to leave home

is already half the

PART ONE: TIME





Curatorship as Artistic Process

The saying goes that it is the journey that counts and not the destination. In this case however, the journey was the destination. This destination, for the longest time lurking on the distant horizon of my artistic quest, eventually emerged in the form of this back and forth across the straits separating Singapore and Sumatra. To put it simply, Crossing the Straits has been the long nurtured application of an artistic tactic that took the form of a collaborative group project meant to investigate connections in time and space between people, places and cultural identities; a collective field research, at times empirical, at times academic, on historical, ethnographic, and environmental topics, with the intent to materialise this process in the form of works of art.

A rational critical mind might say that by aiming to be a bit of everything one runs the risks of ending up being nothing in particular. But one should live dangerously; take risks in order to reach the unusual. My long held artistic position has been precisely to work on the space that connects things by building links between disciplines, communities, places, rather than isolating them as the subject of focused specialism as has become the generally accepted norm. In the next few pages, an article gives the genesis of this improbable collaborative adventure between two groups of vastly different artists and their resulting exhibition titled *To leave home is already half the journey*.

And in truth what is a collaboration if not the resolve to leave one's comfort zone, the "home" we are conveniently used to, in search for the excitement of unpredictable interactions with the "other(s)"? Isn't collaboration born out of the desire to identify and work on the space that separates us, and if all goes well meet half way in the harmony of the almost vanished space that nonetheless will always keep our individual uniqueness apart? Isn't a collaboration an open ended acceptance to seek and submit to "the gaze of the other"?

The first part of the present publication gives the chronology of the events making up the multidisciplinary educational project, an elective combining nine students from Level two and three Bachelor of Fine Arts programmemes of the McNally School of Fine Arts (MSoFA) and their journey to meet their counterparts in Muara Jambi: the remarkably talented members of the Padmasana Foundation. The second part is dedicated to the exhibition presented by LASALLE's Contemporary Arts Singapore for which the Muara Jambi team crossed the straits in the opposite direction. Throughout these pages, each and every participant will convey their interpretations of what was experienced, reflect on what was learned, and possibly mention a few things that might have been overlooked.

I hope this compilation of essays and images will share something tangible of this travel through the geographical heart of a rich and elusive entity: the Malay world. As a whole I hope all this will turn out to be the expression of a wider, deeper understanding of what our lives on each side of the straits might be about when deciphered through experienced history, and the expression of the sensation resulting from being the living now of the ancient meeting place of India and China.



The Malay world is a part of Asia defined by the maritime fluidity of a perimeter that imperceptibly turns into oceanic infinity. No real beginning, no absolute end. Let's not be fooled by the cultural manipulations that mostly intended to serve a quest for power at the hand of diverse political elites. The Malay world is much bigger, wider, deeper and more mysterious than the current constructed concept of "Malayness" enforced by propaganda. I would even think that it is impossible to define the Malay world just by its physical and cultural components as is usually done. In fact any attempt at doing so will inevitably miss out on its underlying formless essence. A well-understood and open-ended historical study naturally leads to the conclusion that since the dawn of time the Malay world is primarily about water: the water at the doorstep of the house, the water from which comes the daily meal, the water on which eons ago, the Malay language started its migration towards unknown shores, crossing a multitude of straits to the east, to the west, moving further and further with the receding horizon, to become according to linguistics the most geographically widespread family of native languages on earth. Water is essentially perceived as formless transparency... shall we say present in the ubiquitous absence of its finite physicality? Forever present on the shore, any shore; forever absent in its immeasurable transparency... at times tranquil and serene, at others wild and unfathomable... the flesh and spirit of formless water. Later versions grew over it as the result of cultural influences coming from foreign lands. But the forever-shifting watery roots were never truly forgotten. They just keep on moving with the tide of time, even if at times barely perceptible in the context of today's modernity.

A teenage artistic adventure with a childhood friend, based on the collaborative process of the surrealist cadavre exquis, led me to adopt in the 1970s the motto: I am Ma and I work on the space between things. I took it with me when I moved to Asia, only to learn in 1986 that this was precisely a defining tenet of Japanese culture that was also going by the exact same name: the ma or 間, the negative space, or "pause" between two structural parts, the "void" between "two full", the mastery of which will define the quality of a painting or the performance of a Noh actor. If I now hold Crossing the Straits to be a project that turned out to be one of the most complete expressions of my artistic process ever it is because the intent to decipher and develop connections across time and space was applied to a world of shifting connections and fluid networking assembling bits and pieces of physicality scattered across boundless horizontal openness. In so doing, the project made subject and process mirror one another, yet kept them apart in their undertaking, just as the two teams of participants now stand in their own respective space on each side of the straits yet forever united by the memory of moments of elation and togetherness. Or is this nothing more than my interpretation? Did the people who crossed the straits with me perceive something of this paradox loaded with mythical resonances? I like to believe they did; at least to some extent judging by the reflections and narratives heard in the voices echoing through these pages.

Curator and producer Gilles Massot

S. Chandrasekaran Head, McNally School of Fine Arts

As part of McNally School of Fine Art's vision, we focus on developing various learning platforms that go beyond classroom learning. Thus, the Muara Jambi project is one aspect of this strategy.

The Muara Jambi project engages our students with various forms of traditional knowledge and artistic skills that have been shared with local young people. This sort of platform allows new ways of thinking about artistic practice which can be defined as community-based learning; a shared platform whereby individuals learn from each other through observational skills and oral communication.

One of our graduates Tan Luo Yi (BFA) was involved in the Muara Jambi project. Recently, she was awarded MSoFA Fieldwork Research Grant 2018. This was mainly because she was expressing her interest in understanding tikar-making by the women of the Malay community in Jambi even after the completion of Muara Jambi project. This sort of outcome provides with a platform for continuous learning and the fostering of practice-led research.

Our School is committed to ensure that both our current students and our alumni will continue their artistic practice by engaging with various forms of research methodology within the regions of Southeast Asia.

Finally, I would like to thank Gilles Massot, lecturers and students who contributed in ensuring the success of the project. Also, Hazel Lim, the Programme Leader of the BFA(Hons) for her insight in supporting the project.

<u>Hazel Lim</u> <u>Programmeme Leader, BA(Hons) Fine Arts</u>

The exhibition title - To leave home is already half the journey symbolises one of the things that the MSoFA value so much but which is seldom articulated - the importance of the creative journey and the process of discovery (the self) that ultimately lead one to the destination or to a port of call.

When we initiated this project in 2016, I remembered how it took me many hours to be introduced by Gilles Massot and Elizabeth Inandiak to understand the complex narratives of Muara Jambi and the treasures it withholds - the histories, the architecture and most of all the stories of past inhabitants and the people who live there today and who seemed to be touched by the sacred energy the site holds. The possible relations it had with modern day cosmopolitan Singapore and our historical and spiritual ties to this land fascinated me.

It set me thinking about how, as a programmeme committed to training artists and art practitioners, we want to communicate with students about the roles they can play in the world when they graduate and leave the college. I would like to think that some of our graduates would become world-class

artists and commercially successful practitioners that excel in the world of galleries and art fairs. I would also like to think that we had given them opportunities to engage with other kinships and to bridge art-making with communities, to research and to rewrite histories through the stories of art.

The semester-long elective Crossing the Straits, led by the ever-curious Shirley Soh, was the place where all the likeminded people and the visionaries for this project congregate, with a motley crew of students coming together to take on this journey and to bravely tread through unknown outcomes and experiences.

When you read through this thoughtfully designed catalogue by one of the students Chung Hua, I hope you would be as moved as I am by some of their stories and reflections, and to be as intrigued as I am by the journey of Yijing, whose spiritual path and trajectory I hope, echo the journey that an enlightened art student would care to make.



To leave home is already half the journey

// Introductions

Head, McNally School of Fine Arts, Dr. S Chandrasekaran

Programmeme Leader, BA(Hons) Fine Arts Hazel Lim-Schlegel

1 // Assembling the Team

The genesis of a work in progress Gilles Massot

Buddhism in Indonesia: Muara Jambi, the first green Mahayana Buddhist monastic university of Southeast Asia

Elizabeth Inandiak

Voices of the ashes

Elizabeth Inandiak

Muara Jambi: Lessons for an elective

Shirley Soh

Padmasana Foundation

Edited by Marc Thalmann

2 // The Elective

Seminar Muara Jambi: Legend's, local wisdom, fantasy and the "inner eye" as excavation tools

The students' proposals (part 1)

Workshop by Heri Dono Siong Chung Hua

One Night Only

3 // The Journey and Procession

An unexpected but happy change of schedule Gilles Massot

Reflections on the Muara Jambi study trip (part 1)

Priyageetha d/o Diayalan

The meaning of language

Elizabeth Inandiak

Re-enacting Atisha's meeting with Serlingpa Borju

Being Yijing

lan Tee

Reflections on the Muara Jambi study trip (part 2)

Tan Luo Yi

4 // The Exhibition

To leave home is half the journey: Curator statement

Gilles Massot

The students' proposals (part 2)

Setting up the show

Gerald Tay

Disaster on the land of Melayu

orju

True absorption: Prayer flag for Muara Jambi

lan Tee

Interviews

Borju, Iman Kurnia, Gilles Massot, Shirley Soh, Gerald Tay and Siong Chung Hua Transcripts by Dionne Yap, Muhammad Masuri and Siong Chung Hua

Singapore - Muara Jambi: A reciprocal journey

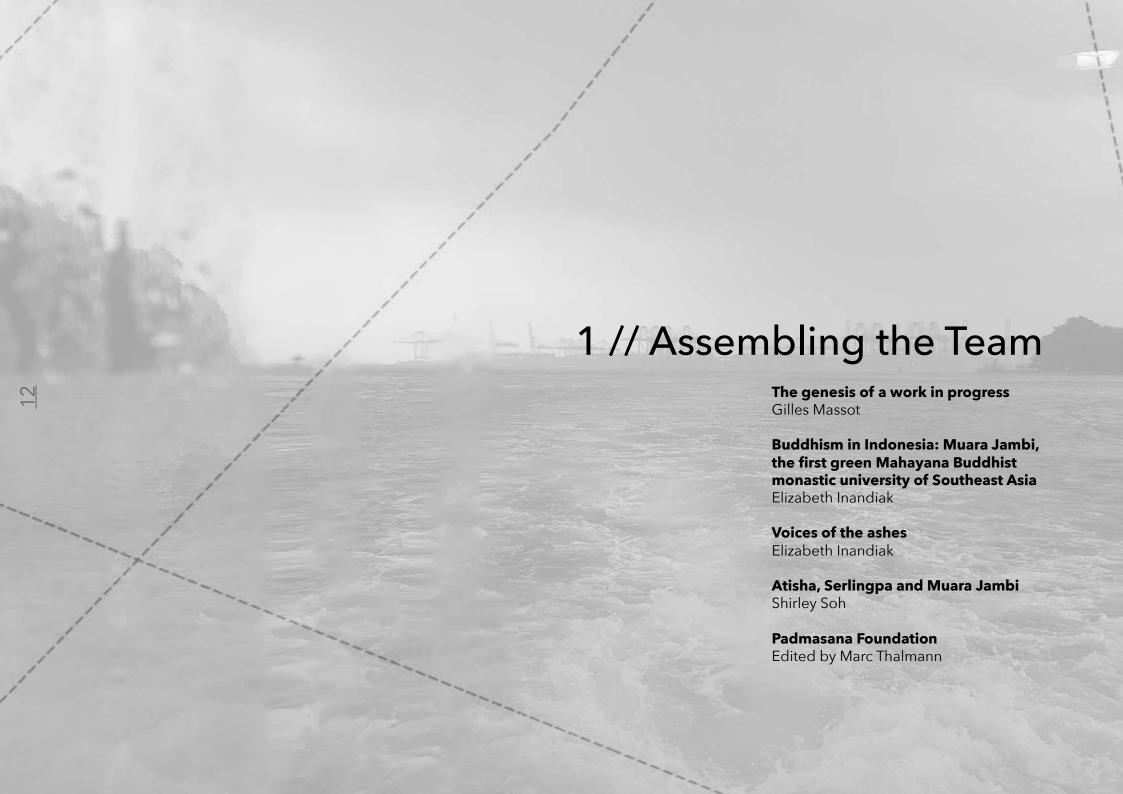
Elizabeth Inandiak

Reflections from the other side of the straits

Muara Jambi fieldwork research reflection Tan Luo Yi

And so the journey carries on

Gerald Tay



work in progress

The origin of the artistic adventure "Crossing the Straits" goes all the way back to the late 20th century when I started visiting Elizabeth Inandiak in Jogjakarta. A writer by profession, Elizabeth had been based in Jogjakarta since the 1980s. Our encounter was relatively recent, but deep connections had guickly emerged, from artistic to intellectual, to spiritual. One of them was undoubtedly that we had both left our Gallic "home" at about the same time, and both found a new "home" in South East Asia. The long awaited year 2000 was by the change of era saw a new connection emerge between us: a shared fascination for the maritime Sumatran empire of Srivijaya that initiated the trading pattern on which the prosperity of initially Malacca and now Singapore would rest.

On my side, the first three years of the 21st century were mostly devoted to the research and writing of my book Bintan, Phoenix of the Malay Archipelago. The production of that book had me diving with passion and delight in the fluid and shape-shifting maritime Malay world. All periods of history had to be covered in the book, but what fascinated me most was the medieval history of the region embodied in the mysterious yet paramount role of Srivijaya and its implications in the semi-mythical story of Sang Nila Utama. According to the Sejarah Melayu, this Malay prince, said to have founded the city of Singapura, had miraculously appeared in Palembang, the site of the ancient capital of Srivijaya. Prior to his reaching the shore of Temasek, the island he would rename "Singapura", Sang Nila Utama had stopped in Bintan to be crowned King of the Malay world by Queen Wan Seri Beni. An unexpected development of this research led me to the house of Pak Atan in the village of Bukit Batu at the foothill of Gunung Bintan, the mountain, or rather hill, at the heart of the island. Pak Atan was the last descendant of a family whose members had passed on from one generation to the

next the legends pertaining to the local historic cemetery. For centuries, they had kept alive but secret the tales of the cemetery, home to the alleged graves of Wan Seri Beni and other characters central to this most famous episode of the Sejarah Melayu. With the change of millennium, Pak Atan had received instructions from "mystical sources" that the time had come for these secrets to be shared openly, failing which they would not survive in the new era. And so, in the course of a few years, I found myself progressively initiated into the gone in a glimpse of an eye, and the transformations brought / secrets of these myths, including the forging of the first Kris, each visit pushing the narrative further back in time.

> Another surprising finding was to learn that Bintan, or rather the little island of Penyengat where resided the aristocratic community of the 18th and 19th century, had been the place of writing of the first monolingual Malay grammar by the Bugis scholar Raja Haji Ali. This grammar had in turn become the basis of Bahasa Indonesia, the language adopted by the Dutch government? When to unify the administration of the colonial territory. Today's Indonesia could therefore be said to basically speak the language of Bintan. In fact, by the end of my research, Bintan the main island of the Riau Archipelago clearly emerged as a mostly overlooked but defining element of regional identity. Most importantly, it marked the connection between the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian Archipelago. In the course of History, it played the part of a determining link between the Asian continent and Nusantara, between the continental land mass and the mosaic of islands linked to one another by an almost infinite number of straits. Two of these straits, the Strait of Malacca and the Strait of Singapore, mark the boundaries of the Riau Archipelago, while being at the same time among the busiest maritime routes in the world. Seen from the other side of the Singapore Strait, the identity of Singapore, the "little red dot" that had been my home for two decades, became much clearer and its place

in history more intelligible. Most importantly, Singapore's lost connection with its hinterland became evident in my understanding of regional politics and sociology. I could see how for many Singaporeans it had become almost more natural to take a flight to London than to cross the strait to Tanjung Pinang. This is when the idea of "crossing the strait" took on for me a conceptual implication that connected Singapore to its hinterland as well as its distant past.

On her side, a seemingly improbable series of events had put Elizabeth on the path of the Buddhist monk Atisha, who turned out to be another little known but essential connection between continental Asia and Nusantara. Born in 986 in today's Bengladesh, Atisha went to further his studies under the guidance of Dharmakirti, or Serlingpa, in Srivijaya, or rather Malayu, another Sumatran centre of power whose prominence emerges around the 10th century. Srivijaya's status as a centre of Buddhist learning was already highly praised in the 7th century by the Chinese monk Yijing who stopped there to perfect his study of Sanskrit while on his to the ideal of "unity in diversity" found in Pancasila, the five way to India. Atisha arrived in Suvarnadvipa in 1012 and studied Bodhicitta with Serlingpa until 1024 when he returned to India and settled in the Vikramashila monastery where he took charge of the teaching. His repute as master of various schools of Buddhism, including the esoteric practices characterising Vajrayana Buddhism, led King Yeshe Ö of Tibet to invite him to Tibet in 1040 where he died in 1054. "There is therefore reason to believe that when Atisha went to Tibet in order to 'purify' Buddhism according to Tibetan sources, he replicates much of what he was taught in Sumatra", and some scholars have even "debated the possibility that the concept of mandalas which Atisa espoused while in Tibet was first formulated in Sumatra" (Miksic 2015).

In a guest that reads almost like a treasure hunt, and having even been entrusted at some point with some authentic ashes of Atisha, Elizabeth eventually found herself one fine day of 2010 in Muara Jambi on the banks of the Batanghari river in Jambi, Sumatra, a little village right at the heart of the expansive archaeological site to which it gives its name. Much of Srivijaya's history remains mysterious and academic debates about the actual location of the various centres of powers are on-going. Formal evidence is yet to be established, but the sheer size of the Muara Jambi site combined with recent developments in historical research, "advance reasons to believe that Malayu was the most important Buddhist centre in the Straits of Melaka between 1025 and 1200, and that of a major eruption that also destroyed the whole village.

Atisha may have spent his time in Malayu/Jambi (...)" (Miksic 2015). For Elizabeth however, her intuitive relationship to the memory of Atisha left no room for academic caution: she had finally reached the place where her quest wanted to take her. But what she found in Muara Jambi was much more than the crumbling vestiges of a long gone history. Instead of just traces of the past and ancient narratives, she discovered a vibrant collective of local youths, who although practising Muslims, were actively involved in the preservation and valorisation of the Buddhist sites as an integral part of the local identity.

Started in 2011, the Padmasana Foundation had already garnered awards and recognition, both national and international, for its creative approach to raising public awareness of this archaeological site. To them, the old stones were not just ghosts of the past; they were an integral part of a present troubled by economic, social and environmental problems that needed to be addressed to prepare the future. Faithful principles of the Indonesian state philosophy formulated by Sukarno in 1945, and leaving aside religious sectarianism, the members of the Padmasana Foundation successfully connected distant past and contemporary environment. Between them and Elizabeth, a collaboration started that resembled in many ways her previous community and cultural projects in Java.

From the long term support given to the residents of Bebekan, south of Jogjakarta, to help rebuilt their village after the dramatic earthquake of 2006, to the book soon to be published with the Padmasana Foundation about their village and activities, Elizabeth's involvement with Indonesian society is multifaceted and most importantly significant in its pragmatic efficiency. Two of these projects became materials for a cycle of events, which I initiated with her for the Alliance Française de Singapour in 2012. Performed in the Alliance's auditorium, her 2004 literary transcription of the Javanese epic Serat Centini had become a show combining the reading of her text and its choreographed interpretation by the Javanese classical dancer Didik Nin Thowok. In the gallery, she called on her long time friend Heri Dono to present an exhibition revisiting a previous collaboration centred on the legends of Kinahrejo, the village high up on the slopes of Mount Merapi where lived Mbah Marijan, the Keeper of the Volcano. A year before, Mbah Marijan had met with an untimely death in the course Heri subsequently developed a new body of works based on these recent dramatic events and part of the proceeds of this show would go to the reconstruction of the village.

Then one day before the opening, the three of us were sitting in the Alliance's coffee shop where Elizabeth was sharing her enthusiasm for this group of colourful activists she had recently befriended in Jambi. This is when the scattered pieces of the puzzle finally came together to become "Grossing the Straits".

Prior to that day, Elizabeth and I had already envisioned the idea of travelling overland from Singapore to Jambi as a modest re-enactment of the adventurous sea journeys accomplished by both Yijing and Atisha. These were times when the intangible promise of great spiritual knowledge would be enough to send people on dangerous and improbable journeys along which death could await at any time. Chinese Yijing and Indian Atisha happened to be two prominent sources of information available on Srivijaya and Old Malayu, and interestingly enough they also embodied the two geopolitical cultural spheres that defined the regional trading pattern. And which other modern country in the region represented this meeting of civilisations through trade better than Singapore, the little island right at the tip of the northern Asian land masse, the city-port that existed mostly as the meeting point of our two monks' respective cultures. What gave our original idea renewed energy and identity was that now "crossing the strait" also meant meeting a community of people sharing our interests for both past and contemporary narratives. This was also a community of young people that resonated with the students I was now teaching in LASALLE. THEY were the ones who needed to come into contact with each other. Within a few minutes the broad outline of "Crossing the Straits" as a school project had taken shape: it would revisit the past by writing it as present: the 'present' of an exchange of knowledge between two communities animated by the same passions, but separated by 'the straits'.

By 2015 the vision had become an elective budgeted for the following academic year. The question of who would conduct the elective was most naturally solved when one day seated at a table in Newton food centre, Shirley Soh mentioned en passant that she would leave for a pilgrimage to Muara Jambi the following week. Just as kampong life and cosmopolitan urban life were indeed only straits apart, 11th century Muara Jambi and 21st Century Singapore t were in fact not that dis-

tant from each other. As part of her spiritual practice, Shirley was following the classes of a Buddhist monk whose teaching was based on the writings of... Serlingpa. As a way to give a contemporary physical context to this spiritual teaching from the past she had planned for a trip to the place where it was first dispensed. The interesting so-called 'coincidence' was that Elizabeth was briefly passing through Singapore the very next day, a one-night stopover on her way to Darhamsala where she was following the teaching of the Tibetan monk Tashi la who had first mentioned Muara Jambi to her. They needed to meet to plan Shirley's trip, and hopefully more...

