the Javanese words gotong (“work”) and royong (“together”), the term traces its origins to age-old customs where individuals collaborated in communal efforts, fulfilling social obligations within their community.

Social Turn: is a term to describe the recent (1960s) returned focus to art that is socially-engaged and community focused. (Term coined by Claire Bishop)

Socially-engaged practice: socially engaged art that is collaborative, often participatory and involves people as the medium or material of the work.



Kadek Dei Darmawan, *Traveling as a Pilgrim* 2023, collage of 23 Linocut prints on paper, mounted on hardboards, variable dimensions

FOR TEACHERS

Gorong Royong invites the integration of southeast Asian artists and their discourse into existing curricula and case study investigations. The exhibition provides a broad dialogue from both male and female artists across Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. Beyond the rich conversations presented by the artists and their lived experience, the exhibition is brought together through collaborative research and expertise by its curators and their backgrounds in art history and Asian cultural studies.

Consider examining and teaching this exhibition as an extension study following case studies about Collaborative Practice, Art & National Voice, Contemporary Southeast Asian Arts. Or Art & Social Engagement.

CASE STUDIES

This case study can be done as full unit or sections can be used to support a previous case study or investigation. The intention of this case study is to introduce students to various art practices that work in conjunction with community to present narratives to a wider audience. The themes explored in exhibition spans awareness of narratives of women in domestic life, nostalgia for past history and landscapes, environmental preservation, connections through traditional, religious or spiritual practices and activities, mythical creatures and views of everyday village life. Beyond these themes the exhibition and this case study focus on the collaborative and community aspect of each artists' practice. Students seek to understand that each artists' practice centres around bring to light the spirit of community. This resource examines how the artists;

- work within their community
- represents the livelihoods and narratives of their community
- engages in grassroots and collective ways
- capture community spirit

'Community' is a difficult concept to define as they are in constant evolution and flux. They are responding to shifts in politics, religion, spirituality, economics and technology as well as being a complex network of sub-communities within themselves. Additionally defining community in words, requires us to acknowledge bias and limitations within our own language. Therefore, it is argued that artists and their artworks hold the important responsibility to authentically and accurately document their communities.

Begin with a general exploration of how art can create and communicate a sense of community. Using the below quote and suggested artworks, explore how the artists have used symbols, imagery and artistic choices to captured the community of their time and place.

'Civilisations are not remembered by their business people, their bankers or lawyers. They're remembered by the arts' – Eli Broad

- Raphael, *The School of Athens*, 1509
- Qui Ying, *Spring Dawn in the Han Palace* 1552
- George Seurat, *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* 1884
- Thomas Eakins, *Agnew Clinic* 1889
- Henri Matisse, *Dance I* 1909
- Ye Qianyu, *Solidarity of the Chinese People*, 1953
- Ai Wei Wei, *The Law of the Journey* 2017
- David Boyd, *Untitled (TBOMB)* 2020

Next, as a class, brainstorm the aspects of community that artists might choose to document. Consider why and how they might capture these aspects. This should lead to examples about gender, religion, social experience, professions, family life, influencing students to offer artworks or artists they know of that capture the community through their works. This is an appropriate point to complete the resource's focus activities on the selected artists. Each activity explores the practice of the artist and delves more deeply into the aspects of community they present within their works.

Gotong Royong: Community spirit in contemporary Southeast Asia presents works by 6 Indonesian artists. Examine the ways in which curators and exhibitions have the ability to capture diverse aspects and narratives within the same community by comparing and contrasting the curatorial decisions of *Gotong Royong: Community*

spirit in contemporary southeast Asian art with the previous 16albermarle Project Space Indonesia shows Seni Baru: New Art from Bali & Bandung and Indonesia Calling 2020.

Begin by downloading the Media Kit for each exhibition. Read the curatorial statements and discuss as a class the intentions of the exhibition. Spend some time considering the events and social experiences of Indonesia and Australia at the time of the exhibitions to understand any possible agendas or goals of the artists or curators involved.

For the next activity, students can navigate across the 16albermarle Project Space exhibition pages. In groups of 2-3, choose an artist from each exhibition to compare and contrast their practice and the ways in which their works capture community spirit. Once complete come together to discuss the students findings.

