

HERITAGE MATTERS



ASIA PACIFIC TRIENNIAL OF CONTEMPORARY ART AN AUSTRALIAN JOURNEY



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(Professor Dr. Amareswar Galla, an Indo Australian, has had a long relationship with the APT since its foundation)

PHOTO CREDITS: THE 9TH ASIA PACIFIC TRIENNIAL OF CONTEMPORARY ART, QUEENSLAND ART GALLERY & GALLERY OF MODERN ART (QAGOMA), BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

Australia has travelled a long way to immerse itself as an integral part of the Pacific Asia Region. Contemporary art has been an invaluable agency. Initiating a Biennale or Triennial is a bold new step for any country or organisation. In 1993, Australia ventured to maximize its economic engagement with what was called the East Asia Ascendancy. Australia in Asia and Asia in Australia policy framework of the government provided the right environment. Queensland's own engagement with the countries of East Asia provided promising ground. The first (APT) Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art was launched. Dr Caroline Turner as the curator and Doug Hall as the Director of the Queensland Art Gallery provided the critical leadership. The 9th production of the Triennial continues the engagement under Chris Saines as the Director and Zara Stanhope heading the inhouse curatorium. The show is made more extensive with the opening of the Gallery of Modern Art, and together with the Queensland Art Gallery the two under one management, provide flexible and integrated exhibiting spaces.

APT's history and the details of the artists, including the ones profiled in this Column, and curatorial visioning can be accessed on the website: <https://www.qagoma.qld.gov.au/about/our-story/apt>. The central and ongoing concern is best summed up in the quote from the Women's Wealth Project in APT 9: '.... to Bougainvilleans, land is like the skin on the back of your hand. You inherit it, and it is your duty to pass it on to your children in as good a condition as, or better than, that in which you received it.' (Raphael Bale, 1969) In 1993/1994, I was commissioned by the Australia Council for the Arts to review its Asia focused funding for creativity and cultural exchanges. It included the foundational APT 1. All the seventeen recommendations from the report were taken up by the APT management. To the credit of Dr Caroline Turner, she convened an open and inclusive seminar on the recommendations. It was a moment of decolonisation of what was then dubbed as the 'White Tribe of Asia'. Australia was undergoing social transformation that is embodied in its National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia 1989, a non-partisan policy framework of the Government. Productive Diversity was one of the main platforms, that recognising and working with the country's linguistic and cultural diversity is good for economic, cultural and social outcomes within the country, in the region and beyond.

APT has evolved into a challenging engagement. It has endeavoured to be relevant to both Australia and the region and its contingent cultural, social and environmental transformations. APT 9 demonstrates that the engagement with the Pacific Island countries has come of age. The shared discourse is Australia's and the Pacific's commitment to the integrity of Indigeneity. Unlike other Biennales and Triennials of art in the world, the APT is unique in the way it has built cumulative expertise, a knowledge base and a range of methods and modalities of engagement in the Pacific and Asia



region which constitutes more than sixty percent of the world's population. The colonial legacies of the Pacific had to be addressed. It is an aquatic continent, the largest water mass in the world with dispersed Island Nations. It is no mean feat to sustain the APT given the constant struggle of the management to diversify their budget and find generous public private and people partnerships, the 4Ps that are critical for sustainability of any innovative and inspirational project in the present global economic environment.

The overall direction of the APT 9 could be fathomed in the evocative and summative essay titles/ words of the curatorium. Zara Stanhope - We Journey On Through These Rough Waters. Diane Moon - Islands: Some Kind of Paradise. Tarun Nagesh - To Define Myself, I Must Define Others. Reuben Keenan - Material World. Ruth McDougall - What Money Can't Buy: Relationships of Value in the Pacific. Abigail Bernal - Entangled Histories. Ellie Buttrose - Museums For Our Collective Future. These are seamlessly complemented through APT Cinema and APT Kids programming.

APT is not driven by a single curatorial voice. Unlike most contemporary mega art events which proclaim grand curatorial statements and struggle to translate them into the exhibitory complex, APT 9 searches, scopes and negotiates a range of cultural border crossings and grounds itself as relevant to contemporary realities of the region. Women, Indigenous Peoples and First Nations are integrated into the galleries, beyond the tyranny of the self and the other stereotypical casting which is colonial and so common elsewhere.

Given the obsession of the Andhra/Telugu people for ICT and AI, I was particularly immersed in the liminal spaces evoked by Mithu Sen who poses that 'Languages imposes a strange and alien logic that tells us not to smell poetry, hear shadows or

taste light.' The recalibration of the mores and hegemonic structures and constructs of the Homo Hierarchicus (remember the work of the famous sociologist Louis Dumont) has been made reflexive and confronting through Mithu's UnMYthU installation. In another installation Shilpa Gupta uses her ability to create a nexus of interrogation through asking us to explore as to how we form and foster our relationships though emotional and contextual engagements. She creates another immersive atmosphere through the installation 'For, In Your Tongue, I Can Not Fit.'

APT is facilitated over the Australian summer and into the start of the academic year. Researchers and students are always involved with APTs. APT Kids works well for families vacationing through Brisbane and its hinterland including the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Marine Park. It is endangered with what has become politically the Adani coalmine and the broader and imminent global warming. Visitors to the APT 9 are confronted with the realities of the cultural dimension of climate change and environmental degradation. Nordic visitors escaping the bitter cold in their homelands find the APT as an important awareness raising stop as much as the cricket crazy Indian tourists who now include the APT in their travel to the adjacent Gabba. Chris Saines's commitment to facilitating an intellectual and informed framework for the APT is critical. '... Rather than imposing a single thematic framework, the exhibition draws together common threads of concern.' The visitors are as diverse as the APT itself. The collaborative environment across the institution and with relevant stakeholders enables a continuum as the APT evolves. APT is not site centred. It is not about Brisbane. It is about the contemporary creativity of the whole region. APT is a phenomenon.

UnMYthU: UnKIND(s) Alternatives, Mithu Sen, New Delhi, India, 2018

Thabeik Hmau (bowl upturned) by Htein Lin, Myanmar, 2017. Rosary of 108 bowls. Symbolic of meditation, healing, resistance and protection, but capable of inciting hatred and violence in contradiction of the values they represent. Installation reflects the history of Myanmar from the 1920 anti-colonial demonstrations and 2007 Saffron Revolution to the recent violence toward Muslim Rohingya people

Women's Wealth Project created by a group of artists from Bougainvillea Autonomous Region of PNG, Solomon Islands and Australia, co-curated by Sana Balai, 2017. It promotes the capacity of art as sustainable and socially responsible, illustrating forms of aesthetic and cultural significances, focussing on weaving, pottery and body adornment alongside video and new media

Aftermath (detail) Site specific installation by Pannaphan Yodmanee, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand, 2016. New form and contextualisation of Buddhist Art focussing on the cycle of destruction and renewal and the role of faith in transcending modern urbanism and its destructive forces

House - Spirit, Vuth Lymo, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 2018

Missionaries of Charity founded by Mother Teresa (Sisters Milada, Czech Republic; Antonella, Philippines; Celia, Malawi, Terese, Indian - from Vijayawada, AP) appreciating A Chronicle of the Land and People of the Cordilleras, Kawayan De Guita, Baguio City, Philippines, 2018

NEXT WEEK

Heritage Matters will focus on the Youth Leadership Forums of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)

Past Columns of Heritage Matters can be downloaded at: <http://inclusivemuseum.org/heritage-matters/>