And much more indeed happened, a long list of occurrences and so-called 'coincidences', moments of doubt and sudden enlightenments, puzzling synchronicities, purposeful serendipity... destiny, fate or karma, however you might choose to read it. Maybe one of the most puzzling aspects of the way this adventure took shape is how two foreigners, dua Perancis Mat Saleh, were entrusted with secrets from a culture not their own that made these events and legends talk to one another... across the straits.

The project Crossing the Straits turned out to be indeed the result of a series of timely events, some lucky, others seemingly not quite so at first, but then strangely enough always leading to a better option in the end; I would say a series of occurrences far too opportune and recurrent to be seen as just mere 'coincidences'. It was in fact all about a narrative that wanted to be told.



Buddhism in Indonesia: Muara Jambi, the first green Mahayana Buddhist monastic university of Southeast Asia

Elizabeth Inadiak

In the year 671, the Chinese pilgrim Yijing (I-Tsing) leaves the port of Canton on a Persian vessel to visit India and study Buddhism. Remembering Xuanzang, the famous monk and translator who died some years before, gives him the courage to venture into this dangerous journey. But unlike Xuanzang Yijing does not travel on the famous continental Silk Road. The demand for Chinese silk is falling, due to Byzantium having successfully developed sericulture since the year 551. In addition from the early seventh century, the continental Silk Road has become increasingly dangerous:, Arab military campaigns block the overland road through Persia. Trade between China and Sindh (currently a province of Pakistan) is interrupted because of the incessant wars in Central Asia between the Arab Umayyad dynasty, the Chinese Tang Dynasty, the Tibetans and the Eastern Turks. Goods and Chinese pilgrims therefore have now to travel by sea through the Straits of Malacca, already one of the main lines of international trade.

Yijing will emerge as the first chronicler of this new sea route, which will also be that of Buddhism. In his travel account translated in English in 1896 by Junjiro Takakusu's under the title: "A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and Malay Archipelago, A.D. 671-695" he reports that after twenty days at sea, Yijing stopped in a unknown fortified city located on an island that he calls "Fo-Che": "In the fortified city of Fo-Che, (lived) Buddhist monks numbering more than 1,000, whose minds are bent on learning and good practice".

After nine years at Nalanda, a city that hosted the largest Mahayana Buddhist monastic university of its time, in the present state of Bihar in India, Yijing returns twice to this mysterious island kingdom of Fo-Che, which he also calls "San-fo-ts'i" or "Mo-lo-yeu." Yijing writes, "They (the monks in Fo-Che) investigate and study all the subjects that exist just as in Middle Kingdom (Madhya-desa, India)". This indicates that subjects such as logic, grammar and philology, medicine, arts, as well.

as metaphysics and philosophy were taught in Fo-Che. According to his records, he copies there hundreds of Sanskrit manuscripts, before finally returning to China in 694.

Where was this mysterious kingdom of Fo-Che? The puzzle will remain unsolved for more than twelve centuries. In 1918, the French epigraphist George Coedès finally identified Fo-Che or San-fo-ts'i as the kingdom of Srivijaya centered in Palembang, Sumatra. In the 1980s, archeological excavations confirmed that the river port of Palembang was indeed the political and military capital of this powerful kingdom facing the Malacca strait, on the confluence of maritime trade between India, China, and the Middle East. Despite the discovery of a colossal statue of Buddha on a hill in Palembang, there was however no evidence to substantiate the existence of a great center of Buddhist learning which Yijing compared to Nalanda.

In the eighteenth century, Dutch officials of the East India Company (VOC) had noted north of Palembang, in the heart of a lush forest and the hot haze of the equator, about thirty kilometers from the mouth of Batanghari, the longest river in Sumatra, a huge archaeological site covering both banks: Muara Jambi. Excavations started from 1970 by the Indonesian government have established that this extraordinary site, which spreads over more than two thousand hectares, encloses 84 red-brick "temple complexes" - locally called "menapo"- connected by an ingenious system of canals. Eight of these "temple complexes" have been excavated, with several statues and many pieces of Chinese pottery and ceramics from the ninth to the twelfth centuries. But since very few epigraphs attesting to any written transmission of knowledge have been found so far, archaeologists still do not dare to speak openly about a "university." Yet they admit that these complexes were not temples, but study centers with two to six podiums each, once sheltered of life, summarises the main points of all the teachings of the sutras in a progressive order. from the sun and rain by a tiled roof supported by wooden pillars. The student monks would be sitting cross-legged around the podium on the brick pavement.

As a matter of fact, the entire design and layout of the Muara Jambi complex is very similar to those of Nalanda, where monks lived in a cluster of buildings that were fortified or walled in accordance with the vinaya, monastic rules. Hence, the "fortified city" mentioned by Yijing was almost certainly referring to the complex of Muara Jambi.

Three and a half centuries later, another travel record corroborates that of Yijing: "An Account on Meeting with Master Serlingpa Chokyi Dakpa." It is written in Tibetan in the first person by Atisha, a prominent Indian Buddhist master. Atisha was born in the Land of Sahor (nowadays near Dhaka, Bangladesh) in 980 as the son of King Kalyana, and was named Prince Chandragarbha. In his teenage years, Atisha left his kingdom and wandered through forests and mountains seeking knowledge from masters living in the wild or in the monastic universities of Nalanda and Odantapuri. At the age of twenty-nine, he received the Buddhist monk ordination and was given the name Dipamkara Jnana, "He Whose Deep Awareness Acts as a Lamp."

Song 132 of Atisha's Tibetan biography (Rnam-thar rg-yas-pa, written around 1355) says, "Atisha's most important master was Serlingpa, also known as Dharma-kirti, whose fame was widespread. Atisha had already heard about Serlinga's teachings on compassion and Bodhicitta and he was sure that Serlingpa had been his most precious teacher for infinite lives." With one hundred and twenty-five students and a group of merchants seeking gold, Atisha put to sea. So says Atisha's account:

"Homage to Maitreya and Avalokiteshvara!

I, bhikshu Dipamkarashrijana, travelled by ship for thirteen months and went to where Lama Serlingpa was. After five months had passed, the Son of God Indra sent great storms to stop me from continuing my mission of Bodhicitta. Also, he appeared in the form of a giant makara to stop me and sent lightening. At that time I did an intensive meditation on Love and Compassion. As a result the storm calmed down and six huge lightenings were seen stuck up in the sky unable to fall down. However, the makara managed to stop our way. At the same time the violent wind caused our ship to become very unsteady the way it happens to flags in violent wind; shaking, wavering, bobbing up in the air and sinking down in the ocean. The four masts in the four corners were laid down and the four big stones were downed to anchor the ship. But the atmosphere turned even more scaring; terrible sounds blared from all the four corners followed by lightening...."

After fourteen months on sea, Atisha crossed the Strait of Malacca. He landed on the famous "golden island," Suvarnadvipa as it is called in Sanskrit. George Coedès identified this isle as being that of Sumatra. Many historians and archaeologists subsequently confirm the thesis of the French epigraphist. The western regions of Sumatra were indeed known at the time to be very rich in gold.

Today, the mouth of the Bantaghari River, Muara Sabak, is actually just a pier. The ocean is still far away, at least two hours by boat, but the land stops here, where the river divides into two branches. The two arms encircle an island that looks to the Malacca Straits, guarding the river's entrance. This fluvial island hosts a national park with lots of crocodiles and mangroves. Just as in Atisha's account:

"As soon as we crossed the ocean, I (Atisha) went straightaway to the golden stupa the Tibetan emperor had built once upon a time. It was there that the six disciples of Lama Serlingpa were engaged in samadhi. This stupa was located to the east of the forest of Suvarnadvipa, to the south of the joyful lotuses, to the north of the dangerous mires, and to the east of the Crocodile Kekeru. I

stayed there for fourteen days, making inquiries about the life of Lama Serlingpa."

A number of descriptions in the account of his journey suggests that it is in Muara Jambi that Atisha met Serlingpa and study with his dearest master, such as the large number of monks who lived there and the excellence of Buddhist texts that were taught there:

"Then I (Atisha) saw the bhikshus coming from a far off distance in procession following their master. They were well dressed in their three robes. Each one was holding a water container and a staff. There were five hundred and thirty-five in number and looked as gracious as arahats. The master was attended by sixty-two sramaneras. In all there were a total of five hundred and seventy-two monks. As soon as I saw this, I felt as if I was seeing Buddha surrounded by arahats. What a pleasant scene it was! (...)

"Then we went to Lama's residence, the Silver Parasol Palace, and took our seats. (...) After we had settled there, the Lama in order to introduce to me the characteristics of 'dependent origination' began his teachings from the 'Abhisamayalamkara' in five sessions. Staying in the Silver Parasol Palace, I continued with my practices of listening, concentration and meditation. Lama Serlingpa guided me throughout this process of practice."

In 1025, entrusted with the precious teachings of Serlingpa, Atisha sailed back to India, just before the Chola Kingdom from South India attacked Srivijaya. He settled at Vikramashila Monastery. In 1041, the king of West Tibet, Yeshey-wo (Ye-shes 'od), invited him to reinstate all aspects of Buddha's teachings - Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana - as complementary. Atisha stayed thirteen years in Tibet and died in Tibet in 1054. His most famous teaching is A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment (Byang-chub lam-gyi sgron-ma, Skt. Bodhipathapradipa), which served later in Tibet as the basis for the lam-rim graded stages genre, a textual form that, like a butter lamp lighting up in the storm sivAtisha had



Atisha had many masters, but all his biographies report that at the mere mention of Serlingpa, his eyes filled with tears. He said that all the goodness he had, he owed to his master of the Golden Island.

One still wonders why Muara Jambi sank into oblivion after the thirteenth century. Some scholars mention the attack of the Hindu kingdom of the Cholas in southern India, which wanted to take control of the lucrative and strategic Straits of Malacca. But this assault, which would put an end to the power of Srivijaya, occurred in 1025. However, one of the most beautiful statues discovered in Muara Jambi is a Prajnaparamita dated from the thirteenth or fourteenth century. Other scholars suggest that the Mo-lo-yeu Kingdom recorded by Yijing and where Muara Jambi is located was a vassal, a competitor or "a matrix" of Srivijaya, and as such was saved from the Cholas attack and prospered after the fall of Srivijaya. Unlike the large Indian monasteries of Bihar that were laid to ruin by Turkish and Afghan raids, Sumatra and the entire Indonesian archipelago did not experience Muslim invasions. The sack of Muara Jambi - if it ever happened- cannot be attributed to Islam, which is the dominant religion in the region today.

On the very site of Muara Jambi stands a village whose inhabitants are all Muslims. Their homes are made of wood and built on stilts along the Batanghari River. Their orchards planted with cacao and durian trees extend into the ruins of the temples. Several young villagers occasionally work on excavations under the supervision of the archaeologists. They can identify each stone, each mound of red earth, every tree in the forest where their parents have small huts to watch the fall of the durians at night. They can point out several endemic species of trees from the Indian subcontinent that grow nowhere else in Sumatra, except in the forest of Muara Jambi. For instance, the kapung tree or kembang parang (meto dzambaka in Tibetan?) whose white film-like petals inside the bark are used in India and Tibet as flower-offereings in tantric initiations.

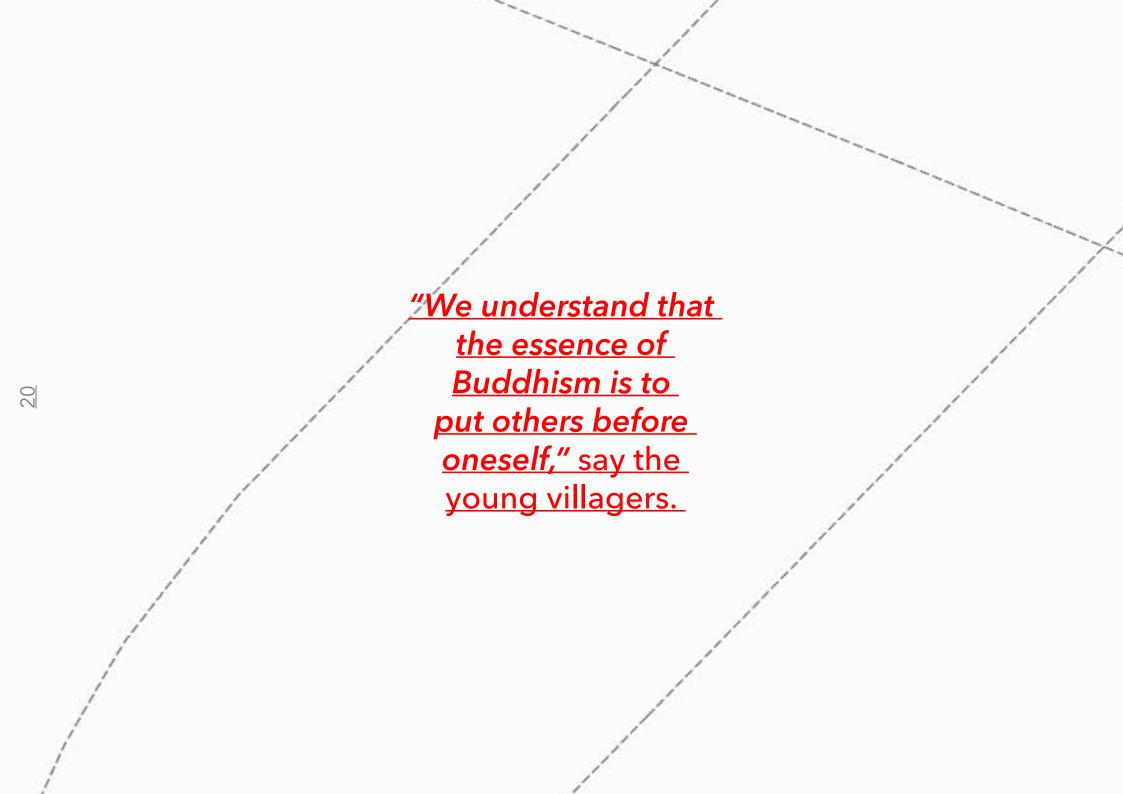
Archaeologists have not yet been able to unravel the mystery of these 84 temple complexes surrounded by walls and canals, many of which are still piles of ruins

and earth mounds in the middle of the orchards and cocoa plantations of the villagers, so they've adopted the local term "menapo" for them.

"Napo" in the language of Muara Jambi means "deer" and "me" means "location." During the annual floods of the Batanghari River, which submerges the village under more than a meter of water, the menapo is the high location where wild animals from the forest take refuge as if in Noah's ark. The young villagers themselves are convinced that the 84 temple complexes were in fact faculties and that Muara Jambi was the first green university for Mahayana Buddhism in Indonesia. At the crossroads of India and China, its campus encompassed the rain forest which was used as an orchard, a library, a living pharmacy and a haven for meditation:

"We understand that the essence of Buddhism is to put others before oneself," say the young villagers.

They have founded a community center and a green school, Saramuja, to excavate in their own way the ancient history of this forgotten site and transmit to the village children the local culture and the sense of respect for the environment. More recently, they've organised themselves into a larger community center, the Padmasana foundation to professionalize their research and share it more widely. Their symbol is the Dvarapala, the gate keeper of Hindu or Buddhist temples which is traditionally presented in a fearsome appearance. But the statue of Dvarapala discovered in a temple of Muara Jambi, if properly armed with a small shield and a broken mace, is smiling and wearing a flower on his











sia and Zanskar: ATISHA. I've never heard of this name before. According to Paul, Atisha was a great Buddhist master from India who went to Sumatra by the 11th century to perfect his knowledge. Later on, he was invited to Tibet where he spread his "Indonesian" master's teachings.

Back in France, in the Tibetan Library located at the Collège de France, I found a biography of Atisha translated from Tibetan into German: Rnam thar rgyas pa which might have been written in 1355 based on more ancient written and oral (songs) accounts. This biography tells how Atisha was born in the Land of Sahor (nowdays near Dakha, Bangladesh) in 980 as the son of King Kalyana, and was named Prince Chandragarbha. In his teenage years, Atisha left his kingdom and wandered through forests and mountains seeking knowledge from masters living in the wild or in the monastic universities of Nalanda and Odantapuri. At the age of 29, he received the Buddhist ordination and was given the name Dipamkara Jnana, "He Whose Deep Awareness Acts as a Lamp".

Song 132 of Atisha's Tibetan biography says that « Atisha's most important master was Serlingpa, also known as Dharmakirti, whose fame was widespread. Atisha had already heard about Serlinga's teachings on compassion and Bodhicitta and he was sure that Serlingpa had been his most precious teacher for infinite lives. With a group of merchants, Atisha put to sea: The boat crossed the Ocean of Shells and the Milk Sea. The waves were as high as some mountains in the Himalayas.

One year later, I went to Dharamsala, India. At the Library of the Tibetan Works and Archives, upon my request, Lobsang Shastri translated the manuscript entitled *Jo bo rjes mnyam med gser gling pa chos kyi grags pa dang mjal ba'i rnam thar*, An account of a meeting with Master Serlingpa Chokyi Dakpa:

"Then I (Atisha) saw the bhikshus coming from a far off distance in procession following their master. They were well dressed in their three robes. Each one was holding a water container and a staff. There were 535 in number and looked as gracious as arahats. The master was attended by 62 sramaneras. In all there were a total of 572 monks. As soon as I saw this, I felt as if I was seeing Buddha surrounded by arahats. What a pleasant scene it was!"

In 1025, entrusted with the precious teachings of Serlingpa, Atisha sailed back to India, just before the Chola Kingdom from South India attacked Srivijaya. He settled at Vikramasila Monastery. In 1041, the king of West Tibet, Ye's-ses-od, invited him to reinstate all aspects of Buddha's teachings - Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana - as complementary. Ye's-ses-od's kingdom extended until Karsha, the site of today's nunnery where I heard "the voice". Atisha stayed thirteen vears in Tibet and died in Tibet in 1054. His ashes were kept in a stupa by his Tibetan disciples Bhante Pannyavaro, head of Mendut Monastery, near Borobudur (Central Java) has been guiding me for many years to follow in Atisha's footsteps. He told me that in 1981 he received a pinch of Atisha's ashes from Venerable Visuddhananda, head Buddha Dhammarajika Monastery in Dhaka, Bangladesh. In October 1997, with a letter from Bhante Pannyavaro, I set off for Bangladesh. When I arrived in Dhaka, Venerable Visuddhananda had passed away. He had been replaced by Venerable Buddhananda Suddhananda who welcomed me with the following account.

Atisha's ashes were kept for centuries in a stupa in Tibet until 1959 or so, when China invaded Tibet. Thanks to Prime Minister Zhou En Lai, one of the few monasteries that were spared was Atisha's Nyethang Monastery. Atisha's ashes were brought to Beijing and displayed at the National Museum. In 1963, during

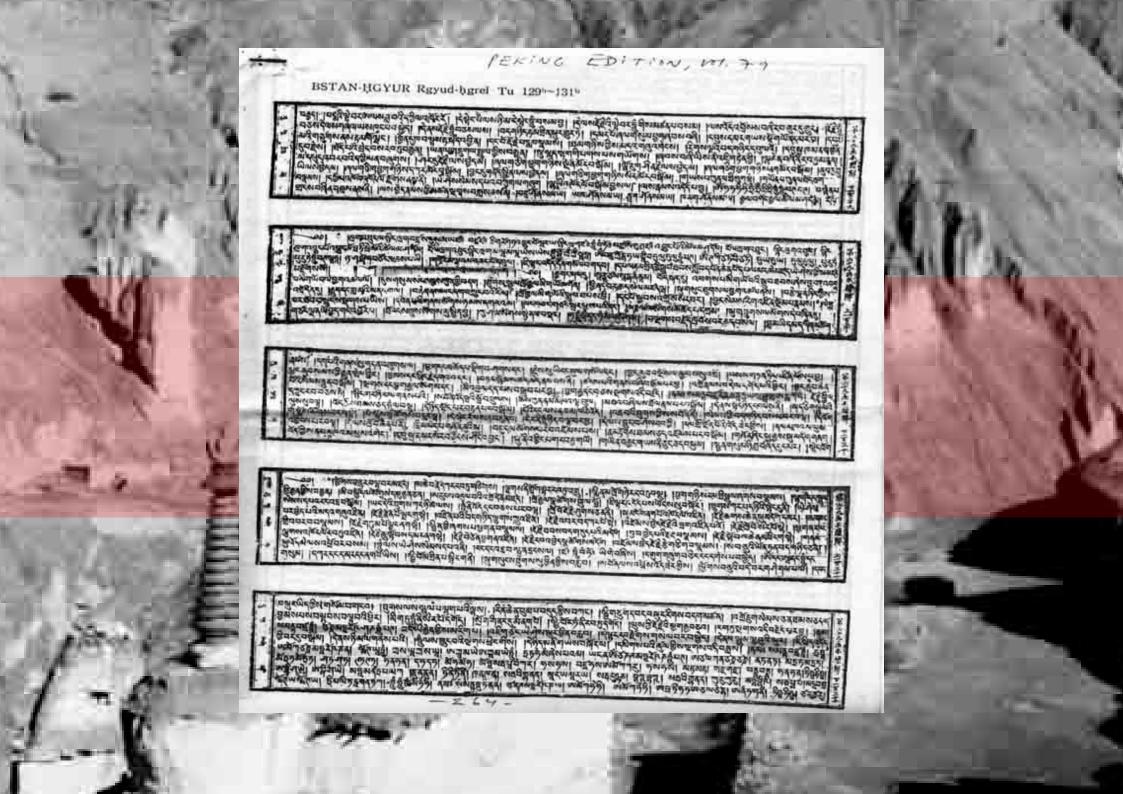
the Vietnam War, Zhou En Lai invited a few Buddhist monks from several Asian countries for a peace round-table. Venerable Visuddhananda saw Atisha's relics at the museum and requested the Prime Minister to return the precious ashes to Atisha's birthplace: Bangladesh. Zhou En Lai gave his approval. In 1978, the government of China officially returned half of Atisha's relics to the government of Bangladesh.

Atisha's ashes are now kept at Buddha Dhammarajika Monastery in Dhaka. The next morning, before my visit to Atisha's birthplace at Vajra Jogini, about one hour's drive from Dhaka, Venerable Suddhananda invited me for breakfast at the monastery and, out of the blue, offered me a black film box containing Atisha's ashes. On monastery writing paper he wrote: "Holy ashes of great Buddhist scholar Atisa Dipankara is gifted to Ms. Elizabeth D., writer from Indonesia, for worship and adoration", which he dated and signed.

