Visit to the ITB In 1978, at the Beginning of A Trip to Look for Indonesian Art

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First of all, I would like to congratulate you on the 100th anniversary of ITB. I am very honored to have an opportunity to give a presentation in this very important moment.

The first time I visited ITB was 42 years ago. It was the first time for me to encounter Indonesian art on a trip as a curator/art historian. The trip was a very important event as it opened the door for my life as a curator/art historian. Therefore, I would like to think again the meaning of the trip.

I landed at Kemayoran Airport in Jakarta on the 1st December 1978 as a new curator who was preparing the opening of Fukuoka Art Museum. Indonesia was the first foreign country I visited soon after I just graduated from university.

I was one of 4 members of the research team that had a purpose to enable Indonesia to participate in the Asian Contemporary Art Exhibition which was planned to be held in 1980 by Fukuoka Art Museum. It was the First Asian Art Show Fukuoka as the world’s first large scale that was focused on Asia, participated by almost 500 artists from 13 Asian countries.

At that time, we lacked of any kind of information in Japan, and surely not to mention Indonesian Contemporary Art. Therefore, we relied on the Indonesian National Committee of IAA (The International Association of Art) as an NGO under UNESCO, and planned to ask the committee for the exhibition curation (in other words, for the management including selecting the artworks that would be exhibited)
At that time, the chairman of the Indonesian National Committee was MOCHTAR APIN, and the general secretary was G. SIDHARTA. Mochtar Apin was the Dean of Faculty of Arts of ITB and as the main members of the committee were the professors of ITB. We had several meetings with IAA’s members, visited the studio of Bandung artists, and also saw many artworks. We also had a meeting with artists other than ITB.

Thus, after Bandung, We visited ASRI Yogyakarta and IKJ Jakarta. We also met the pioneers of Indonesian Contemporary Art such as AFFANDI, SUDJOJONO, AGUS DJAYA and BARLI.

For implementing the exhibition, after Indonesia I visited Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia, and Singapore, I met many artists, and saw many artworks. It was not only the starting point of my career as a curator/art historian, but also as the first contact between Japanese museums and Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia.

I had a strong impression on the spoken languages that were so unfamiliar when I met the artists during my trip around Southeast Asia. It was the word of “National Identity”. It seemed that people were asking themselves unanimously what [Indonesian Art] is, what base that makes [Indonesian art], what [Indonesian] or [Things as Indonesian] is in art. For Japanese people, the issue of National Identity in art, was not urgent. That is why at that time, to me, as someone who lacked of knowledge in the early of his 20’s, I found it hard to understand why such an issue was so important. Facing those incomprehensible issues and thinking of how they came from by cultural, social, or political context, then became such a step of my understanding towards Southeast Asian Art. It was Mochtar Apin first and the ITB lecturers who led me to such an awareness concerning these issues.

Indonesian artists at that time, were trying to create Indonesian art either in the concrete form, abstract form, form in the canvas, or even form on the pedestal. By the time it reached 1990, the number of artworks with the expression form by political and social themes towards the installation and performance were increasing rapidly. It was a phenomenon that was covered not only in Indonesia but also in the whole Asia. I summarized such trends in an exhibition called Realism as An Attitude: 4th Asian Art Show Fukuoka (1994).

After that, I held an exhibition called The Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia 1997 to introduce the history of modern art in Southeast Asia to Japan. ITB members helped me so much during this survey as well. Furthermore, as the Chief Curator of the newly created Fukuoka Asian Art
Museum, I planned the opening commemorative exhibition of First Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, and picked up Asian art in the latter half of the 90’s with the keywords of Communication/Collaboration/Community.

Starting from Indonesia, I have taken up various arts in Southeast Asia in my career as a curator like this. However, I felt that these all are originally from the trip to Indonesia in 1978, and it seemed that it was the beginning of everything. Furthermore, if I look back now, my career as curator/art historian was probably such a trip towards the questions I encountered there, the questions that has no answer, the extremely difficult questions to answer, and the questions of what Indonesian art is.