You may also consider investigating the practices of Ruangrupa (Indonesia), All(zone) (Thailand), Pangrok Sulap (Kota Kinabalu), Yo So Collective (Latin-Naam), Sa Sa Arts Projects (Cambodia), tiSamjort (Cambodia), teamLab (Japan), Miss Rockaway Armada (USA), Gelitin (Germany), The Motel Sisters (Australia), Boomalli Aboriginal Artists' Co-op (Australia), Unbound Collective (Australia), Neak Sophal, Sao Sreymao, JR, Pepón Osorio, Ai Wei Wei (Berlin/Chinese), Shonagh Short, Ian Nesbit, Rick Lowe, Min Ma Naing, Farwa Moledina, Nadia Hernandez, Yue Minjun.



Fefia Suh, *The entire of what you need, what you have* 2022, cowry shells and stoneware, 42.5 x 48 x 7 cm (overall)

FOCUS ACTIVITIES

Here you will find *Gotong Royong: Community spirit in contemporary southeast Asian art* artist questions for classroom discussions. These activities can be done individually or in connection with the suggested case study Art



& Community.

Anang Saptoto, Bitter melon thrives farmer groups prosper 2024, banner painting on canvas, 150 x 200 cm

Anang Saptoto

Anang Saptoto is a multi-disciplinary artist, designer and activist based in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Saptoto's work is deeply rooted in addressing ecological concerns and fostering social change. Saptoto is actively involved in environmental and human rights movements and collaborates extensively with various communities and demographics. He believes in the power of direct international, solidarity-building and collective action as essential elements of artistic expression.

One of Saptoto's series in *Gotong Royong* Saptoto presents two commissioned paintings, produced for the PARI project. The PARI project was first established in response to challenges in local produce distribution during the pandemic and now has grown into a collective initiative dedicated to bridging the gap between art and farming practices. In a recent exploration in early 2024, PARI initiatives joined forces with 21 farmers' groups in Yogyakarta City's Gondokusuman District. This collaborative effort involved conducting cooking experiments featuring bitter melon as the primary ingredient, showcasing the culinary outcomes, and mapping out the participating farmer groups.

Think About/ Discuss:

How has the artist contributed to a community identified concern and conversation?

Identify the symbols and images the artist has used to communicate ideas about the community at the heart of this artwork?

Saptoto has a socially-engaged practice. Research this terminology and outline the impacts and benefits a practice like this has on social progression and change.



Dian Suci Rahmawati, *Ageming Ati (Soul Appearance)* #22018, Painting on hijab fabric, installation 120 x 100 cm

Dian Sci Rahmawati

In *Gotong Royong*, Rahmawati presents two paintings adorned with hijab fabrics depicting women in their daily routines. Rahmawati's *Soul Appearance* installation explores the nuanced concept of Awrah in Islamic teaching. This term signifies parts of the body meant to be concealed from others, necessitating coverage for privacy. Through this work, she addresses the traditional Islamic practice of veiling women's bodies and heads, prompting individuals who adhere to this practice to contemplate how to respect those who choose not to do so in contemporary society. The installation aims to heighten awareness regarding the significance of suitable attire for Muslim women, advocating for collective societal respect toward their cultural and religious norms. It encourages a deeper understanding of their practices and fosters mutual acceptance and tolerance.

Unseen Images practise:

5 Mark Question:

Identify the ways in which Rahamwati has portrayed daily life within her artwork.

8 Mark Question:

How do these two Indonesian artists present aspects of their gender and culture?

Make reference to *Gorong Royong* artists' Dian Sci Rahamwati's *Soul Appearance #1 and #2*, 2018 and Sakinah Alatas' *Imagine what I couldn't see*, 2022. <https://www.16albermarle.com/ex-18-sakinah-alatas>



Kide Baharudin, *Hulu Hala (chaos)* 2024, acrylic on canvas, 92 x 92 cm

Kide Baharudin

Painter Kide Baharudin is an emerging artist from Malaysia. He primarily works with acrylic paint on canvas, integrating found objects to create animated, expressive brushstrokes that convey the chaos and tension inherent in his subjects and scenes. His works are often inspired by personal experiences, family narratives, and the surrounding local culture and history, which he gathers from various media sources, including newspapers, television and social media.

Baharudin's artworks in *Gotong Royong* depict various facets of kampung life, showcasing communal gatherings. They capture the essence of kampung spirit and portray a rich landscape of human fabric. The term 'kampung spirit' is deeply ingrained in Malaysian ethos and embodies unity and solidarity among its citizens, fostering mutual support through shared resources, joys, and challenges. Within the Malaysian context, 'gotong royong' and the 'kampung spirit' interweave as bedrock principles, embodying the enduring values of communal cooperation and mutual assistance. While 'gotong royong' represents collective labour and communal responsibility, the 'kampung spirit' leads to a profound sense of belonging and interconnectedness, particularly in times of adversity.