April 30, 2000 - At the request of the Tibetan government in Dharamsala, I presented Atishas's ashes to His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of his arrival in exile, in McLeod Ganj, India. I kept just a pinch of Atisha's ashes as a memento.

The day before setting off to Palembang, in Sumatra, to continue my journey in Atisha's footsteps, I found by chance an auspicious article at the library of the French Embassy in Jakarta: The Paradoxical and Nostalgic History of Gending Sriwijaya in South Sumatra by Margaret J.Kartomi. It recalled how that song was created in Palembang during the Japanese occupation in 1945, and set to music inspired by the kromongan orchestra from the ancient Hindu-Buddhist palaces of South Sumatra but based on Javanese Demak style from the 17th century. The song was created by a group of writers led by a journalist, Nung Cik A.R., member of the Partai Nasional Indonesia, and by M.J Suud, member of the Muslim Party Serikat Islam. After the war, Gending Sriwijaya became a very popular song in Indonesia. In 1962, Nung Cik A.R. joined the Indonesian Com-





munist Party. This is why, after General Suharto took power in 1965, it was forbidden to perform Gending Sriwijaya on official occasions. Here are the lyrics: From where did the writers of this song hear the name

When I long for the glory of the past/I sing a tune again, the song of Sriwijaya/I long for the glory of the past/I sing a tune again, the song of Sriwijaya/In art (??) I enjoy again that happy era/I recreate from the womb of that great time/Sriwijaya with the great hermitages of the glorious masters/Dharma Pala, Shakya Khirti, Dharma Khirti...

of Dharma Khirti? Until now, archaeologists working in Palembang have not found any inscriptions mentioning the name of Atisha's dearest teacher.

In July 2000, I went to Tibet via Nepal. In Kathmandu, the Tibetologist Hubert Decleer guided me to Tam Bahil, the monastery built by Atisha on his way to Tibet to train monks in the skill of translation. As a Dharma friend, Hubert untrusted me with much of his published and unpublished research about Atisha in Nepal. I express here my deepest gratitude to him. In Tibet, I stayed five days in Drak Yerpa, a steep mountain full of meditation caves where Atisha spent three years and built a chapel and a library. South of Lhasa, I was fortunate to be led by the Lama of Nyethang Monastery into the house where Atisha used to study in his later years, and where he passed away in 1054. When I stood before Atisha's white empty stupa in this house, I dissolved into an ocean of tears.

The years passed. In July 2009, Venerable Tashi la, a Tibetan Monk, tantric ritual master for His Holiness the Dalai Lama, visited me in Yogyakarta. He wanted to see Atisha's ashes. He was on his way to Sumatra to try to find the site where Atisha met Serlingpa, 1,000 ago. Venerable Tashi la visited Muara Takus in Sumatra, but he didn't make it to Muara Jambi. When I met

him again in India a few months later, he advised me to go to Muara Jambi.

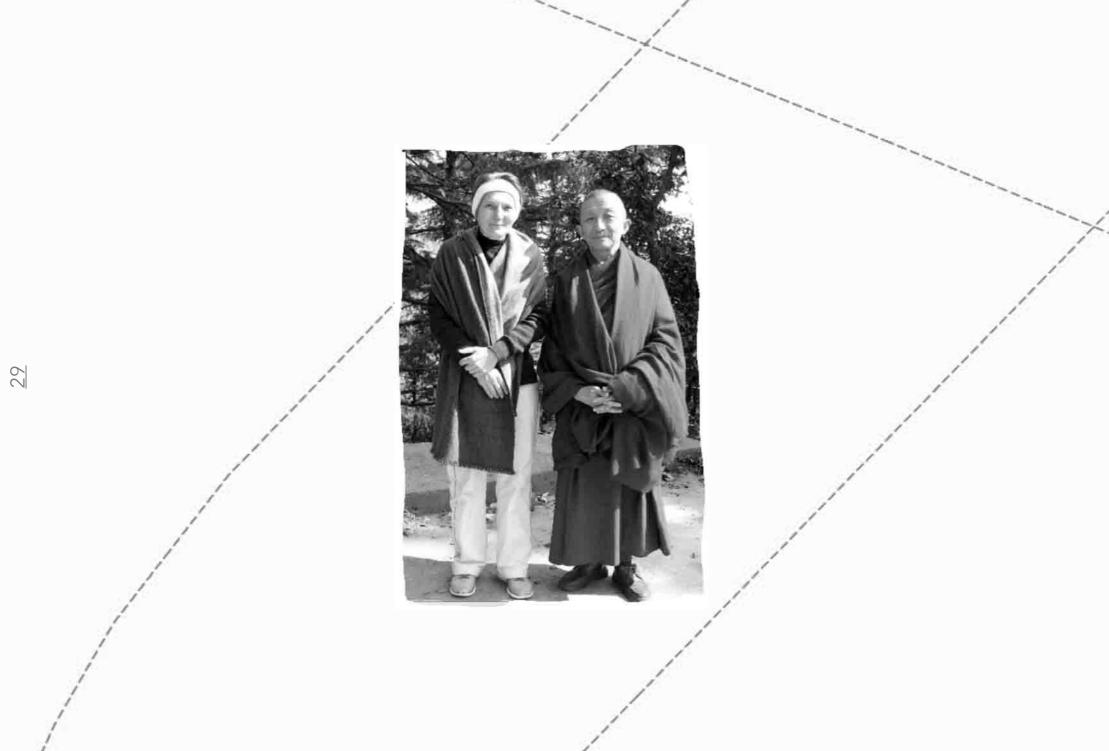
I had never thought of Muara Jambi as a possible location for Atisha's meeting with Serlingpa, because Muara Jambi is located in Malayu or Mo-lo-yeu, the ancient Chinese name already mentioned by Yijing as another Buddhist kingdom in Sumatra. Besides that, I had a "romantic" view of Serlingpa/Dharmakirti living as a Buddhist recluse in a cave or in the jungle like the holy Jetari from whom Atisha took the bodhisattva vows, or his tantric master Rahulagupta, on the Black Mountain. I never thought of Serlingpa/Dharmakirti as an abbot of a big monastery or as a master whose vast and sharp knowledge was supported by a powerful institution.

In November 2010, a few days after the big eruption of Merapi Volcano, with Bhante Pannyavaro's blessing who fled the rain of ashes with all the monks from Mendut and took refuge in a Buddhist monastery on the north coast of Java- I was invited by the Jambi Province in Sumatra to talk about Atisha's relics in a seminar about Muara Jambi as a tentative candidate for UNESCO World Heritage.

During the two-day seminar, several scholars exposed how excavations undertaken since the 1970s by the Indonesian government have already exhumed eight of the 84 menapo and several statues, much Chinese pottery and ceramics from the 9th centuries, but very few epigraphs. One of the most brilliant speeches of the seminar was delivered by Professor Mundardjito, a senior archeologist from Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta. He stressed that the construction of Muara Jambi, which lasted over several centuries, must have required multidisciplinary knowledge to adapt to the complex geography of the site: rain forest, swamps, river with monsoon floods. Therefore today, to unfold what Dr. Mundardjito regards as the "identity card of Indonesia" (Muara Jambi), a multidisciplinary approach is required: archeologists, historians, epigraphists, environmentalists, architects, spiritual masters and also village communities living on the side with their local wisdom.

Beyond the seminar, I went to the village where wooden houses are built on stilts in the heart of the junglealong the Batanghari River. In the region of Yogyakarta, on the island of Java, where I live, I was working on the reconstruction, "body and soul", of two villages destroyed by two natural disasters: the 2006 earthquake and the 2010 eruption of the Merapi volcano. But in the village of Muara Jambi, I found myself confronted by another disaster, a human tragedy: oblivion. The inhabitants told me that their ancestors were lepers who were driven by the neighbouring villages into the depths of a forest full of haunted ruins. What tragedy must have taken place in this site to create a goal for lepers in a place that had previously attracted the greatest masters of China and India?

Since then, this question has driven me to return several times a year to the village of Muara Jambi to explore this extraordinary enigma with its inhabitants who are all Muslims today. I joined the youth group of the village, which has founded the Padmasana Foundation to excavate with their own tools the ancient history of this forgotten site. In February 2018, we have published a book together: "Dreams from the Golden Island" in four languages: Indonesian, Chinese, English and French with some quotes in Sanskrit, Tibetan and Arabic. The villagers are the dreamers of this story, the ferrymen on the river of time to what lies beyond memory.



Introduction

The early truth seekers had little by way of maps and relied on stories by wayfarers, travelling frequently with traders. Taking long, arduous, even treacherous journeys, they sought teachers and sacred texts not just for their own edification but to bring home the fount of truth and share its secrets. My interest in Muara Jambi began out of curiosity in a place that I thought was more mythic than real, especially as it was graced by a Buddhist Bengali pundit, Atisha, whose writings I have found timeless even as they were written a thousand years ago. Atisha, himself a learned monk scholar of great repute, was visiting Muara Jambi in search of the Sumatran master Serlingpa to request for special teachings. Hence, when I was asked if I would teach a fine art elective on Muara Jambi in 2016, I leapt at the challenge, and a challenge it was that included a pre-elective site recce with curator Gilles Massot and a post-elective field trip with the students. In this short essay I would like to highlight the pedagogical challenge from two perspectives, namely the multi-disciplinary nature of the elective and the contemporary relevance of the project.

The multi-disciplinary situation

Dealing with an archaeological site whose location is still much speculated upon for its historical significance provided an excellent opportunity to appreciate the shifting nature of history, archaeology and even political treatises. In the annals of the Sriwijaya empire lasting from 7th to 13th Century CE, Muara Jambi has been overshadowed by Palembang often presented as its capital or centre of administration. However, archaeologically, Muara Jambi was undisputedly a thriving Buddhist centre of learning, with its sprawling grounds and brick architecture closely related to the Nalanda Buddhist university¹ in India. Several distinguished scholars were closely related to Muara Jambi and hence Nalanda. In the 11th Century, Serlingpa, a Sumatran scholar monk whose biography still remains unclear but who has been cited incontrovertibly in Buddhist texts, met with Atisha who sought and studied with him for 12 years. Then further back in time in the 7th Century, there was the

and Muara



Chinese pilgrim Yijing whose 25-year travel records and writings contributed to world knowledge of the Sriwijaya empire. Many writings of highly philosophical and esoteric content from these scholars are still being studied and referenced today.

perts' were invited to speak to the students. Even before the elective started, writer/journalist Elisabeth Inandiak with Indonesia visual artist Heri Dono conducted a workshop; Inandiak for her travel writings and research on Muara Jambi and Atisha, and Dono for his wayang kulit and mask-making methodology and aesthetics. When the elective began, Dr Helene Njoto from Nalanda Sriwijaya Center (ISEAS) spoke on Brick Architecture in Indonesia while Dr Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz from Yusof Ishak Institute (ISEAS) spoke on Domestic Architecture History of Muara Jambi. Muara Jambi as an elective thus spawned several pathways of interest: archaeological, historical, geographical, architectural and cultural as well as other contemporary issues that will be briefly covered later in the essay. What's also amazing about Muara Jambi is its closeness to Singapore. Literally, a boat ride to Batam, then a short flight to Jambi town and another boat ride or a car trip away, Muara Jambi is practically next door to Singapore if we look at the regional map. A sleepy village situated on the banks of Sungei Batanghari belies its rich heritage and Muara Jambi deserves attention from those of us interested in the history of the region.

While there was much for us, city dwellers, living among the villagers in the rural countryside to learn and absorb, we did face one problem. Many from LASALLE did not speak Bahasa Indonesia and many from Padmasana did not speak English. In spite of this language issue, a warm friendship developed, which became most evident when the Padmasana team in turn visited Singapore to participate in the exhibition in January 2018. Both sides left home to cross waters to encounter another culture and another environment, and in that crossing, both sides have exchanged bits of themselves and become hopefully richer for the experience.



The contemporary relevance

When I first visited Muara Jambi, I discovered more than an ancient ruin and pilgrimage site. A community lives in its midst. The Malay inhabitants, who are Muslims, are proud of their historical and cultural inheritance but they struggle to preserve its legacy against the encroachment of deforestation, palm oil plantations, coal and sand mining, while eking out modest livelihoods in this part of Sumatra. Muara Jambi's heritage is not a priority for the national government and the municipal government has other more pressing concerns. However, to a local NGO, Muara Jambi is worthy of UNESCO protection and their mission is to bring awareness to its significance. That NGO is Padmasana Foundation, which works among the villagers especially its youth to care for the environment of Muara Jambi, as well as its Malay culture and community. All three times when I have visited, we have had the pleasure of engaging their services as eco-cum-cultural travel guides. Each time, Padmasana brings us up to date on the current issues facing Muara Jambi and the villagers. They show themselves as dedicated community organisers helping to revive local knowledge, such as their traditional medicine and craft skills. For the post-elective field trip, they organised workshops for the students where we learnt mat weaving from the grannies in the village and the uses of their medicinal herbs from the dukun, the village traditional healer-cum-shaman.

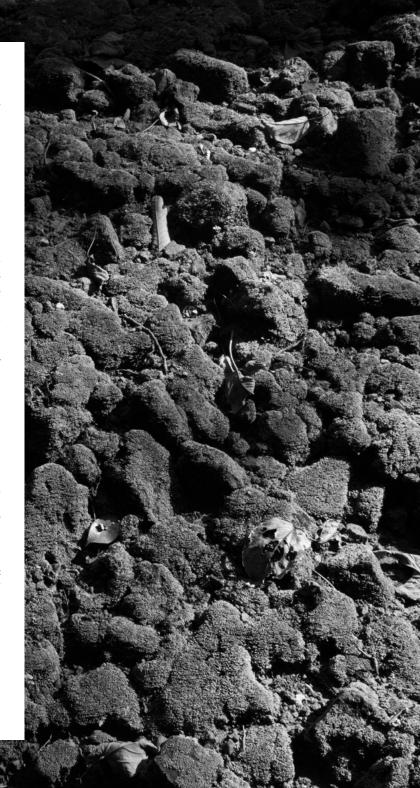
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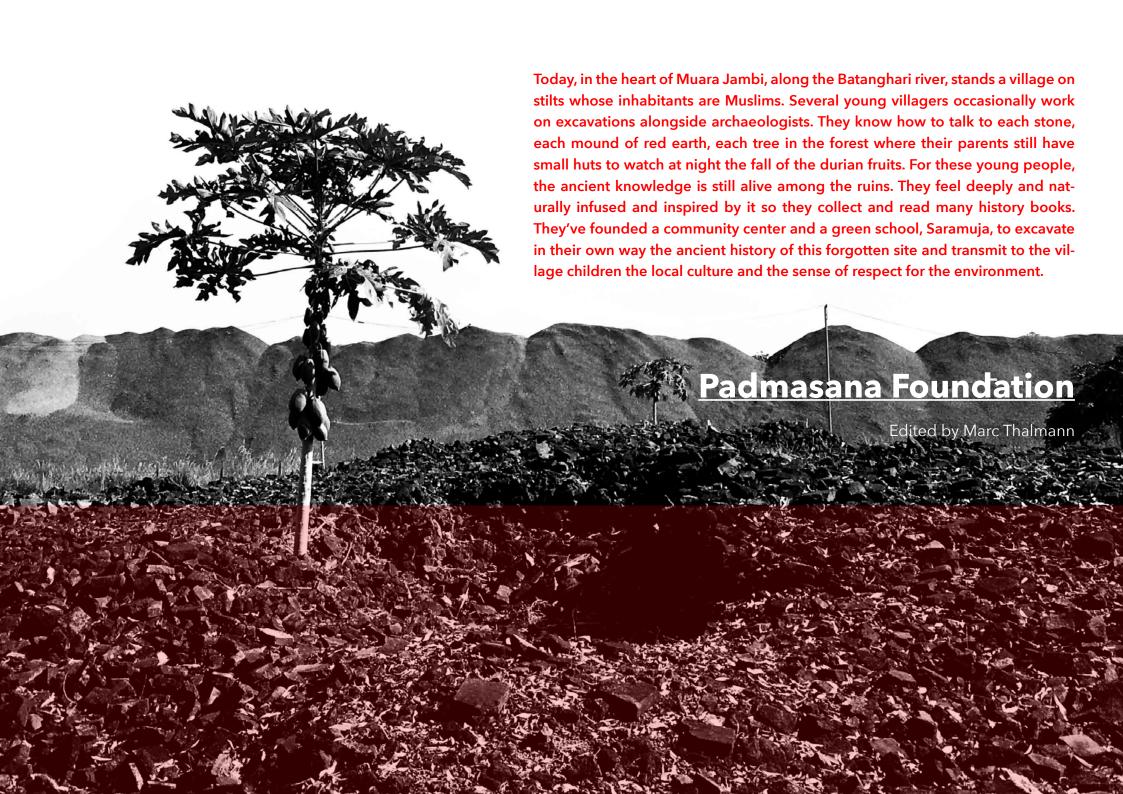
Post-elective, post-exhibition

I began this article by talking about the early truth seekers inspired by stories of Atisha travelling in this region, so close to Singapore. In our art education, I hope to believe that learning is in a way following the footsteps of the early truth seekers, perhaps with far more modest aspirations but nevertheless still committed to some kind of truth seeking. Indeed what would our art education be if not a yearning to learn, infused with the spirit of inquiry, curiosity and the open-ness to probe deep and deeper.

I like to end however with the teachings that Atisha came to learn from Serlingpa, and that is, the meditative practices on compassion. He spent 12 years at Serlingpa's side until he perfected the practices and was said to have found enlightenment. Hence the time came for his return to India. When he was back in India, the Tibetan king visited Atisha and pleaded with him to come to Tibet to revitalise the Buddhist way of life. And so began another journey and another country for Atisha, this time, spending the last 13 years of his life away from home. In Tibet, he wrote the influential text, Lamp on the Path to Enlightenment, which influenced Tibetan Buddhism till this day. Perhaps the biggest lesson we all could take from Muara Jambi is about taking that fateful step to leave home to find our way eventually to our enlightened state. As Atisha uttered, which became the title of the January 2018 exhibition at LASALLE, 'To leave home is half the journey.' What do we yearn for when we leave home? And what kind of learning happens?

¹ Nalanda was a major Buddhist centre of learning from 5th to 12th Century CE. It is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In 2014, it was revived as a modern university, under the stewardship of economist Amartya Sen, with support from several countries including Singapore.













General situation of the Muara Jambi temple area

The Muara Jambi Temple site or area, is a temple complex located approximately 40 kilometers from Jambi Town, or 30 kilometers from the regency capital Muara Jambi. Its coordinates range from 103 22' E to 103 45' E, and from 1 24' S to 1 33' S. This location stretches along eight kilometers with an average altitude of between eight and 12 meters above sea level.

Geomorphologically, based on the interpretation of SLAR imaging (Side Looking Airborne), almost all areas of this site are located in an ancient delta formed by the alluvial plain of the east coast of southern Sumatra, consisting of three land forms that are recent natural leeves, back swamps and subrecent natural leeves, situated alongside the river Batanghari.

The Muara Jambi temple complex is a relic of the Ancient Malay Kingdom and of the Sriwijaya Kingdom, which became the center of Buddhist worship from the seventh to the thirteenth century. In regional history, the Ancient Malay Kingdom and the Sriwijaya Kingdom are known to have had an enormous influence, not only in the archipelago but also on mainland Southeast Asia such as in Malaysia and Thailand. The Ancient Malay Kingdom and Sriwijaya played an important role in the international politico-economic arena as a link between India and China at that time.

This area is designated as a cultural heritage site based on the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture number 259 / M / 2013 on the Establishment of Muara Jambi geographical space as a National Cultural Heritage site. This area definitively covers an area of 3,981 hectares, spread over two districts (Marosebo and Tamanrajo) and eight villages (Director General of Culture, 2014). It can be concluded that this area is the largest archaeological complex in Southeast Asia (20 times the

area of Borobudur, or twice the area of Angkor Wat in Cambodia).

On October 6, 2009, the Muara Jambi geographical space has been proposed as World Cultural Heritage, as the number 5465 tentative list in UNESCO.

This cultural heritage area consists of the following archaeological remains:

- 11 main temple buildings, which are Koto Mahligai, Kedaton, Gedong I, Gedong II, Gumpung, Gumpung II, Tinggi I, Twin II, Kembar Batu, Astano, and Sialang. These main temple buildings have the characteristic of being delimited by brick fences.
- 82 menapo. Menapo is a term in the local language, to denote a mound of soil containing collapsed bricks. Until 2010, at least 33 structural brick buildings have been found and 82 menapo. Among these, 70 menapo still have not been excavated.
- 3. Different types of pottery, ceramics, artifacts, beads, stone statues, inscriptions and building structures such as stupas, chinese coins, ancient broken glazed roof tiles, gold ingots, and andesite stone as pillar base and as mortar, scattered in several locations on the surface.
- 4. 17 ancient canals connecting the fields of temple complexes to one another, supposed to work as transportation infrastructure and drainage systems within the area, as well as aspects of past cosmology.
- 5. Nine artificial ancient ponds and lakes.
- An artificial ancient hill (Bukit Perak) as the cosmology embodiment of the center of the universe.

Therefore, the Muara Jambi temple complex is considered very important for the historical documentation of one of the world's civilisations. It is estimated that there is still abundant evidence buried in the ground and at the bottom of the river, which has not yet been excavated.



