

DISCOURSING in REGIONAL CONTEMPORARY ART

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'Regional' of the label 'Regional art activities/forums' is of course based on the common meaning of the term 'region'. As Apinan Poshyananda had put it into words at Asia Center's symposium, *Asian Contemporary art Reconsidered*, the term 'region' points out various areas such as Southeast Asia, the Far East and Asia-Pacific.¹ However, regional art activities were at no time meant to show a certain 'regional art'. The selection of countries in regional exhibitions very often was arranged loosely.

Considering that tendency, a regional art activity in my opinion is an opposition to the international art activities. Contemporary art that has been taking as the basis of nearly all curation is chosen because of its political intensity in reading modernist art and not simply for showing the living art in a region. I see this is the paradigm of the emergence of regional art forums. It reflects shared perception on being ignored in international forums.

What I want to emphasize out of the 'regional-international' phenomenon is that the intensity in sensing the contradiction varied in regional art activities. There are artists, curator, organizations, and museum's administrator who really feel the confrontation because of their direct experience being ignored in the international art forums. They took the initiative to form regional art forums. To make the regional forums meaningful, they brought in artists from periphery areas that at the time did not have experience in international art world but can be assumed were marginalized.

In Asia-Pacific region it is quite clear that organizations, galleries and museums in Japan and Australia were mostly the initiators in the forming the Asian, or the Asia-Pacific regional art forums. Artists, curators from the rest of the countries in Asia/Asia-Pacific were the ones who were brought in.

Therefore, regional art forums are far from being homogenous in perceiving clues of contemporary art disclosed in regional activities. This condition resulted in different outgrowth that can be seen after ten years of progress. For organizers, museums and curators the constituting of regional forums has reach its target since thoughts and concepts emerged in regional forums has been taken into account in the discourse of contemporary art in the international art world. However, for the majority in the forum, the ten years of progress is barely a start in understanding the international connection of art.

Considering the case in Indonesia, being involved in regional art activities has clearly become an enlighten process. Starting with sensing the 'regional-international' confrontation in contemporary art discourse, artists came in contact with art discourse in general. The result was a clearer understanding, not just of contemporary art, but also of modern art, even of fine art tradition experienced in Indonesia - fine art tradition was somewhat "internationalized" around 18th century. Art discourses that previously hidden were raised to a level of more explicit awareness. This is

particularly apparent in a research on contemporary art in Indonesia organized by *Cemeti* Foundation just completed last months - four scholars from two most acknowledged art academies (ITB and ISI) were asked to do the research. In the report it is quite clear that the understanding of contemporary art among artists and critics has become extensive during the 90s, in particularly the what and the why of contemporary art developed in Indonesia. In early 90's even the term, 'contemporary art' was still confusing to most artists and critics, let alone a vision on contemporary art in Indonesia.

I think this is also the case in many other Asian countries and the appropriate term for this process is 'discoursing'. The term 'discoursing' here points out a discourse that is still in process and could not yet be considered as discourse. In one hand, it is a basis for a local discourse, in the other hand it is a regional discursive element when mediated can disclose the regional art discourse in world context.

The 'discoursing' process that has local and international dimension, in my opinion, is a critical matter in regional art activities. This is actually "the" regional subject that has been overlooked - therefore should be assuredly taken into account - in contemporary art discourse in world context.

A trigger is needed to bring this local 'discoursing' process to a regional level. The trigger could be a theory, set of theories or some sort of simplified map of reality. Here the paradigm of the emergence of regional art forums I have mentioned before is crucial.

At the symposium *Asian Contemporary Art Reconsidered*, John Clark revealed that regional exhibition should serve the interest of historian and critics and not only the concern of cumatter.³ Asian or Asia-Pacific regional exhibitions that consider discourse-oriented criterion, I think, can serve the interest of the "brought in" Asian artists. Despite unintentionally they have been seeking the position of their works in contemporary art discourse. In their respective countries where the infrastructure of art is somewhat lacking, analysis of works and historical overview very often lead to confusion.

It is a matter of fact that in Southeast Asia - probably also in many other countries in Asia - there is no education for art historian. No wonder if there are only few critics, curators, art historians and nearly no theoretician in Southeast Asia. This is why theoretical and historical analysis - which is significant in the emanation of a discourse - is far from being developed.

Notes:

1. *Asian Contemporary Art Reconsidered*, Symposium's papers, p. 107.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Asian Contemporary Art Reconsidered*, Symposium proceedings, p. 166.