Think and Make:

Take a moment to explore the many depictions in Baharudin's artwork. Discuss the two terms in the above text. How can language deepen one's understanding about the beliefs and priorities of a community?

On a piece of paper, using pens, watercolours, fine liners, Posca pens and other various media create a landscape of human interactions that portray the following Australian expressions:
'Hard yakka': playing your role in hard work and community trade
'She'll be right': a sense of collective reassurance and solidarity
'Mate'-ship': the idea of engaging with everyone on an equal and friendly level



Kusofiyah Nibuesa, *Multicultural* 2021 assembled cut paper 120 x 240 x 19cm

Kusofiyah Nibuesa

Kusofiyah Nibuesa's artwork transports us to her homeland, the far south of Thailand, a region long plagued by religious and ethnic tensions. In her work, she shines a light on a harmonious and diverse community where Muslims, Buddhists, and Chinese residents live together peacefully. Nibuesa employs paper cutting, printing, weaving, hole-punching and stenciling techniques to craft intricate paper relief sculptures depicting the vibrant daily life of Pattani's bustling markets. Through her art, she celebrates the region's textile designs, which serve as significant markers of identity for its inhabitants. Each piece portrays a unique and nuanced perspective of daily life that often goes unnoticed. Nibuesa removes her subjects from their busy backgrounds and uses overlapping paper forms to create shadows against the gallery wall, highlighting the collective individuals within the works. Through her practice, Nibuesa celebrates the lives of those who are often invisible in the geopolitical discourses of our time. She brings to light the beauty and significance of ordinary people, their routines, and the rhythms of their daily lives. As a member of the Muslimah Collective, a group of five female Muslim artists, Nibuesa often highlights her cultural and religious heritage in her artistic explorations.

Think About/Discuss:

Discuss Nibuesa's *Multicultural* through a Structural Viewpoint to answer the following questions:

How does the artist use the wall space and dimension to create further meaning to the artwork.

What does the title *Multicultural* tell us about the community portrayed in this artwork?

Explain how the use of pattern, line and shadow convey's the diverse community in the market.

How do material and conceptual practice marry within this artwork?

Please visit 16albermarle Project Space's exhibition *Other Possible Worlds: Contemporary art from Thailand* for more educational activities on Kusofiyah Nibuesa's practice.



Mangku Muriati, *Cremation Ceremony During Pandemic 192021*, traditional watercolour on canvas 81 x 125 cm

Mangku Muriati

Mangku Muriati is an Indonesian artist based in Bali. Growing up in a family deeply rooted in the arts, she is the daughter of the renowned Kamasan painter Mangku Mura. Following in her father's footsteps, she became both an artist and a priest (pemangku) in her local temple. Her work extends the Kamasan painting style by the introduction of contemporary narratives. She explores the reinterpretation of traditional knowledge from religious texts and reimagines stories to make them relevant to contemporary issues. Muriati not only keeps the Kamasan painting tradition alive but also imparts her knowledge to the next generation of Balinese artists.

Unseen Image practise:

5 Mark Question:

Outline the ways in which the artist's practice combines the old with the new (or traditional and contemporary).

8 Mark Question:

Explore how the artist communicates ideas about her time and place.

Below is further information about the artwork written by the exhibition's curator. This can be read and discussed as a class once the students have answered the Unseen Image activity.

Muriati captures the vibrant tapestry of communal engagement in upholding cherished traditions while prioritising safety. Conceived during the volatile period of the 2019 pandemic, a time marked by individuals succumbed to COVID-19 with their bodies unseen and untouched as a final farewell, the painting encapsulates the

collective experience of fear, anxiety, and tension during the pandemic, coupled with the artist's curiosity about the existence and duration of this global crisis. It reflects on the pandemic's impact on Balinese death rituals, exploring the delicate balance between life, death, tradition, and the necessity for adaptation in the face of an ever-evolving landscape.

Useful Links

<https://www.thepeakmagazine.com.sg/lifestyle/southeast-asia-art-indigenous-communities/>

<https://content.acca.melbourne/uploads/2018/02/Artist-Collectives-and-Communities-of-Practice-2.pdf>

https://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_features/book_report/how-to-collaborate-25-leading-art-collectives-share-their-creative-processes-part-1-54686

<https://nga.gov.au/stories-ideas/collecting-the-artistic-voices-of-indonesia/>

<https://www.artshub.com.au/news/features/good-work-building-a-stronger-arts-ecosystem-2624953/>



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