Situation analysis and issues in the Muara Jambi temple area

The integrity of the Muara Jambi temple area is facing the threats of human activities:

- . Industries have appeared, that destroy the integrity of the menapo, such as the coal terminal stockpile alongside the river, factories and CPO (crude palm oil) refineries on the banks of river encroaching on temple boundaries, seismic activity of oil and gas exploration that operates very close to the location of excavations and oil palm plantation companies that have penetrated the area. The entry of corporations and industries was due to a compromise by regional stakeholders of the autonomous Muara Jambi district, which granted permits for the use of cultural heritage lands, for short-term economic priorities. This transfer of land use has a negative impact on archaeology and ecology.
- 2. The number of visitors, who are heavily concentrated in the areas of the main temples, is endangering the integrity of the brick structure of the buildings. There are thousands of visitors on weekends and public holidays, climbing on the temple structures. This is due to the absence of zoning policies for the relocation of traders and the management of visitors flow by stakeholders, in this case BPCB (Balai Pelestarian Cagar Budaya = Cultural Heritage Preservation Agency). For the tentative listing of World Heritage, the overall preserved area must be sterile from industrial intervention and the core zone of the main temple must be sterile from visitors and traders.
- 3. The high level of visits into the core zone brings new problems in waste management. The volume of waste over a large area, combined with low awareness of visitors and traders regarding waste disposal, cannot be overcome by the few cleaners who are hired by BPCB. In addition, the absence of a central waste collection point near the area creates a garbage pileup that cannot be processed or burned, and which eventually gets

- swept into the Batanghari river.
- 4. Ecological degradation: the rate of damage to the Batanghari river basin is worsening, erosion eroding the river embankments along the area, as it is being transformed for residential and industrial functions, further narrowing the area of the site, and leading to the disappearance of one of the temple riverbank structures before being registered and excavated in 2011. In addition, the Muara Jambi region experiences periodic floods each year at the height of the rainy season, causing some areas to be inundated due to lack of drainage management.
- 5. Potential loss of archaeological remains at nonregistered sites, due to them being sold or
 smuggled out to collectors outside Jambi. The
 most common risk is through excavation of sand
 (Type C mining) in the Batanghari river around
 the temple area. This is because the river waters
 are used as a means of public transportation and
 therefore cannot be included in the core preservation zone of the region, while the least expensive and easy digging process is to dredge the
 bottom of the river, making use of Type C mining
 permits.

Meanwhile, the weaknesses that are the factors inhibiting the preservation of the area include:

1. Weak coordination among stakeholders who each claim rights to make decisions and end up making overlapping policies for the temple area. This problem is due to the absence of a comprehensive area development plan/master plan involving all stakeholders. On the one hand, the Regency Government adhering to regional autonomy, feels entitled exclusively to the management of the region, in order to obtain income in a quick and easy way. On the other hand, the Cultural Heritage Preservation Agency (BPCB), as a vertical institution controlled directly by Jakarta, does not feel inclined to answering to an autonomous regional government as it actually





- does not need to negotiate with other stakeholders. As a result, each party is running their own programmes and violates the boundaries of their authority; when problems arise within the area, each stakeholder tends to reject responsibility and claims the other is the source of the problem.
- 2. The lack of central government attention to the preservation of the temple area is marked by the absence of any solutions or interventions undertaken to end the standoff between respective stakeholders, resulting in more complicated and protracted area management issues.
- 3. Ex situ stakeholders involved in area conservation tend to be active at their own stakeholder level, but very rarely have an organised approach at grass root level. Some support-raising efforts have been poorly targeted because public participation outside the area has not been effective as the main motor of change.
- 4. In situ stakeholders are slow to develop due to limited supporting facilities, finances and networking. Long-term conservation operations cannot be implemented in a systematical and integrated manner; they even tend to be only sporadic.
- 5. The Cultural Heritage Preservation Agency (BPCB) Jambi, as the most authoritative technical institution in the core zone of the temple area, lacks sufficient budget and resources to conduct conservation and supervision efforts over a coverage area as large as the Muara Jambi site. Many ancestral objects found by local people on non-registered sites, remain either unrecorded, or with no compensation awarded.

However, there are forces that encourage preservation efforts for the temple area, namely:

1. The legal power of the Muara Jambi Temple Area which is definitively designated as a National Cultural Heritage area accompanied by the fact that this is the largest archaeological site in Southeast Asia, with its 3,981 hectares. (20 times the area of

- the Borobudur site or twice the area of Angkor Wat in Cambodia).
- 2. The high number of annual visitors (nearly 150,000 visitors who purchased tickets in 2014) constitutes a potential market that is able to provide sustainable income to surrounding communities, through the tourism services sector.
- 3. The nomination process of the region as a World Heritage Site, which is in the tentative stage of UNESCO, demands a shift in management paradigm, from the old approach (BPCB and site) to a new approach (Landscape Culture Area), which includes tangible and intangible remains, as well as human aspects and the natural environment. This world heritage approach provides a very broad mandate to communities around the site, to engage in the management and the enhancement of protection forces on an international scale.
- 4. The establishment of the Tourism Village (Desa Wisata) of Muara Jambi, upon the initiative of the community in March 2015, as a form of awareness of the in situ population to the potential of the site, which will be symbiotic with the sustainability of the temple area.

Future challenges that must be anticipated in the conservation of this site include:

- Integrated area management involving all those involved and the stakeholders, beginning with a collaborative master plan.
- 2. Advocacy efforts towards policy changes, to prevent the issuance of new land use permits for industries and to relocate industries with expiring permits for them to leave the protected area.
- Zoning management efforts or crowd control, with the utilization of a relatively wide and empty buffer area in order to reduce the concentration of visitors and traders in the core zone of the main temple.
- 4. The management of the Tourism Village (Desa Wisata) pilot project that has been formed should

- be followed up with the enhancement of supporting facilities such as Homestays, a Tourist Information Center, the strengthening of souvenir craftsmen groups and cultural attraction groups, as well as capacity building of local stakeholders and guides.
- 5. Increasing the awareness and the capacity of the in situ population to protect the area and its residual assets, by involving the community in public archeology programmes and by building community-managed village museums.



In general, Padmasana activities include:

- 1. Research, data collection and compilation of catalogues for ancient remains found on riverbeds outside the core site and collected by the community. Through a persuasive approach, the people are willing to surrender their collection to Padmasana, with the assurance that the ownership status of the object will not be transferred to anyone without the permission of the owner, while waiting for the construction of a village museum belonging to the community. These artifacts are stored by Padmasana, documented and classified by shape, dimensions or size, discovery location and approximate age. The artifacts in the inventory are:
 - a. Ancient Chinese coins. Over 2000 pieces of coins have been collected, identified as 1293 pieces from 41 reigns, of which the most coins come from the reign of Tang Kao Tsu (618-686 AD) with 141 pieces. So far the oldest single coin found is from the Han dynasty (Western Han 186-182 BCE)., according to Dr. Edward McKinnon.
 - b. Manuscripts in the form of tin plates or rolls, with Grantha and Ancient Malay script, for a total of 51 plates. Two plates have been newly identified, through the help of EFEO epigraphy researchers, Prof. Pierre Yves Manguin and Dr. Arlo Griffiths.
 - c. Fragments of ceramics and pottery glazed with various motifs and decorations, as well as various artifacts made of metal and stone.
- 2. Revitalisation of art, culture and local wisdom
 - a. Tracing the history of the Tonel Melayu theater and re-establishing its performing arts team. Tonel is a Malay drama artform with Dul Muluk as the main character. The show is similar to ketoprak in Java, but with Malay language, musical instruments and customary clothing being used. This artform is

- featured on special occasions or folk festivals in the village of Muara Jambi.
- Development of Malay arts groups such as Rebana Hadrah, Rebana Siam, dance mask art groups which are part of the cultural attractions.

3. Participatory education and training

- a. Through joint learning activities for schoolaged children. With a non-formal method, done outdoors in the temple area. The contents conveyed includes local wisdom, the history of the Muara Jambi region, the preservation of ancient remains and environmental awareness.
- b. Group coaching of souvenir craftsmen, including printing and screen printing, making of ethnic necklaces, bracelets and woven pandanus artifacts.
- c. Training of local tour guides according to tour guides competency standards, including tourism service ethics, coordination of groups, preparation of homestay accommodation, foreign language skills.
- d. Digital multimedia training, including:
 - Videography: camera familiarisation, lighting, sound, script writing, storyboard, non-linear editing, motion control, color grading and visual effects.
 - Graphic design: introducing vector editing applications, raster, blending and retouching, digital printing, color separation, offset printing.
 - 3D animation: introduction of 3D applications, object modeling, rigging, texturing and animating.
 - Web development: introducing blog platforms such as Joomla CMS and WordPress.

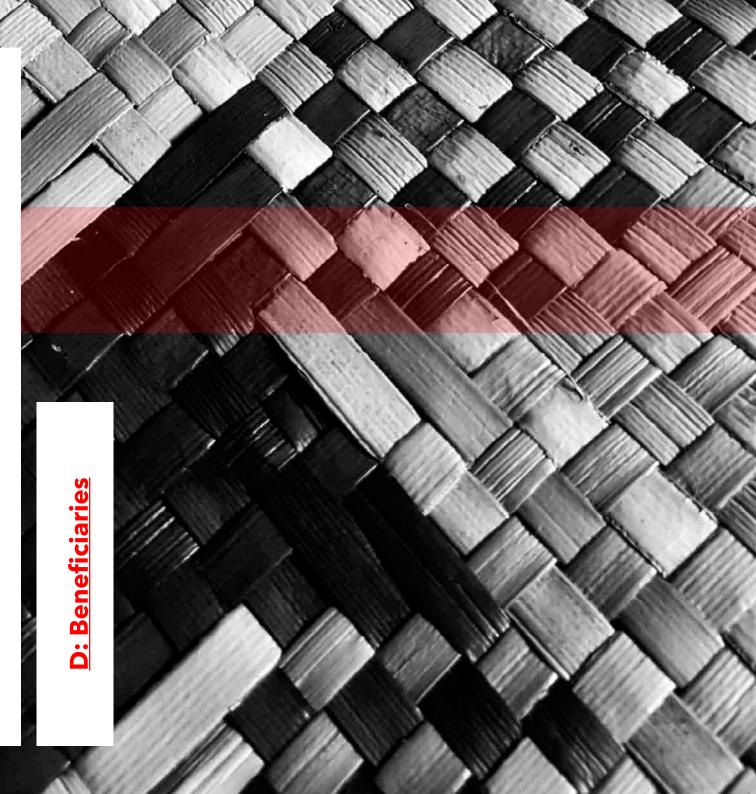


The community groups that will be the direct beneficiaries of the programme run by Padmasana are:

- As an in situ stakeholder of the Muara Jambi Temple area, Padmasana acts as a campaign agent for the preservation of the site, as the engine driving the creative economy of the village, as a socialisation intermediary and a conflict mediator between stakeholders and the community, and as a daily observer to monitor the activities or developments occurring in the area. It can be said that Padmasana activities cover the entire population of rural communities within the Muara Jambi cultural site.
- School-aged children (primary and secondary) who are domiciled around the area and who attend the Muara Jambi Nature School.
- The general public or tourists who visit the site, by garnering support and participation in the preservation of the area.

While the indirect beneficiaries of the programmeme run by Padmasana are:

- The Government of the Jambi Province, the Muara Jambi Regency and the East Tanjung Jabung Regency through their Tourism Departments. Through this project the local government can gather technical input for the regional tourism development plan, especially from the Tourism Village, for it to be aligned with the agenda of the Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIP-PARDA).
- The Cultural Heritage Preservation Agency (BPCB) of Jambi. With the emergence of community support and the participation of the public in efforts to safeguard, preserve, and socialize cultural heritage legislation rules, as well as the community empowerment.





Financing of Padmasana

Specifically, the financing of Padmasana activities is sustained by:

- Indie Video Production House: Padmasana has a good reputation in Jambi. Clients include Government, Corporations and SOEs. Padmasana dominates the production of all video profiles of tourism destinations in the Jambi Province. Profits can be allocated for reinvestment in equipment, with 50% sustaining the organisation's cashflow.
- Organising events in the Muara Jambi temple area, on special occasions such as public holidays or New Year celebrations: Padmasana can put up festivals and gets compensation from tickets purchased by visitors.
- Selling souvenirs and merchandise: the scale is still small due to limited capital and production volume.
- Organising tour packages and local guides: the scale is still limited, because the majority of visitors to the area are domestic tourists.
- Selling Dream Books Dreams of the Golden Island, available online and also for sale within the Muara Jambi temple site.

PADMASANA HOMEBASE OFFICE

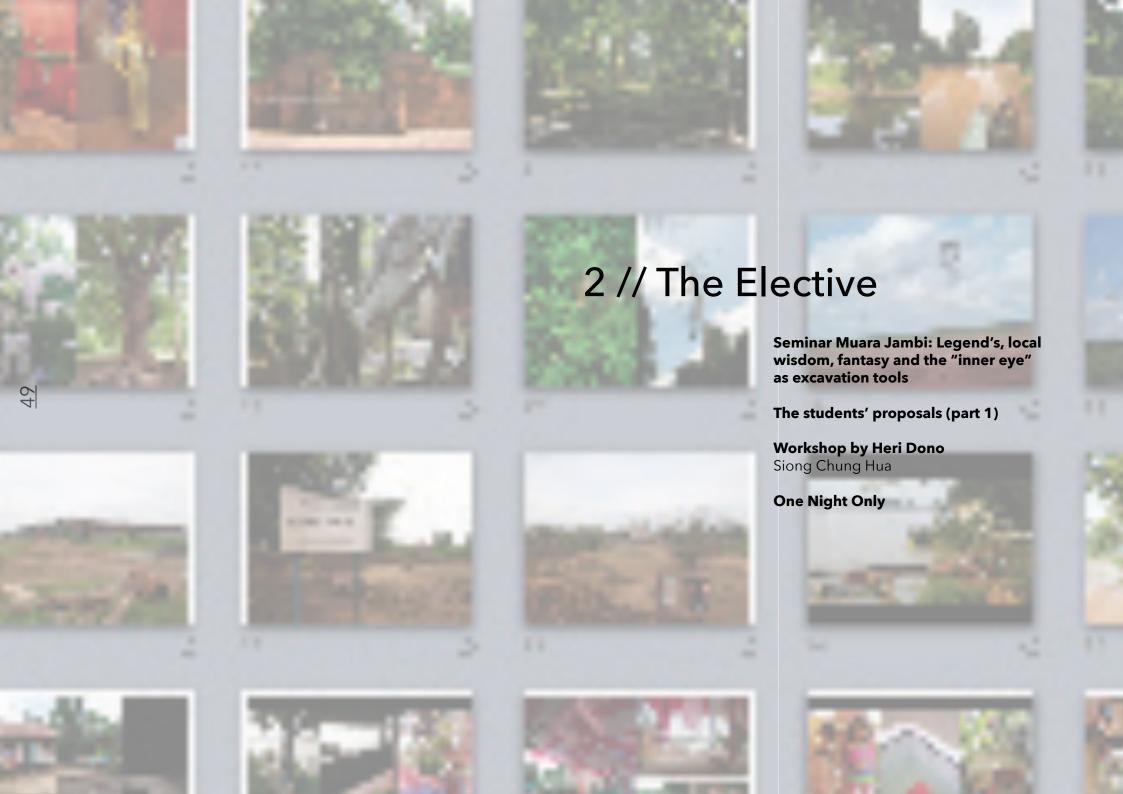
Jalan Yuka No 22 Palmerah Lama -Jambi Selatan - Jambi City Jambi - 36139 - Indonesia

PADMASANA SITE RESEARCH CENTER MUARA JAMBI TEMPLES COMPOUND SITE SANGGAR SARAMUJA

Melayu River Hamlet RT 05 -Desa Muara Jambi Regency of Muara Jambi - Jambi - Indonesia Website: www.padmasanafoundation.blogspot.com/3 Facebook: @padmasana.swarnadwipa Instagram: @padmasana_official









Background

Known as the largest archaeological site of Indonesia, the history and function of the ruins of the Muara Jambi complex located on the Batanghari river in Sumatra remains for the most part a mystery. Various archaeological seminars have been organised in recent years in the city of Jambi to discuss the history of Muara Jambi. Young activists of the village of Muara Jambi are always invited, but as mere spectators. They are never given a chance to speak, whereas the prominent archaeologists and historians from Indonesia and abroad are puzzled by the magnitude of the ruins and the very few artefacts and epigraphs exhumed on the site until now.

However, at a seminar in November 2010 about Muara Jambi as a tentative candidate for UNESCO World Heritage, Prof. Dr. Mundardjito, a senior archaeologist from Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta, stressed that the construction of Muara Jambi, which lasted over several centuries, must have required a multidisciplinary knowledge to adapt to the complex geography of the site: rain forest, swamps, river with monsoon floods. Therefore today, to unfold what Dr. Mundardjito regards as "the Identity card of Indonesia", a multidisciplinary approach is required: archaeologists, historians, epigraphists, environmentalists, architects, artists, spiritual masters and also village communities living on site and experiencing it through their local wisdom.

Furthermore, in a book soon to be published, John N. Micksic writes: "The brick architecture of Muara Jambi is impressive in its complexity and scale. It is possible to argue that Muara Jambi's most important contribution to world cultural heritage lies not in its buildings, but in its intellectual activity. As M. Dumarçay taught me, the buildings were only a shell for human thought and contemplation about the nature of reality."



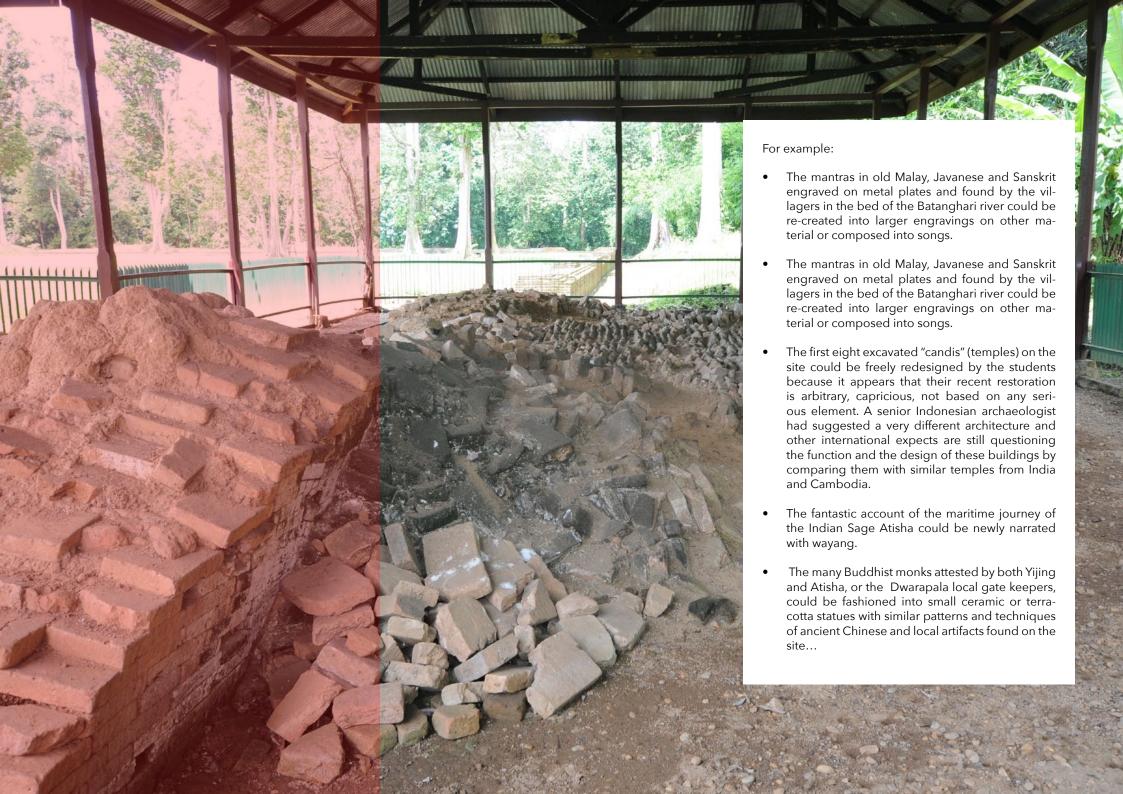














The maritime journey

Once the artworks done, the students of LASALLE will load them on a boat crossing the strait towards Muara Jambi. They will re-enact part of the pilgrim chronicle of Yijing (I-Tsing), who leaved the port of Canton in the year 671 on a Persian vessel to visit India and study Buddhism, as well as the account of the maritime journey of the Indian Sage Atisha from India to Sumatra in the year 1013.

At the mouth of the Batanghari river, in Muara Sabak, the students of LASALLE will be welcomed by the local youth community to whom they will present their artworks as a "tribute" to the science about the nature of reality once taught on this shore of the Malacca strait. The students and the local youth community will journey together upstream to the site. At Muara Jambi, the local villagers will welcome the students with their traditional art and with several endemic species of trees from the Indian subcontinent that grow nowhere else in Sumatra, except in the forest of Muara Jambi. For instance, the kapung tree or Kembang Parang whose white film inside the bark is used in India and Tibet for tantric initiations.

It so happens that the preparatory trip conducted in February by the four visitors took place at the time when the Padmasana Foundation was inaugurating a new communal space given to them by the village authorities. Located right on the bank of the river and around the village's main landing pier, this new venue includes an office and an outdoor café coming with a stage that can be used as a place for gathering and performances. Much of the activity envisioned for this December journey will therefore be centred in this space, including the staging of the arrival of the 'delegation' on the main landing pier. The presents brought along will include flags and pennants that can be later used as decorative pieces of this place, including the banners of Iching and Atisha, and a fresco printed on tarpaulin that will be used as a backdrop for the outdoor stage.

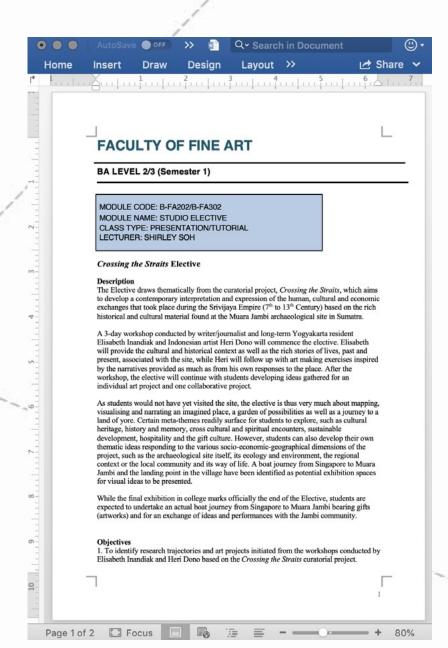
The seminar

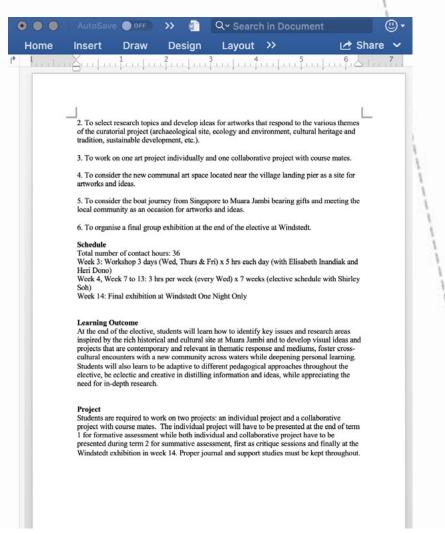
Through this process of physical embodiment of the exchange, the final form and content of the performance will take place when the two will come as one. The performance will be staged like a seminar where the speakers are both the students of LASALLE and the local youth community who are the "modern students" of one the biggest Buddhist learning center of the past, both guardians of the site and explorers of its past. The audience will be villagers, local dignitaries and intellectual leaders. The site of the seminar: the ground of one of the "menapo" (temple complex) of Muara Jambi, where the monks used to study. Both students and the local youth community will present their "finds", artworks or interpretations about Muara Jambi. This parody seminar provides both a framework and a huge freedom for both the students and the local youth community to express their creativity and thoughts about Svarnadvipa, the Golden Island at its golden age.

Weeks or months later, a concluding seminar and possibly an exhibition will be held in Singapore with a few representatives of the Muara Jambi youth community together with the students where there could confront their artworks and excavation tools with prominent archaeologists, academics and historians.









The students' proposals (part 1)

A collaborative workshop by students of McNally School of Fine Arts, Singapore, and the members of the Padmasana Foundation in Muara Jambi, Indonsesia. Conducted by Elizabeth Inandiak, Heri Dono and Shirley Soh. Curated by Gilles Massot.

Hi Gilles.

I am writing to express my interest in the elective stated and the research trip to Muara Jambi.

This elective will enrich my artmaking and is relevant to my research, and will help further my understanding on pre-Islam of the Malay worldview, which is foreign to me as a Malay myself. I believe there is a small connection to current malay cultural aesthetics and understanding in between. It will be a good observation and finding.

I am interested in the historical and geographical aspect of this trip and am excited to see what I am able to produce for this elective. It will be interesting to work with you, Shirley and the others on this project.

My works are mainly sculptures made of found materials and paintings. I believe that this way of artmaking speaks about the diasporaric situation of the Malays not only in Singapore, also its surrounding. Most of my works revolves around my questioning on Malayness, its culture, beliefs and language.

I hope and looking forward to involve in this project. Thank you!

Regards. Arif 5 May 2016

Gilles Massot Fine Arts Lecturer LASALLE College of the Arts 1 McNally Street Singapore 187940

Dear Mr. Massot

As an artistic individual with a keen interest in reconnoiting the contemporary societal structures the Southeast Asian region. I am interested to be part of *Crossing the Straits* elections semester, I have researched on the inquiry between the geographical location of a place and its evolution. This varied from the property of the strain and even historical archival materials that disinterred latent narratives within a site specific place in Kuala Lumpur. I believe this elective will serve as a great opportunity for me an understand appreciate the historically rich and diversified locally of Neara Jambi, Indonesia which would allow me to cultivate deeper cross-cultural mass the beyond the geographics.

Stepping on to the terrain of Muara Jambi, the communal experience can be contributed through not just by observing the land and the locals, but through the partal of the land and the locals, but through the partal of living the will cultivate various first-hand perspectives. In a land full of rich traditions, history and spirituality, one could discover the chronicles of the mysterious land between physical and emotional assumptional to the chronicles of the mysterious land between physical and emotional assumption of the Muara Jambi cultural and moral values which would also were to gain never assigned.

The topic of interest that I am issen to inquire would be the exchange and transformation of the human body travelling as a vagabond on foreign grounds. I forest make based work along with the use of textile materials to visually transfer the materials to visually transfer the materials and emotional experience I would have with Muara Jambi.

I believe this elective would serve as a great platform for me to contribute and collaborate my experiences and knowledge with Crossing the Straits team.

Thank you.

Yours Sincerely, Priyageetha Diayalan

52

Muara Jambi Proposal

Kung le Pin William

After some discussion I had with Gilles and looking at the outline of this course, I decided to select this elective as a choice to challenge something different and to experience things I have never done before.

First of all I see this as an opportunity to meet new people from different aspects of areas, from artists, writers and to the community there. This is the opportunity for me to gain knowledge from the experienced lecturers, artists, writers and people from other areas.

This project is very rich as well, from cultural, to geographical, community, history and to the environment areas. I see this elective as a stage where I will learn a lot in many areas of subjects, to stand out of my comfort zone and to thrive as an artist as well.

Also it will be a challenging process to be working on the medium of the artworks and to think that we will be carrying the artwork use if to Muara Jambi during the trip. This project is challenging and interesting at the same time.

Muara Jambi is in my country, Indonesia, so without any doubt I see this as a chance to understand my own country even further, from cultural perspective to the landscape/environment at Muara Jambi. And also during the trip I can also be beneficial to be translating the language Bahasa Indonesia to my flow students of Lasalle to those who don't understand the language.

My vision of this project and the trip is to broaden my perspective on every areas of my life and to thrive as an artist for my future practices.

Also that with my main practices is focus on environment and human made disasters, I see this elective as an opportunity to see what is happening there at the site this year. To witness the landscape and environment condition there at Muara Jambi.

I also see this opportunity to gain knowledge from the best, to challenge my own comfort zone, to meet new people, making new friends and to broaden my social connections. I enjoy taking photographs and videos and so I am looking forward for the trip there during December. And for the most matter is obviously the experiences and opportunities I get for this project and trip.

Thank you so much.

Name: Muhammad Masuri Bin Mazlan

Letter of Intent

Dear Mr Gilles.

I am writing this to you – to sign up for the elective subject. I am keen to be part of the Padmasana Foundation activities in its restoration work and sustainable development. This elective will allow me to acquire new conceptual and transferable skills, in return II will be able to exchange my time and labour to facilitate the ongoing project. This opportunity will allow me to sharpen my language skills in speaking Bahasa Indonesia as this increases my social and relationship skills to interact with the local community.

Through this project, I can improve the cultural awareness of the built heritage and also to demonstrate practical acts of solidarity within the community in Muara Jambi, Indonesia. Moreover, I seek to be part of a larger community to make a real difference for the betterment of the society as a whole. This is so as I never delve in such activity in a foreign land with a group of people of various socio-economic backgrounds, working on such a large-scale project. This project spoke to me on a personal and emotional level as I support conservation-restoration of a cultural heritage in its preservation of the material, historical, and design integrity of humanity's built heritage for the current and future generations to appreciate and enjoy.

Given the context of communal living, I can see myself adapting seamlessly with the environment and the people around me. I hope that I will be given the opportunity to be part of this educational trip with a group of esteem team as they will impart me with a great deal of knowledge and guidance. I wish to apply these new inspiration and relevant experience in my future art practices. Thank you and I hope to hear your reply soonest!

Best regards,

Masuri

5 May 2016

Siong Chung Hua

Dear Gilles and Shirley,

RE: Letter of Intent for Crossing the Straits Project 2016

36 years after my birth, I am nowhere closer to calling this land home. I am of the opinion that perhaps I do not belong - not to the culture. was born into, not to any of the languages I was pushed upon, and not within the society the country has raised over the past 50 years.

ror the past two years, my work has centred on societal expectations and roles, citizen and the State, displacement, and the intertwining dynamics between the public and the private space. To explore these themes, I have created various performative video works that utilised the notion of gestures of the everyday, and the personal.

When the Muara Jambi local fervently expressed his desire to protect the culture, history and identity during the presentation. I was very much intrigued and deeply wanted to understand his reasons and intentions. Why would an ancient land matter so much to a modern man. It is my desire to seek the understanding of the meaning of this home. What is a home? Is it an empty space held together by a roof? What is an empty space then? Is it part of the process of communication? Indeed, answers can only concurrent of the process of communication? Indeed, answers can only concurrent of the process of communication? Indeed, answers can only concurrent of the process of communication? Indeed, answers can only concurrent of the process of communication? Indeed, answers can only concurrent of the process of communication? Indeed, answers can only concurrent of the process of communication? Indeed, answers can only concurrent of the process of communication? Indeed, answers can only concurrent of the process of communication? Indeed, answers can only concurrent of the process of communication? Indeed, answers can only concurrent of the process of communication? Indeed, answers can only concurrent of the process of communication? Indeed, answers can only concurrent of the process of communication? Indeed, answers can only concurrent of the process of communication? Indeed, answers can only concurrent of the process of communication? Indeed, answers can only concurrent of the process of communication? Indeed, answers can only concurrent of the process of communication? Indeed, answers can only concurrent of the process of communication? Indeed, answers can only concurrent of the process of communication?

My proposition, therefore, should I be so honoured as to receive a slot in the elective, would include a body of gestural work, inspired by how man perceives the ancient land and its archaeological findings as existing in a transitional state, waiting for the content that will eventually fill it.

Yours sincerely, Chung Hua

Tan Luo Yi

2 May 2016

RE: Application for participation of Crossing the Straits elective I am writing to indicate my interest in participation in the aforementioned activity. I am very interested in history and had been heavily involved in ethnographic research during my time working for Temasek Junior College. I feel that taking on this elective would be a chance for me to further develop that interest as well as picking up more skills from an archaeological perspective. I am also very interested in understanding the sociopolitics of rural life in Southeast Asia through this project; It would also be very beneficial for me to learn about the history and culture of Muara Jambi from an anthropological perspective. One of the most exciting aspects of this elective is the interaction with the locals and the land of Muara Jambi in December I am very inspired by how the locals had initiated this project and reclaimed their heritage that had been largely overlooked by the government. I look forward to experiencing this interaction with these highly passionate people there, to understand their motivations and learn from their determination to contribute to their community. I hope to be able to contribute to the communal experience by bringing my first-aid skills to the table. I am also highly adaptable to my environment, having fixed as a vagrant for a few months in the past as my family used to struggle with homelessness, as well as having lived in a langle for a week as part of a school camp in Pahang, Malaysia. As I have mentioned I am interested in appropriate project from an ethnographical perspective. I am in the stontelling prospects of the culture and history of the Jambi and hope to utilise drawing and sculpture in building a narrative. I earnestly hope that I could be granted the appartunity to understand the rich history and culture that is mind in Muara Jambi. Thank you for the consideration.

Best Regards, Tan Luo Yi



IAN TEE WANG LOONG

CROSSING THE STRAITS ELECTIVE LETTER OF INTENT

Through Crossing The Straits, I hope to gain exposure through working with the experts involved in this project, taping on the experience of Elisabeth Inandiak. Heri Dono and Ms Shirley Soh. This elective presents an amazing opportunity to do so in a theme that resonates with my interest in history. The elective's framework of creating art that deals with a specific community or has social implications is an aspect which I have not dealt with yet, that I think will benefit my own growth and practice.

I am attracted to the fact that Crossing The Straits exceeds into further research through the exchange trip and exhibitions. Personally, it is important that projects have continuity beyond the academic requirements and this elective has such a real grounding which I find appealing. I also look forward to the trip at the end of the elective, as a completely new experience - interacting with the local community and feeling what it is like to live in history. The site as a living ground of history is something that one might not be able to experience in Singapore. This heightened sense of consciousness of history in physical site is something I will take home from this trip.

I am most interested in the historical-archaeological aspect of research in this project. Coming from a background of Southeast Asian History and China studies in A-Levels, I see this as an extension into early periods of pre-colonial history and perhaps to find connections between the archaeological site and 13th century Singapore. The idea of an artistic interpretation/imagination of history is thus extremely fascinating to me, and I foresee myself making a foray into textiles as a medium to address this.

Crossing the Straits elective

Growing up with an interest in the art field, my attention has always been drawn to the primitive sculptures of Southeast Asia: mainly Indonesian ancestor figures, due to its sophisticated approach to the abstraction of the human figure.

For my recent self-proposed project in LASALLE, my works were mostly referenced from Indonesian ancestor sculptures which have had the souls of the deceased transferred to them. I am attracted to the visual aesthetic of the bold unusual form used to depict the human figure. Thus, this stimulated me to look into the transitory period of soul transference and how humans cope with the idea of afterlife.

When this opportunity popped up for me, I could not be more excited. My desire to be part of this project is in hope that I could be enriched by the site and the natural environment to gain inspirations in creating enhanced new works. I wish to be on the ground in person to experience such rich historical and cultural heritage, to deepen my knowledge about the history of Muara Jumbi and to uncover its mysteries. I am positive that this trip would further my research in primitive Indonesia art with an improved understanding of the cultural materials found in the archaeological site of Muara Jambi, under the teachings of reputed art practitioners.

I am hoping to contribute to the communal experience through cultural exchange with the locals, collaborating with them to construct art works that raises awareness of the archaeological site and also assisting them in the restoration projects. Through this exchange, I want to build personal relationships with the local inhabitants because there is so much to learn from them about their culture for me to bring it back to Singapore. I see this experience to be a starting point of a journey and not a conclusive project.

I would choose to employ the techniques of drawing and painting to explore the theme of cross cultural and spiritual encounters in this project.

Gerald

Crossing The Straits -BFA202/BFA302 Letter of Intent

Dionne Yap

2 May 2016 Massot Gilles

Dear Gilies

I'm from BAFAN2A in Fine Arts. Some of my areas of interest lie in natures. The main inspiration behind my self-proposed project last semester was nature and trees in general. As a nature lover, I believe that we should all be living in harmony with the Earth and be environmentally and socially conscious so as to ensure that our resources will not be depleted.

I'm also an animal lover and I believe in conservation. I had volunteered at Ground Up Initiative, a volunteer-driven non-profit community that is shaping a sustainable living kampung and various animal welfare organizations (Hope Dog Rescue and Save Our Street Dogs) before. I look forward to continue making volunteer work part of my life and contribute to the society and the betterment of the world.

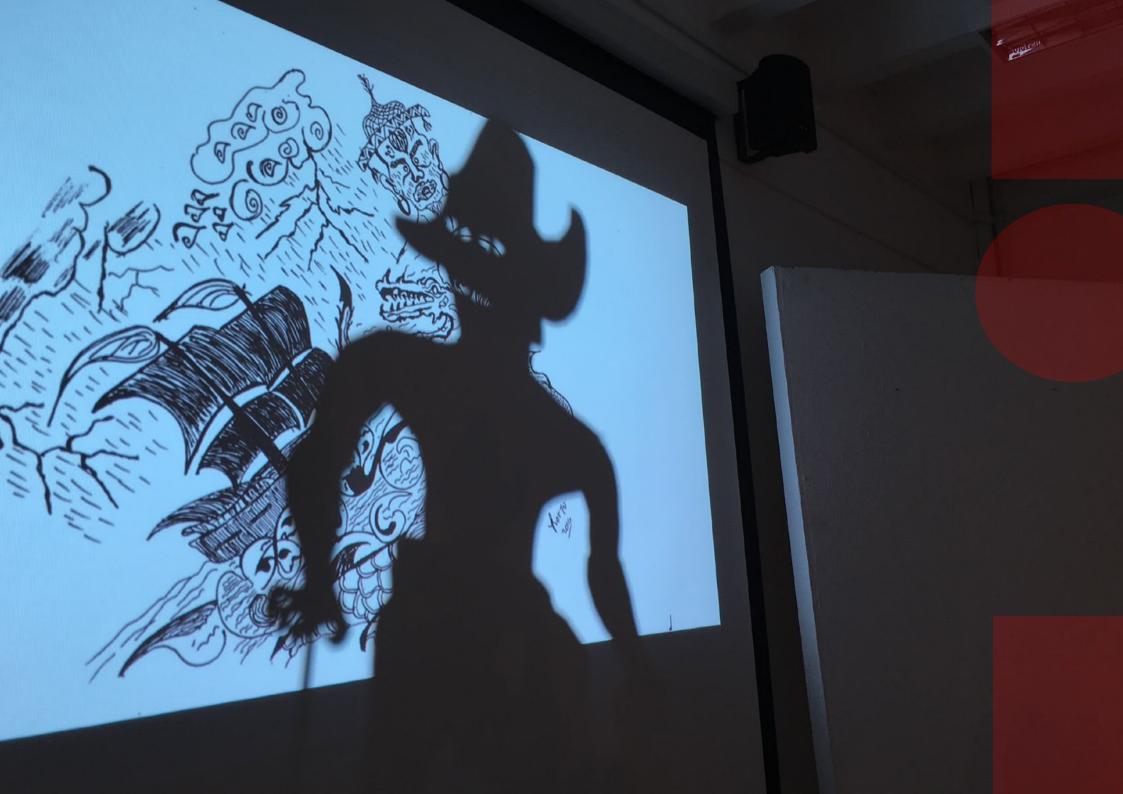
Personally, I aspire to travel around the world, as I believe there's a lot to learn from traveling. I believe that it will be a great learning opportunity for a student like me, to challenge myself with this project as I get immersed in a culturally and historically rich place to observe, to learn and get inspired from it.

Futhermore. I think that this project chose an interesting approach, as participants are required to come out with an artwork after the workshop in school, even before visiting the site thus there will be a lot of research work, mapping and visualising of the imagined place, which will allow some freedom and creativity as we learn and explore about the themes.

I enjoy reading books like 'Creating True Peace' and The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching', written by Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, which introduces the core teachings of Buddhism and thus I'm keen to get the experience to re-enact part of the pilgrim chronicle of Yijing. I look forward to learn more through tales, testimonies and accounts by ancient pilgrims and the artefacts and archaeological finds that we will be able to study through the workshop. Other than my interest in Buddhism teachings, I'm also interested in the old Malay, Javanese and Sanskrit mantras. The possibility of being able to fashion the significant historical figures into teracotta, ceramic statues excites me.

I think that the 'Crossing the strait' out of classroom learning opportunity will be a wonderful eye opener. I have always believed in learning outside of the classroom as I learn better with hands-on opportunities and through first hand observations.

I'll be delighted if I were to get chosen for this elective. I hope to be able to offer and contribute to the the Padmasana Foundation whatever they are looking for and will be very happy and honoured, should I be chosen for this elective and go on this learning journey and eventually present my artworks to the community.











Once every few months, visiting artists from different walks of life and countries grace us with their amazing talents at LASALLE. This time round, we had the talented and multidisciplinary visual artist Heri Dono, to kickstart one of the semester's most intensive electives - Crossing the Straits - a collaborative module (with the Indonesian community and artists) that investigates deep into the magical and sacred history of Candi Muara Jambi, (a Buddhist temple complex dated about the 11th to 13th century CE) in Sumatra, Indonesia.

At the end of three intensive workshop days, we finally got to sit down (enthralled and extremely humbled) with the jovial storyteller. Yet, his charming and captivating demeanour is a stark contrast to his multi-faceted, nuanced and politically aggressive artwork. Arguably one of the first contemporary Indonesian artists of his generation to break into the global art scene in the 1990s, how does an international star of that level handle the artist's ego and the continuing pressure to create? The nine elective students from the BA(Hons) Fine Arts Programmeme Level 2 and 3, who were participants of the workshop, put Heri in the hot seat, ring philosophical questions with enthusiasm.

"First, we have to criticise ourselves, not to criticise others, because we are a witness of our work, on our lives. So artists, when creating the work or making a criticism, we are witnesses. It's not about the ego, but the individual expression, which is universal. Some say that if you're an artist, you're egoistic. This is a difficult expression through your self portrait because sometimes when you describe yourself through drawing, it's under your consciousness," said Heri.

We looked at him in awe at his calm and Zen reply, each sheepishly remembering the ego ares we had during the course of our programmeme. But what happens when someone comes up to him with an unintentionally different interpretation of his artwork or declaring his or her dislike?

"The work engages multiple interpretations from everyone because sometimes the artist isn't aware about what they make as an expression. This is a comparison between Ego and Super Ego. If you're in Super Ego, we know about our Ego, and therefore, we make the distance. When we create the work, it is dif cult to be part of the audience because sometimes you are still in Ego, from your perception. You don't want to listen or look at your work from other people's perceptions. So when I create the work, I become the audi-

ence, so as to be aware of the criticisms. We have to respect them; we have to let them be critical about our works because we need them to. We cannot afford to hide from it; it is part of our expression."

As we continued to contemplate his wise words and layered meanings, Heri continued in his deadpan manner (a must for storytellers) about a challenge he faced when he was a child.

"I almost drowned in the sea in North Jakarta when I was 12 years old. What is surprising, maybe because I drank a lot of sea water, my mind now always think about aesthetic."

We burst into uncontrollable laughter.

And without missing a beat, Heri continued, "When I was drowning, I felt like I was walking in slow motion in the colourful water. When you drown, your movements will be like this. My movements however, were like this [Heri started gesticulating in some recognisably painting movements]... so maybe that's why I think everything in aesthetic. And the colour turquoise." Right on cue, we hollered with delight on this surprising tidbit.

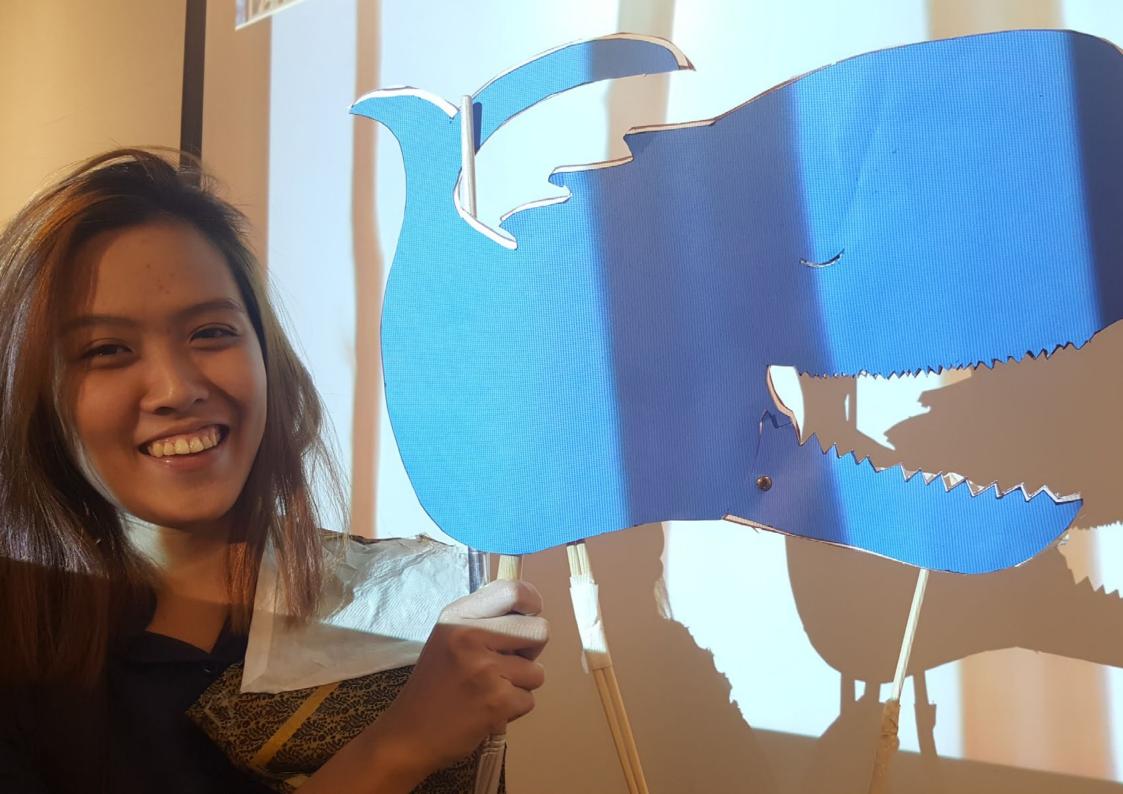
Speaking of aesthetics, as students, we all know too well the struggles of understanding the art terminology from all disciplines and the accompanying complex theories. Does it really matter beyond an institution's walls?

"Sometimes we don't need to be worried about how to get the contemporary art terminology when it's already there," Heri explains. "When I was young, I wanted to be an artist. But when I'm an artist, I want to be a mediator. I travel to residency programmemes to share. This belongs to everyone, the ow of ideas; it is like a well for water. If nobody uses this water, it becomes poison, as there's no circulation. If you give it to your neighbour, the source will be fresh. Ideas are the same. If you keep them, it becomes poison to your body, and you don't even know which idea you want to explore because it has already been poisoned. You need to make it empty in order to create new things."

But what happens if one is unable to create, especially when under pressure?

"My process to create art is to create from stagnation. Because stagnation is a problem for artists. So when I work in painting, I make two different sketches - a sketch for painting or sculpture, and another as a plan for performance or installation. So when I'm bored about this, I write to contemplate about the concept. And when I'm bored about that, I try to create the installation. When I'm bored from installations, I create for performance. And when I'm bored from performance, I do some discussions with others. I'm never finished with this side of creation. The problem with artists not becoming successful is because of stagnation. This is my hobby besides the arts.





















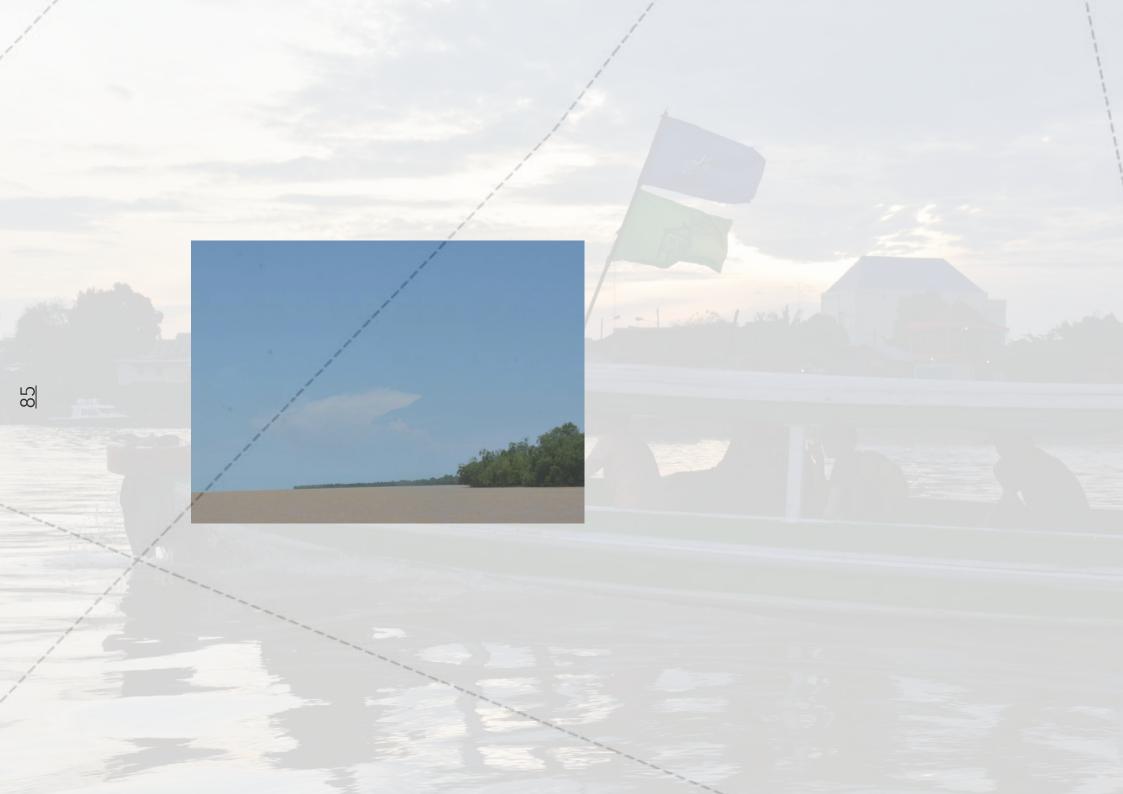
















Crossing the Straits developed through a series of circumstances that seemed to follow their own logic. And remarkably enough, no matter how unforeseen or stressful these events might be, they would always turn out to be for a better. One of the most telling stories pertaining to that aspect of the project is probably the way we were forced to reconsider the whole programmeme of our stay in Muara Jambi at the last minute, due to a last minute change of air line schedule.

A mere few days before our departure I found myself rushing to the Singapore office of Lion Air to check if the flight schedule had REALLY been changed from two daily flights to one single evening flight without prior warning. That sudden change of timing was cutting our stay in Muara Jambi by a full day, thus forcing us to revisit a programme that had taken month to establish through email communication with the members of Padmasana. Most importantly, it badly affected our plans for a grand arrival in the form of a procession inspired by our historical predecessors. Right at an early stage of its development, a key element of the project had been the idea to re-enact the arrivals of Yijing and Atisha in Muara Jambi. Already, the envisioned crossing of the straits by sea had to be abandoned due to mere practicalities such as monsoon season and limited duration of the trip. We had no choice but to fly over the strait. This envisioned ceremonial arrival by boat on the Batanghari River was the last vestige of the early wild naval dreams. And now an airline business decision was throwing even that last vestige of a grand idea overboard... But the huge blow turned out to be all for the better when in the end the procession became a grand finale instead of a grand opening.

In fact this shift made much more sense from a human dynamic point of view, since after five days spent together individuals from both side of the strait had come to know one another better and could interact in a more truthful manner. Time restraint had also forced us to drop the initial plan of a full day boat journey to the river estuary, so we chose instead to focus on the procession that became the apex of the collaboration by giving its full meaning to the careful planning done by Padmasana to organise the event.

The organisation of the procession had been left entirely to their vision and they had planned it in such way that it became a collaborative piece of performance involving the whole village community. The welcoming ceremony on the bank of the river was presided by the village officers and directed by the leader of Customary Law who had decided to use the highest form of language to suit the importance of the situation. Next the village group of Kompang (Malay drums) greeted the visiting party as they step on the road leading to the temples site where Borju was waiting seated in a lotus position the stand, which

historians believe to have been used for teaching. He was acting the part of Serlingpa, while in our group Ian Tee was the Chinese Yijing and Priya the Indian Atisha. The other members of the visiting party were following with diverse offerings. After performing their ceremonial greetings to the Master, the devotees then sat with him on the stand to attend a demonstration of silat, the traditional Malay martial art performed by a group of local experts. This was followed by a dance of topeng, or masked performers, re-enacting an ancient tales of lepers who had been chased from their village to eventually find a new home in Muara Jambi. The final photograph of the procession participants saw a motley crew of over forty people gather on the stand.

The afternoon procession was followed by an evening of dance, singing and merry making during which the entertaining musical performance by Borjoe and his wild musical group had the whole village burst into laughter. The lively colourful celebration was certainly the best conclusion we could have ever imagined for our stay in Muara Jambi. One might wonder if such a high-spirited exchange could have taken place had we performed the procession upon our arrival as first planned. Or wasn't it rather that day's sequence of events that had been the vector leading to such a successful conclusion? In any case, the stressful change of schedule had proven to be a blessing in disguise.

































The students of Crossing the Straits elective along with lecturers Gilles Massot, Shirley Soh, French writer Elizabeth D. Inandiak and Indonesian artist Heri Dono undertook a journey from Singapore to Muara Jambi, Sumatra in December 2016. It was part of a five-day exchange programme based on the elective in which students responded to their own preconceived notions of the various social, cultural, economic and geographical dimensions of the project. Bearing their works as gifts in exchange with the Jambi community and the Padmasana Foundation, the students were prepared to encounter the foreign across the Straits.

Muara Jambi is located right in the Jambi Province of Sumatra, Indonesia. Even though its present inhabitants are primarily Muslims, it is rich in its Hindu-Buddhist cultural and historical context. The site consists of archaeological Hindu-Buddhist temple compounds which dates back to a civilisation during the 7th century CE.

At the crack of dawn, the group was welcomed by members of Padmasana in Jambi City and were taken to the Muara Jambi village on a motor boat through the river channel of Batanghari River. Throughout the two-hour long ride, the landscape of Jambi was consistently ridden with industrial plants fogged with haze. Stepping foot onto the wood-prone lands of Muara Jambi, the group was greeted by the sight of rural life - villagers washing laundry on the river shores, to stilt houses and rocks of live poultry strutting along soil cracks.

Borju holding up one of the hand-made topengs (masks) that are frequently featured in performances put up by Padmasana Foundation.

The archaeological sites consisted of seven temple compounds spread throughout the Muara Jambi regency. The temples are known as Candis and each had a speci c name given to it such as Candi Astano, Candi Gumpung, Candi Gedong I and Gedong II, Candi Tinggi I and Tinggi II, Candi Kembar Batu, and the Kedaton Temple. The temples were made entirely of terracotta bricks which was held together by rubbing the surfaces with water, thus creating its own adhesive. However, most of the temples were initially discovered under heavy foliage as piles of rubble that was the outcome of years of natural disasters. Through intensive conservation, seven of these temple compounds have since been restored to its best possible original state. The temples functioned as likely sites for pilgrims travelling from China and India in search of knowledge, as a shrine that kept the ashes of monks, as a library as well as a place for meditation. Moreover, each of the temples is interconnected through river canals, which used to bring in water into the temple compounds as well as served as a mode of transportation along the Batanghari River. The Indonesian government has since sanctioned this archaeological site as of cultural heritage and on the tentative list of candidates for UNESCO World Heritage.



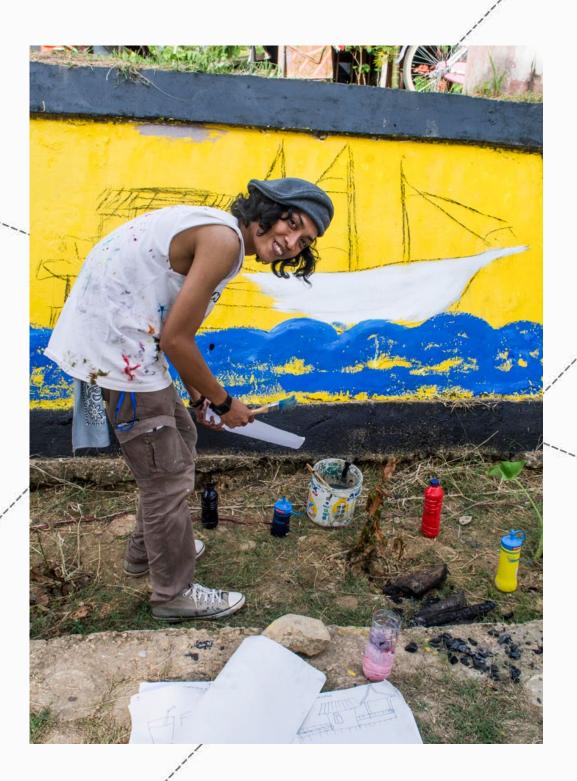


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Throughout the stay, the villagers welcomed the group by putting up performances on stage and without fail, prepared delectable spreads for lunch and dinner at various village houses. In return, the students held workshops, such as silk-screening, wire sculptures and painting on canvasses, in which the village children participated. These were organised by the students and the members of Padmasana Foundation.

The highlight of the trip was the ritual procession which was carried out by the students along with the lecturers, Elizabeth and Heri on the final day. The procession was a re-enactment of what was envisaged as the signi cant meeting of a prominent Indian Buddhist master, Atisha, Chinese pilgrim, Yijing and a renowned Sumatran master, Lama Serlingpa. The procession involved the entire village community, including the chief of Muara Jambi, as well as other dignitaries. Led by a band of kompang (hand-held drums) players, the procession moved into a temple compound where the meeting was held. Being received by Lama Serlingpa, gifts by the students were bestowed and in exchange, the guests were honoured with music and dance. At the end of the hour-long procession, everyone gathered and immortalised the celebratory moment with photographs.

Before leaving for Singapore the next day, the villagers put up a final show to which everyone gathered to participate by cheering and dancing along with the hosts and children to some famous Jambi music. It was a bittersweet moment, one in which the community of Muara Jambi welcomed us with open arms, across the Straits.







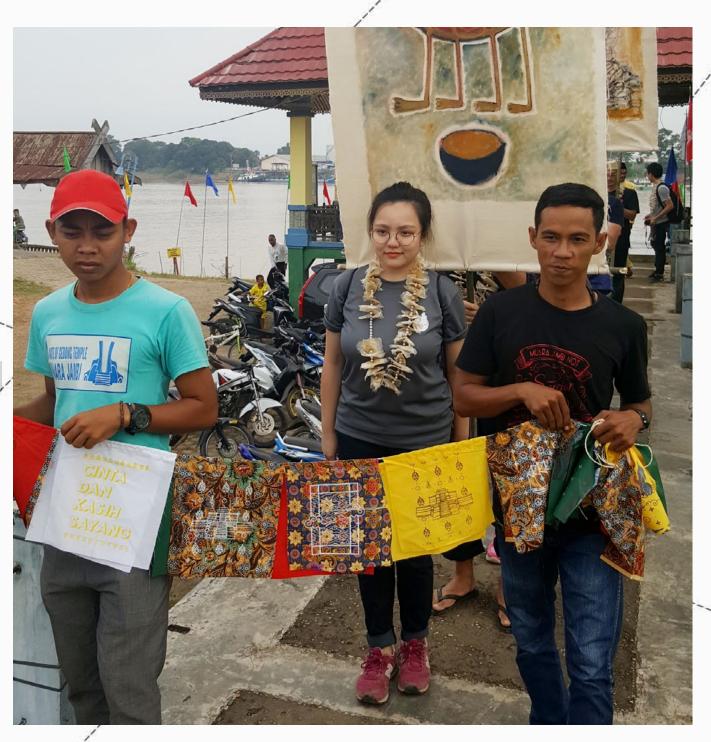




































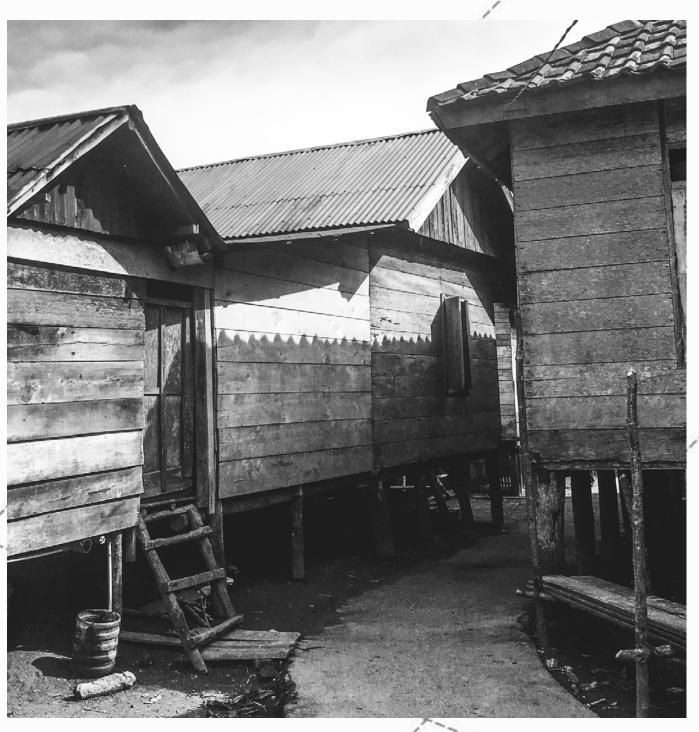
Padmasana Foundation



The Night before the procession, the council of village elders gathered to discuss the type of ceremonial welcoming they should opt for.

According to Borjoe, after lengthy discussion they decided that the occasion was calling for the use of the highest form of traditional language or seloko.

The Seloko adat Jambi is a cornerstone of traditional Malay culture that takes the form of proverbs and advices of an ethical or moral nature, ennunciated in the literary stucture of pantun or short poems of four lines with alternate rhymes.



SELOKO LASALLE

On the boat crossing the Batanghari river, the visiting party (LASALLE students) is represented by: Kemas Abdul Haya.

On the pier, the greeting party (Muara Jambi villagers) is represented by Ilias, the leader of the Customary law.

KATO BAJAWAB DI LAMAN

QUESTION AND ANSWER ON THE VILLAGE'S SITE (The two parties are going to have a conversation in the form of seloko on the village's site)

MUNTING KUDO PELANJANG BUKIT

To fulfil their mandate, the two masters on the tongue will face any obstacles like a horse running on a hill

The visiting party:

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh

The greeting party:

Malaikum salam

The visiting party:

Datuk-datuk, nenek-mamak, tuo-tuo tengganai, alim ulama, cerdik pandai, yang gedang betua, yang kecil sakti ,Yang gedang tidak kami sebutkan namonyo, yang kecil tidak kami imbau gelarnya.

All of you, grandmas mamak, community leaders, religious guides, clever elders, great sages, young wise men, no need to mention the titles of the great men, nor the names of the young ones.

Pantun by the visiting party:

Lapun-lapun keMuara Kerap-kerap ke angso duo Mohon ampun kepada yang tuo-tuo Mohon maaf kepada yang muda-muda

Nets casting the estuary The call of two gregarious geese



Ask the elders for forgiveness And forgive the young.

The greeting party:

Terutama sekali kepado datuk arus nan badengung

First of all, you have to be strong in your leadership.

Bungkal nan piawai
Be very wise as a leader.
Kalau makan berani ngabisin
When you eat, you must have the courage to finish all
the food served to you.

Kalau netak berani mutusin You must have the courage to take fair decisions.

Ya itu pemimpin negeri Yes, such is a state leader

Pantun by the visiting party:

Dari jauh kapal melintang Pasang layar luan kemudi Dari jauh kami ko datang Ado hajat maksud di hati

From afar the boat is crossing Unfolding the sail at the bow From afar we're coming May our wish enter our hearts.

The visiting party goes on:

Kini maksud kedatangan kami kemari iyolah nak mencari rumah nan batuah kampung nan bapang hulu alam nan barajo.

Our purpose of coming here is to search for a home and for the rules of a village that has a natural leader and a lord.

The greeting party:

Kini kami nak batanyo maksud kedatangan datuk berserta



rombongan ke kampung nan bapang hulu alam nan barajo iko apo?

Now we want to ask what is your purpose of your group to come to our village that has a natural leader and a lord?

The visiting party:

Maksud kami beserto rombongan datang ke mari iyolah untuk menuntut ilmu di kampung iko Tapi sebelumnyo datuk kami jugo mintak sisik siang dulu.

Our purpose of our group to come here is to request knowledge in this village. But before we would like to ask if there is any prohibition or taboo.

The greeting party:

Kini ko tuk da'do pantang larang. Tapi ado yang dak boleh datuk buat. Pertamo: kalu datuk berjalan, betemu nan basawar, jangan ditempu. Yang kedua: kalu bertemu nan barebo jangan dibongkar.

Here there is no prohibition. But there are things that you should not do. First: if you walk around and encounter some boundaries around the fields or the fish pounds, do not transgress them. Second: if you encounter a fallen tree, don't cut its branches (don't approach a woman or a man who is already married).

The visiting party:

Baiklah tuk kini la tau kami pantang larang yang datuk jelaskan. Jadi dengarlah pantu dari kami

Very good, now we know the prohibitions that you have explained to us. So please hear this pantun from us.

Bukan cempedak sembarang cempedak (buah mirip nangka)

Cempedak tumbuh di belakang rumah Bukan tegak (berdiri) sembarang tegak

Karno dak tau jalan ke rumah

This is not just any cempedak fruit (ressembling the jack fruit).

The cempedak fruit grows in the back yard We just stand still and shy.

Because we don't know the way inside (your home/village).

The greeting party:

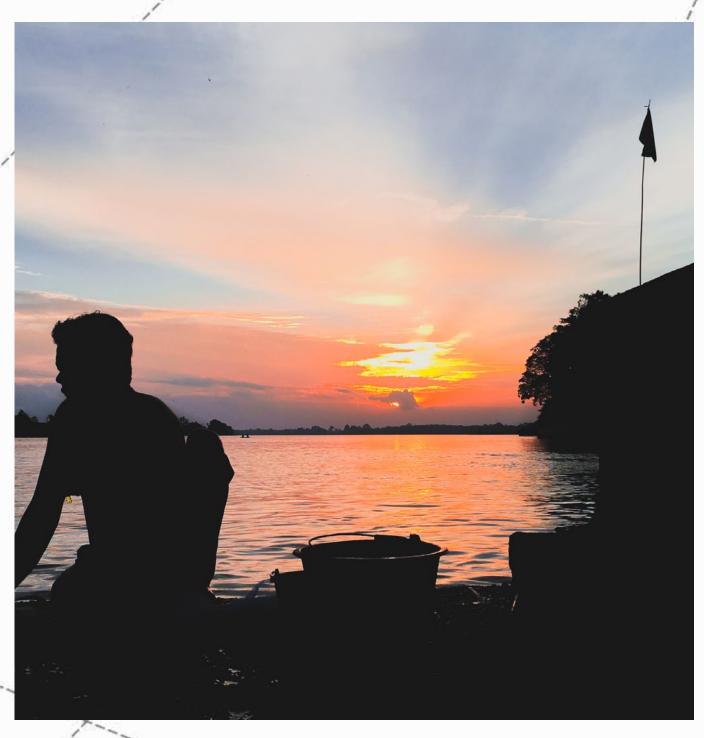
Bukan cempedak sembarang cempedak

Cempedak tumbuh di tepi sungai Bukannyo datuk itu tegak sembarang tegak

Karno ado tuo-tuo tengganai (karena ada orang yg dihormati)

This is not just any cempedak fruit
The cempedak fruit grows on the riverside.

Do not just stand still and shy Because there are elders community leaders.







In the procession re-enacting the arrival of Yijing and Atisha in Muara Jambi, together with the villagers and the students of LASALLE, I was chosen to play the role of Master Serlingpa/Dharmakirti. To play this role properly, I searched for the essence of Serlingpa's teachings, the essence of his humanity. This great master has developed a balance and harmony in his life, by sharing his qualities with all the creatures. I tried to visualise the original procession, as Atisha himself describes it in his "Journey to the Master", written 1,000 years ago. It was not a mere religious procession, but also a very artistic one. Atisha writes:

"In order to offer a beautiful spectacle to Master Serlingpa, I asked all the monks versed in the three scriptural collections to dress in the three robes dyed with saffron from Kashmir. The procession resembled a five-coloured rainbow."

So to re-enact it with artists from Singapore and from Muara Jambi was very adequate. This collaboration made a lot of sense. I tried to reflect that there was indeed no time gap between the original procession and the one we were re-enacting 1,000 years later. When Atisha and his retinue arrived at Gumpung Temple where I was sitting in the lotus position on the paved podium, I was ready to welcome very sincere visitors who were really willing to study, to learn about the local wisdom of the site. The arrival of our friends from LASALLE took place precisely in the same mind-set, on this very sacred site. The procession unfolded outside the boundaries of the academic programme. We were two different people, from two different countries and cultures, but we merged.

The re-enacting of Atisha's arrival inspired me a year later to write a poem entitled: "Berguru di Puncak Ilmu", "To the foot of the Master, at the top of Science". You have to look for knowledge starting from very low to the top. Then, from the top you can spray it down. It's like the rain, which can fertilize the earth by falling from the top of the sky. Our ancestors were first worshipping the trees. Than they realized there was something higher, like the wind, the rain, the sun. They looked up to the top and returned their vision down to earth to benefit others. Here is my poem dedicated to my LASALLE friends:



Dalam prosesi yang mewujudkan kembali kedatangan Yijing dan Atisha di Muara Jambi bersama masyarakat desa dan para siswa LASALLE, saya dipilih untuk berperan sebagai Guru Serlingpa / Dharmakirti. Untuk memainkan peran ini dengan benar, saya mencari esensi ajaran Serlingpa, esensi kemanusiaannya. Guru agung ini telah mengembangkan keseimbangan dan kelarasan dalam hidupnya, dengan membagi sifat-sifat baiknya dengan semua makhluk. Saya mencoba memvisualisasikan prosesi asli, seperti yang dijelaskan oleh Atisha dalam "Perjalanan menjumpai Sang Guru", yang ditulis 1000 tahun yang lalu. Itu bukan prosesi agama belaka, tetapi juga sangat berseni. Atisha menulis:

"Untuk membuat sebuah pawai persembahan bagi Guru Serlingpa, aku meminta semua biksu yang fasih mendaraskan tripitaka untuk mengenakan tiga jubah yang telah dicelup dalam safron Kashmir. Barisan itu menyerupai pelangi pancarwarna."

Jadi mewudjukan kembali peristiwa itu dengan para seniman dari Singapura dan dari Muara Jambi sangat tepat. Kolaborasi ini sangat bermakna. Saya coba merenungkan bahwa memang tidak ada kesenjangan waktu antara prosesi yang asli dan prosesi yang kami ulangi 1000 tahun kemudian. Ketika Atisha dan rombongannya tiba di Candi Gumpung tempat saya duduk bersila , saya siap untuk menyambut tamu yang tulus yang betul-betul mau belajar, mencari ilmu dan kearifan lokal di kawasan itu. Kedatangan teman-teman kami dari LASALLE diperjodohkan dalam pola pikiran yang sama, di tempat yang suci itu. Prosesi itu berlangsung di luar batas-batas programme akademik. Kita, dua pihak itu, berasal dari suku, kebudayaan, negara yang berbeda, tapi bisa dijodohkan.

Setahun kemudian, perwujudan kembali kedatangan Atisha itu memberi saya inspirasi untuk menulis sebuah puisi berjudul: "Berguru di Puncak Ilmu". Kita harus mencari pengetahuan mulai dari yang sangat rendah ke atas. Kemudian, dari atas kita bisa disebarkan ke bawah. Seperti hujan, yang dapat menyuburkan bumi dengan jatuh dari atas langit. Leluhur kita pertama kali menyembah pohon. Lalu mereka menyadari ada sesuatu yang lebih tinggi, seperti angin, hujan, matahari. Mereka melihat ke atas dan mengembalikan visi mereka ke bumi untuk memberi manfaat bagi orang lain. Ini puisi saya yang dipersembahkan kepada teman-teman LASALLE kami:

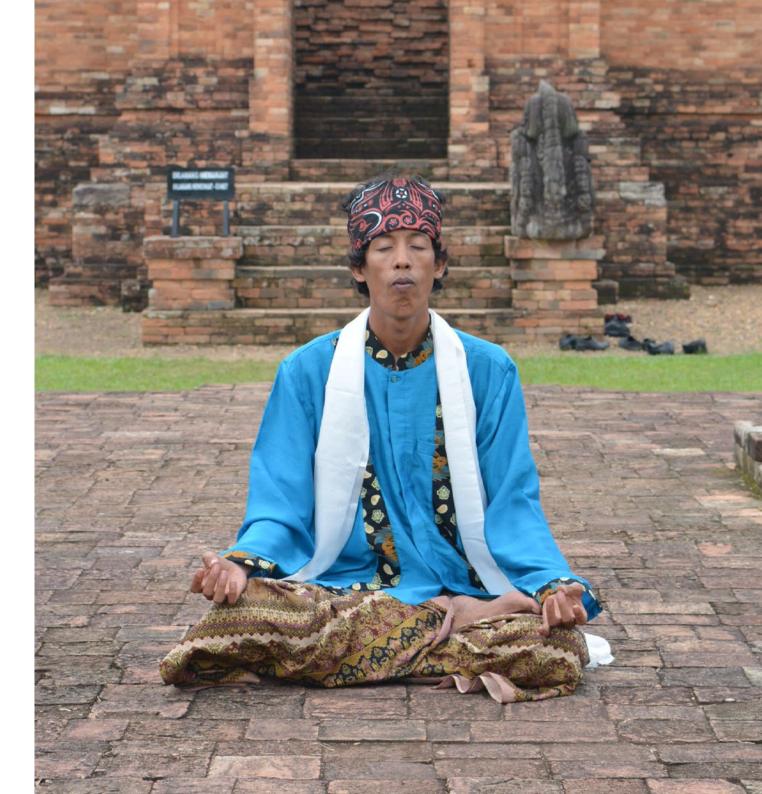


TO THE FOOT OF THE MASTER, AT THE TOP OF SCIENCE

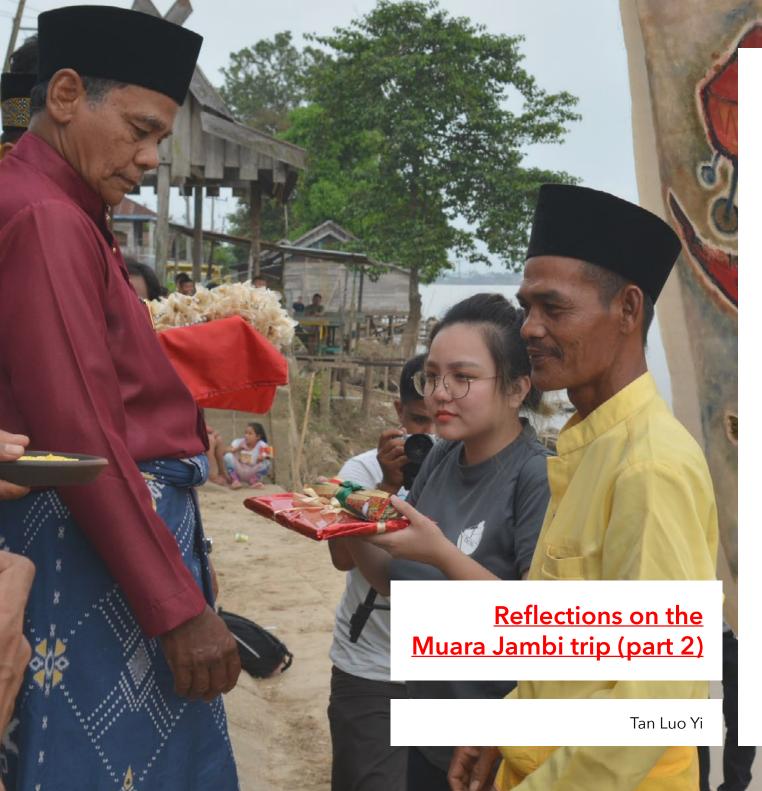
The sail unfolds in the middle of the ocean... Waves...storms and thunderbolts Take you to the Master The incense's smoke raises high Fusing within the night Mantra...mantra infinitely The seekers of peace look inward into their soul On the top of the hill science is waiting for them In friendly meditation silent and in peace You got a fragment of enlightenment With no treasure no throne in return

BERGURU DI PUNCAK ILMU

Layar terbentang
di tengah samudra...
Ombak...topan dan halilintar
Mengantarmu kepada sang guru...
Asap dupa Membumbung tinggi
Menyatu dalam malam
Mantra...mantra yang tak berujung
Dalam batin para pencari
kedamaiaan jiwa...
Di puncak bukit ilmu telah menanti
Dalam samadi berteman
sepi dalam damai
Seberkas lembaran
pencerahan kau dapat
Tampa imbalan Harta dan tahta







Crossing the Straits was a multi-disciplinary elective that was conducted for Fine Arts students in December 2016. The project was based on historical and socio-political research into the archaeological sites that surround the village. These sites are the Muara Jambi Temple Compounds, believed to hold the remnants of an immense ancient Buddhist university that flourished from the 7th to 14th centuries. This was a large university that accomplished students from around Asia visited in order to seek the wisdom of the great Buddhist teacher Serlingpa, before travelling back to their own lands to share his teachings. The people of Muara Jambi are proud of this piece of precious history that sits on their land, protecting and treasuring it as an essential part of their identity.

This is all due to the conservation efforts of Padmasana Foundation, a non-profit cultural organisation made up of locals from Muara Jambi, spear-heading educational tours programmemes that educated the villagers about their own history. Within this foundation, there are four departments: namely Sekolah Alam Raya Muara Jambi (Saramuja), Macro Film International, Dwarapalamuja and Pemuda Peduli Lingkungan (PPLMJ). These four have collaborated seamlessly, working together to promote the conservation of the history of Muara Jambi, with Saramuja being concerned with educating children of the history of Muara Jambi, Dwarapalamuja being concerned with the advocacy of conserving the temple compounds, Macro Film International involved with documentation and campaigning for the programmemes run by Padmasana, and PPLMJ being concerned with the environmental upkeep of the temple compounds.

It was our first morning with Padmasana Foundation, having only a brief meeting the previous night as they welcomed us at the hotel lobby before we settled in to rest with great relief for the night. The whole of the day before had been agonisingly filled with flight delays and never-ending customs clearances. Our group consisted of nine MSoFA students, Fine Arts lecturers Gilles Massot and Shirley Soh, promi-



nent Indonesian artist Heri Dono, and French author and researcher Elizabeth Inandiak. We only learnt later that the Padmasana team, made up of young people from Muara Jambi village, barely caught a few hours of sleep themselves; after waiting for us for hours at the hotel lobby just to give us a warm welcome, they had returned to their headquarters immediately after to continue with work, just to ensure that plans for our visit would go smoothly in the days ahead. For the rest of our time there, Borju and his team of dedicated young people, who were as young as 15-years old, did their best to ensure our well-being, from camping outside the guest house that we resided in to ensure our safety, to riding us to and fro on the backs of their motorcycles. Needless to say, their bright, genuine spirit and sincere hospitality was a refreshing experience as one of the highlights of this educational trip.

Our trip to Muara Jambi was meant to be a community outreach project in collaboration with Padmasana Foundation as well as the villagers there. This was also in line with Padmasana Foundation and their objectives. In one of the afternoons there, we conducted silkscreen printing, wire sculpting and acrylic painting workshops together with the children of the village, while Heri painted murals on the existing structures together with the local artists that depicted the history and heritage of Muara Jambi and the Temple Compounds. It was a thoroughly enjoyable day and marked only one of the ways of community art in which Padmasana engaged with the community; other ways included organising cultural events, performances and even performing arts of socio-political nature.

Considering that Padmasana is a non-profit organisation, the resources they have is precious little and not a lot of money could be dedicated towards art materials. However, Borju and his team are highly innovative in nature, utilising inexpensive materials and improvising to craft impressive props for their work. In one of the performances that we were privileged to see, the members of Padmasana performed an intense scene that expresses the theme,

man-versus-industrialisation. During the performance, ominous music plays while the performers, dressed like machines and contorting intimidatingly, surround and eventually overcome a lone man while he laments the tragedies committed against the environment as a result of rapid industrialisation. It was an emotionally charged performance that left us clinging to the edge of our seats despite our not being able to fully understand the content of the words being performed due to the language barrier. Afterwards, Borju told us that cost was a big consideration for all their performances and he had struggled with the question of making something impactful while also keeping to something affordable within their means. Eventually, he improvised by wrapping the limbs and torsos of the performers with aluminium foil, and also by making use of the

naturally pitch black environment and manipulating the lighting effects to bring out the mood of the performance.

Despite the limitations, it led to an extremely effective performance that was at once intense. Additionally, much of the very professional work that they have produced in their outreach efforts, such as photography, videography, graphic design and silkscreen printing, were self-taught by means of watching YouTube videos on the internet. There is much to be learnt from the resourceful and innovative spirit that Padmasana has exemplified in our short time there.

Ultimately, Crossing the Straits was a beautiful learning experience which gave us an opportunity to collaborate with a group of passionate artists who did not call themselves artists. Their selfless dedication to protecting and contributing to their own community was as unquestioningly necessary in their lives, a brilliant facet to their mission, as compared to the self-centred pragmatism that we were used to expecting. All of us agreed that this was an experience that has affected us extremely and it would stay with us for a long time to come.





On the last night of our stay there, I spoke with Borju to convey my gratitude for the hospitality that we had received and my respect for the work that he and his team had done. Shaking my hand, he shared briefly about how Padmasana had struggled hard when they were divided, and how only by combining all their efforts and working as a team did they manage to reach their objectives. With a wide grin, he wished me all the best and hoped that I would work just as hard with my own community back in Singapore with whatever I have learnt while in Muara Jambi.

Being used to the comforts of city life, adapting to rural environments had been a challenge for me. Living in a kampung is largely described as simple living. On the contrary, I actually feel that it is very complex, with their lives being so closely intertwined with decades of heritage and culture. I couldn't help but compare it to the almost complete lack of it in my own life back in Singapore. Hearing from the villagers themselves, we learn that they are also encountering the problem of gradually losing their heritage due to young people looking for difference in their lives, and I wonder if the loss of heritage will always be the price of progress and innovation.

Witnessing the ancient temples of Muara Jambi was yet another beautiful experience. As a Buddhist, I was overwhelmed by the thought that I was in the same location as the great Buddhist teachers and scholars that lived in the tenth century. Without them, the world would not be able to study Buddhism as vastly as they did today. Thinking about how studying Buddhism in the past was such an arduous and dangerous journey, I was reminded once again of how fortunate I am to be able to study Buddhism as easily as I could. As I sat in Padmasana Foundation's base camp looking at the various ancient artefacts that the villagers had collected from the Batanghari River, I was moved and touched by the intensity of the moment. The people of Padmasana Foundation had voluntarily collected and archived these artefacts with little to no funding



from the government and pure unadulterated hard work and perseverance. This really struck me as the most inspiring aspect of the young people of Padmasana Foundation. Despite the fact that there is no proper infrastructure in place for them to archive and exhibit the artefacts, they keep and record fervently in hope that these treasures could one day be shown to the world, which they rightly belong to. I stand by my statement that they are heroes and true boddhisatvas. I have always felt frustrated with my own inability to afford to be an artist as easily as others could. For a while I had resented this and allowed it to cripple my art-making process. Looking at the creative energy of the people in Muara Jambi despite limited resources was an eye-opener and I will learn to imitate this heartening spirit for the rest of my days."I've come to be in the presence of Guru Serlingpa. I've come here to give meaning to my life."

This was one of Atisha's quotes compiled by Elizabeth that displayed in the To Leave Home is Already Half the Journey exhibition, one year after LA-SALLE's visit to Muara Jambi. Mulling over it while walking around the gallery during the exhibition's final day of running, I felt that this seeking and learning spirit was the crux of this spanning project. It is the very spirit that Padmasana exemplifies in their noble mission in preserving and promoting their heritage, as well as being exemplified in our collaborative effort as artists to understand this huge network of history that has yet to be understood.

SUYO

The very study of Buddhism is to seek out a greater meaning and significance to life. As monks and scholars have done so hundreds of years ago in their journey to Muara Jambi, so have we in the 21st century.



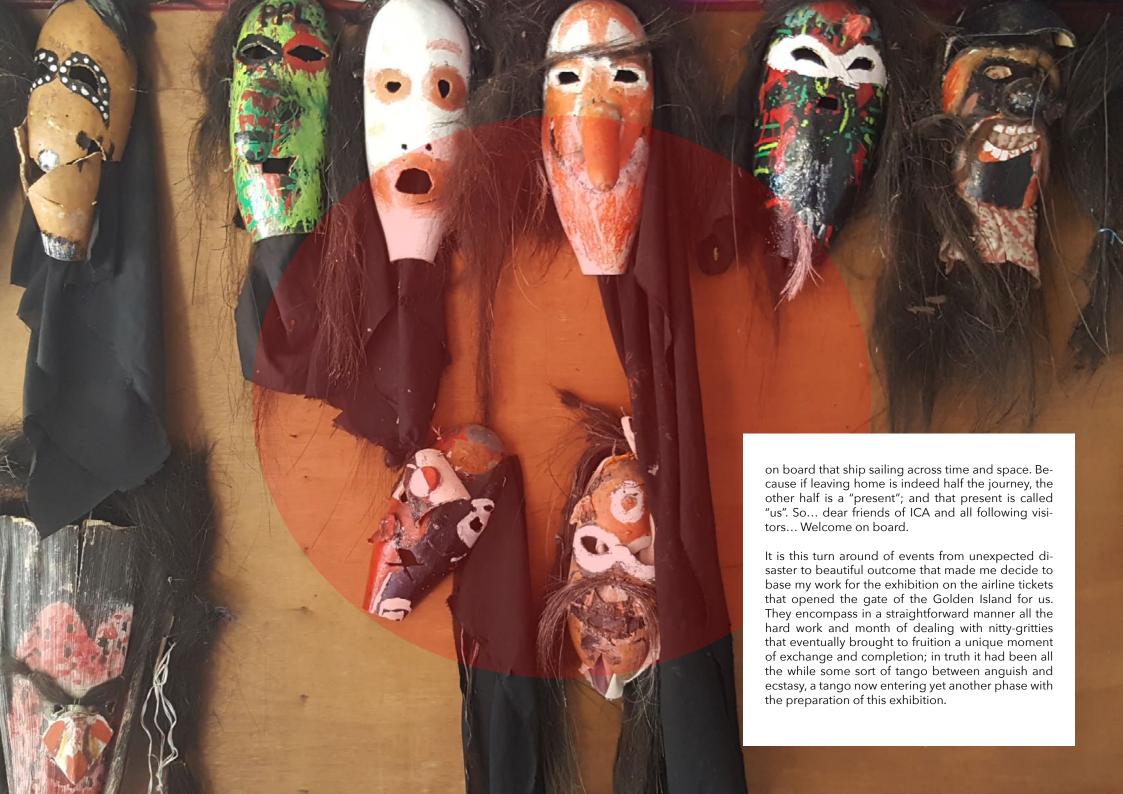


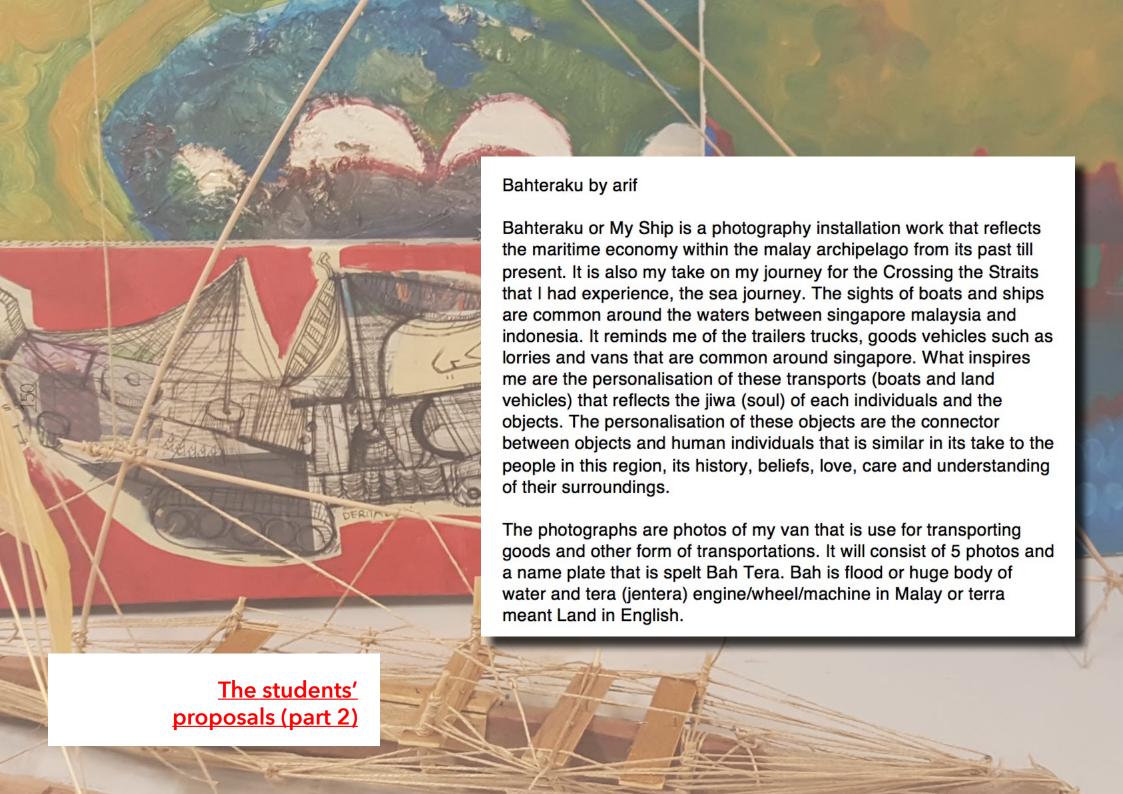












TITLE

facets of a land in Suvarnadvipa

PROPOSAL

Navigating on to foreign shores of Muaro Jambi while possessing only a handful of information, the journey I took ensued me new connections. A land that was rich with traditions and history, still valued at present time. The horizon that met in between the sky and the Batanghari River, smogged with industrial fuel received me. From the humility of the commoners, to the influence of Hindu-Buddhist teachings onto the present Malay-Islam demography, the Candis of Muaro Jambi and its remnants nestled under the vegetation still vibrant in its reddish-hue to the the language of Bahasa and the meditations of the Tibetan singing bowl on temple grounds, reinstates back to Atisha's imagined journey to Suvarnadvipa.

The proposed work would be memorialising the facets of the experience I had in Muaro Jambi in the form of trinkets. The trinkets will encompass different forms of elements that I have encountered. From the Batanghari River to the Candi temples, the elements will be molded from clay into small-sized trinkets. Valuing the journey to The Golden Island, these trinkets will then be gold-foiled, commemorating the crossing I took from home. The trinkets will then be attached and distributed onto a 10m long chain.

Using the trinkets and the chain, it will either be mounted and draped onto a wall like a tapestry or onto the gallery floor. For the gallery floor presentation, it could include thick, broken slabs of clay and cement with the base roughly covered in gold foil - exemplifying the grounds of Suvarnadvipa. The chain could then be laid onto it in a gestural manner - some on top of the slabs or in between. The slabs could also include miniature paintings of Megamendung batik pattern, Sanskrit verses or even the symbols used in paintings to represent Atisha.

MATERIALS

Gold Plated 2.5 mm Thin Short Rope Chain Polymer Clay Gold Eyelet Screws

Gold Foil

Spray Adhesive

*Cement/Clay Slabs

*Plaster

PRIYAGEETHA DIA



William Kung

I will be making a 4.5 meters wide painting on the wall (if I got the space though, if not then 3 meters will be good too, I'm flexible), with white fabric as the replacement for my canvas. The work itself is the recreation of my own imaginative Muara Jambi landscapes, and the work will be created both with my brushes and hands, freestyle basically, I want to pour out the free flow expressive style as I did last year. Also I will do a time-lapse video while I am doing the work, can be for documentation if necessary.



ABSTRACT BY SIONG CHUNG HUA

This artwork is a mixed-media installation that consists of an on-site collaborative performance with the PADMASANA group, an ephemeral sculpture, and photographic print(s) to explore the number of intersecting ideas of the existing Muara Jambi site: its originality and replication (reinterpretation and displacement), materiality and notions of the (real or imagined) historical space, and the intrinsic relation between the two- and three-dimensional forms. Each medium placed on-site is translated and renewed by the other.





Title: Preservation of a Technique (A Tribute to Muara Jambi Women)

The beauty of Muara Jambi lies in its local culture as much as its significance in Buddhist history. When we visited Muara Jambi, I was struck by the efforts of the people in the village whose lives had revolved around preserving the Muara Jambi *candis*. It was heartening to see the hard work put into maintaining the history of the land and encouraging to see history being treasured by the whole community. However, speaking to the locals, we quickly learn that many young people are, ironically, shunning traditional practices of the village in the name of progress. One of such practices that is slowly dying out is the traditional crafting of the woven mat, or *tikar*, as it is called in the Indonesian language.

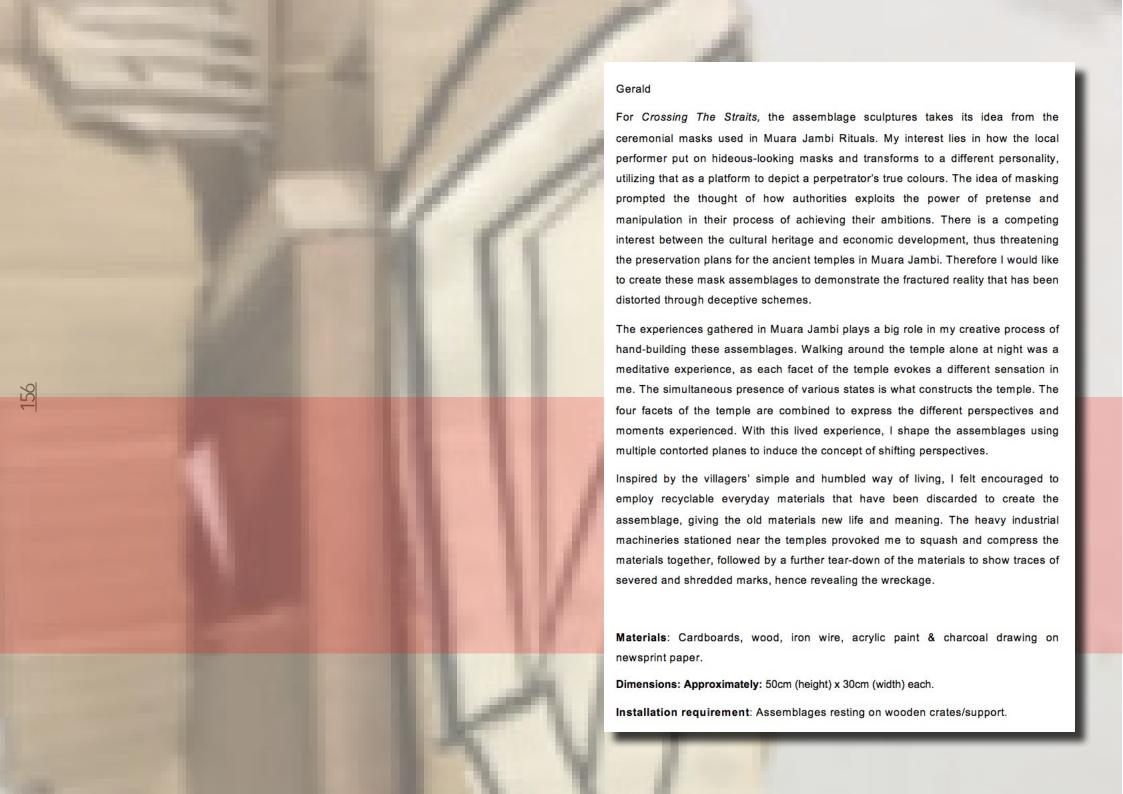
Tikar making is solely practiced by the women. The process of crafting a tikar is an arduous process that requires great skill. Thorny leaves of the plants are first harvested, sliced into appropriate thickness with hand-made tools, dried, dyed, and then painstakingly woven by hand with deft fingers into the final tikar that is used in the home for many different purposes. Despite the difficulty and intricateness of this technique, tikar-making is seen as mundane work by the younger generation. As I reflect upon the very similar phenomenon of younger people in Singapore being indifferent to the ways of old, I wonder if tradition will always be the price to pay for progress.

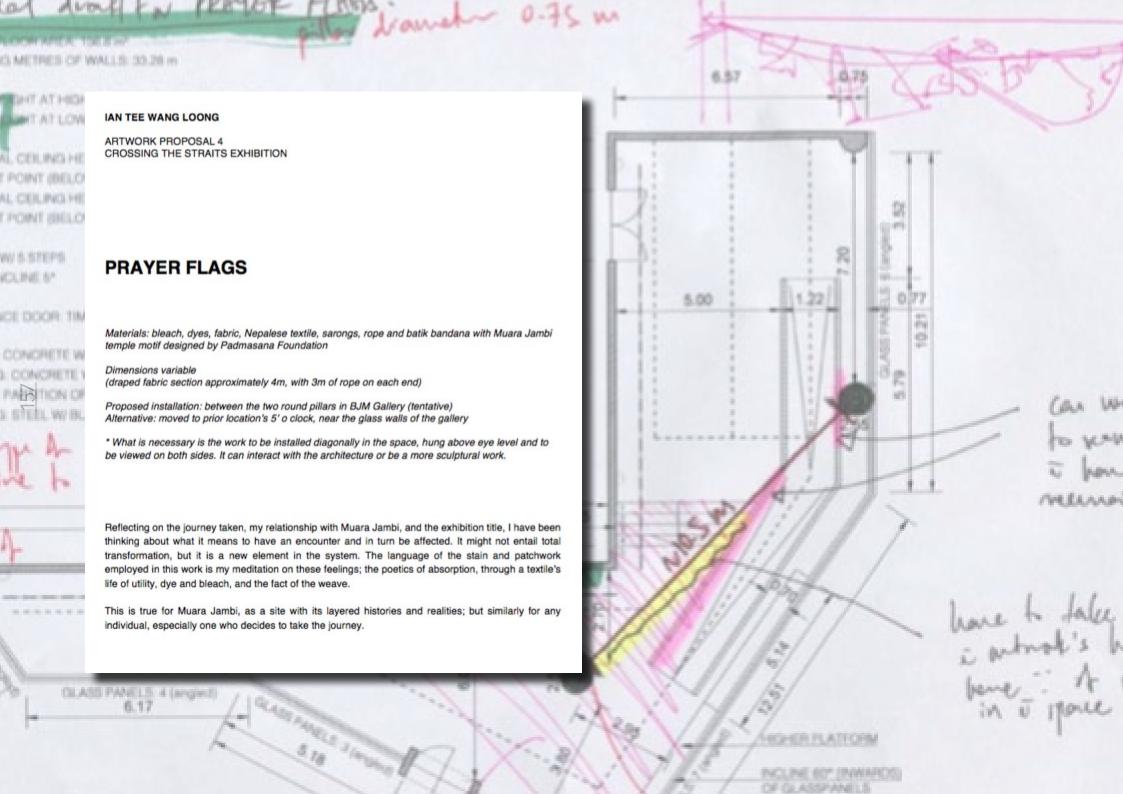
"It is due to heroism that bodhisattvas, willingly taking the suffering of others onto themselves, are always happy."

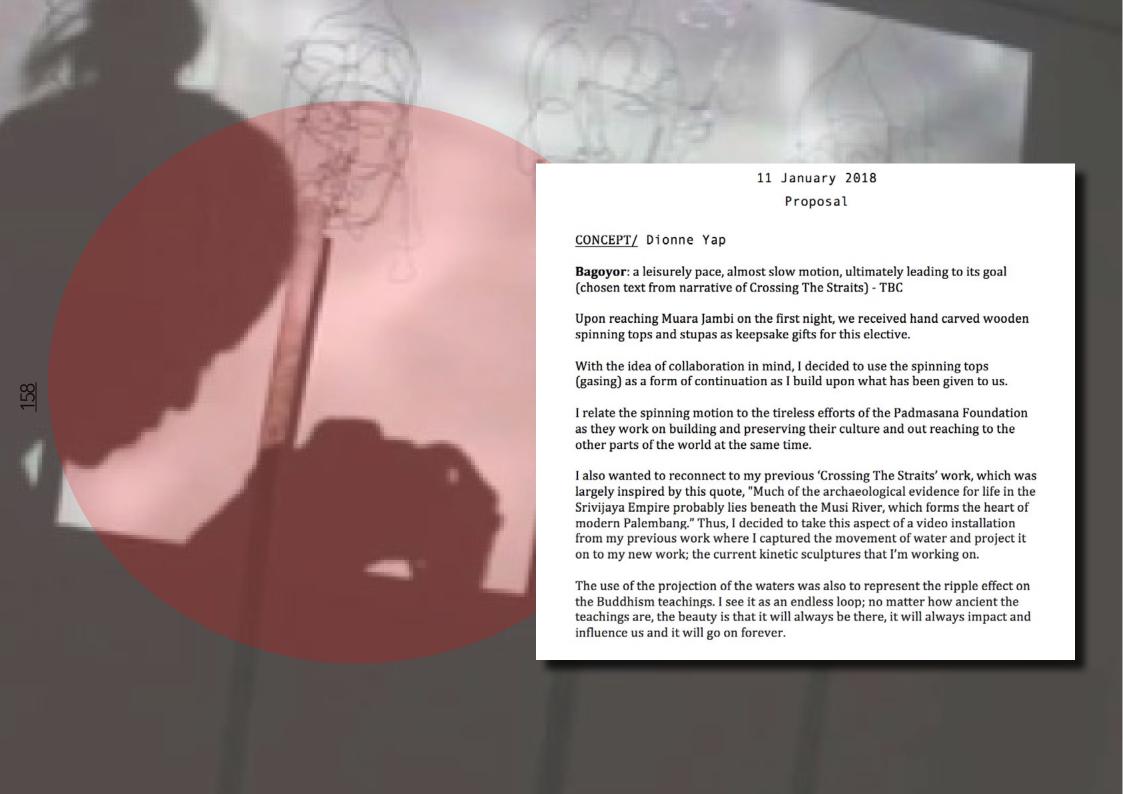
- Serlingpa, in his treatise Wheel-Weapon Mind Training

Bodhisattvas are beings who work with compassion and suffer for the happiness of others, Dharmakīrtiśrī, also known as Serlingpa, the great Buddhist teacher who taught at Suvarnadvipa taught that bodhisattvas thrive with suffering. I likened the people of Muara Jambi as bodhisattvas who voluntarily protected and preserved the history of their land. Likewise, the women who make *tikar*-making part of their daily lives are protectors of tradition. The *tikar* is a symbol of the heritage and culture of Muara Jambi, someday becoming as precious piece of history as the Muara Jambi *candis* are.













CONTEMPORARY ARTS SINGAPORE

LASALLE College of the Arts Exhibition



You are warmly invited to our opening reception

McNally School of Fine Arts: To leave home is already half the journey

Friday 26 January from 7:00 to 9:00 pm

Guest speaker: Dr Imran bin Tajudeen, Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture, National University of Singapore

Exhibition runs Saturday 27 January - Wednesday 21 February

Brother Joseph McNally Gallery LASALLE College of the Arts 1 McNally Street Singapore 187940

Free admission

#toleavehomeisalreadyhalfthejourney

Participants: Borju, Priyageetha Dia, Heri Dono, Iman Kurnia, Elisabeth Inandiak, William Kung, Roy Mardianto, Gilles Massot, Muhammad Arif, Muhammad Masuri, Pebrianto Putra, Siong Chung Hua, Shirley Soh, Tan Luo Yi, archeological site. Gerald Tay, Ian Tee, Dionne Yap

Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore This exhibition brings together painting, sculpture, installation, text and performance by students and alumni from the McNally School of Fine Arts alongside artists from Singapore and Indonesia.

> The works were made following a BA Fine Arts elective and a field trip to the Muara Jambi Buddhist temple compound in Sumatra, Indonesia. In collaboration with the Padmasana Foundation, an organization working on the preservation of the temple compound, the students and artists explored the human, cultural and economic context of the Malay community that lives around its

The title of the exhibition, To leave home is already half the journey, refers to a quote by Indian Buddhist monk Atisa (982-1054 CE), who spent time at Muara Jambi in the eleventh century. The quote's suggestion that any journey, physical or spiritual, begins with leaving one's zone of comfort-is reflected in the works' evocations of home, Singapore and encounters with Muara Jambi's architecture and surrounding communities.

Image: Courteey Gilles Massot, 2065

Gallery hours: 12:00 noon = 7:00 pm, Tuesday to Sunday, closed on Mondays

Telephone +65 6496 5134 Email icas@lasalle.edu.sg www.lasalle.edu.sg/institute-of-contemporary-arts-sg/



A talk by distinguished guest speaker Dr Imran bin Tajudeen Department of Architecture, National University of Singapore.

Local, regional & cosmopolitan in the Straits Buddhist Melayu architecture & culture: looking across Muara Jambi and old Singapura through five objects.

Tuesday 6 February, 7- 9 pm, Lecture Theatre Block F level 2 #F201 LASALLE College of the Arts, 1 McNally Street, Singapore, 187940.

In conjunction with the McNally School of Fine Arts exhibition "To Leave home is already half the journey" presented by the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE college of the Arts.



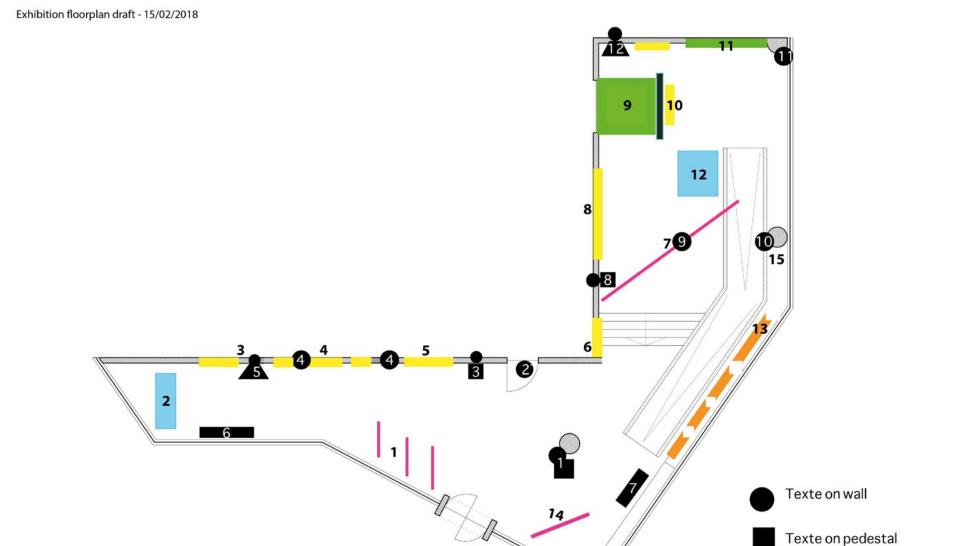
In this talk, I foreground questions of the local/regional and cosmopolitan in studies of the Hindu-Buddhist period of Southeast Asia through connections both textual and artifactual, including the Indic temple architecture in Muara Jambi and other Straits Malay centres in the Buddhist period of Malay history. On the one hand "the local/regional" can be seen in the Old Malay inscriptions and local usages of Sanskrit in ways not seen in India; and on the other hand the Old Malay (and Old Javanese) cases do not fit neatly with Sheldon Pol-lock's "Sanskrit Cosmopolis" [versus vernacular] thesis (and Pollock concedes this point openly for the Old Javanese case in his work). It is also important to note that the "local" Malay reworking of Indic concepts and architecture and their amalgamation with local ideas occurred early in the formation of the extant artifacts that we may study, rather than coming in later as a belated form of "localisati

Regrettably, Buddhist Malay texts from the first millennium and early second millennium (before the fourteenth century) have not survived, but there are a number of references from other sources that there were many Buddhist texts written in Old Malay in both Sriwijaya/Palembang and Malayu/Muara Jambi (though we do not know much on this for Kedah or old Singapura). Malay texts from a much later period do tell us, however, that there is a conscious effort by later Malays who had already converted to Islam, to draw a link of royal legitimacy back to a place named "Melayu" and a Bukit Seguntang Mahameru in Palembang, via fourteenth-century Singapura.

Finally, in relation to the exhibition "To leave home is already half the journey", the efforts by Padmasana/Saramuja and Borju (Mukhtar Hadi) to engage the local community around the Muara Jambi sites and foster the continuity/recovery of local knowledge about, and relationship with, these old sites and structures, when juxtaposed against the global practices of heritage preservation and scholarly discourse on archaeological sites, give us food for thought on how the same questions traverse the centuries into the present day.

Dr Imran bin Tajudeen is Assistant Professor at the Department of Architecture, National University of Singapore. He works on architectural encounters and disciplinary categories across the local and the cosmopolitan in Southeast Asia from the vernacular architecture across the local and the cosmopolitan in obstreams Asia from the ventileural architecture perspective. Of relevance to this talk are his previous discussions on "Sastic and Austro-nesian comparative perspectives" (Nalanda-Srivijaya Centre-ISEAS, 2017) and "Perseja-rahan Singapura dan nama-nama tempatnya [Singapore Historiography and Toponyms]" (Malay Language Council of Singapore, 2015).

Free entry. Refreshments will be served after the talk.



Legend:

- Wall mounted work Yellow Blue - Floor-based work Pink - Work hung from ceiling

- Work requiring AV, projection etc Green

- Added partition Black

BROTHER JOSEPH MCNALLY GALLERY

Texte transparent acrylic

FLOOR PLAN BASIC

SCALE 1:100 / A3 PAPER

F1-01

INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS SINGAPORE LASALLE COLLEGE OF THE ARTS, 1 MCNALLY STREET, 187940 SINGAPORE

McNally School of Fine Arts To leave home is already half the journey

27 January - 21 February

Participants:

Borju Priyageetha Dia Heri Dono Iman Kurnia Elisabeth Inandiak William Kung Roy Mardianto Gilles Massot Muhammad Arif Muhammad Masuri Pebrianto Putra Siong Chung Hua Shirley Soh Tan Luo Yi Gerald Tay Ian Tee Dionne Yap

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The title of the exhibition, *To leave home is already half the journey*, refers to a quote by Indian Buddhist monk Atiśa (982–1054 CE), who spent time at Muara Jambi in the eleventh century. The quote's suggestion — that any journey, physical or spiritual, begins with leaving one's zone of comfort—is reflected in the works' evocations of home, Singapore and encounters with Muara Jambi's architecture and surrounding communities.























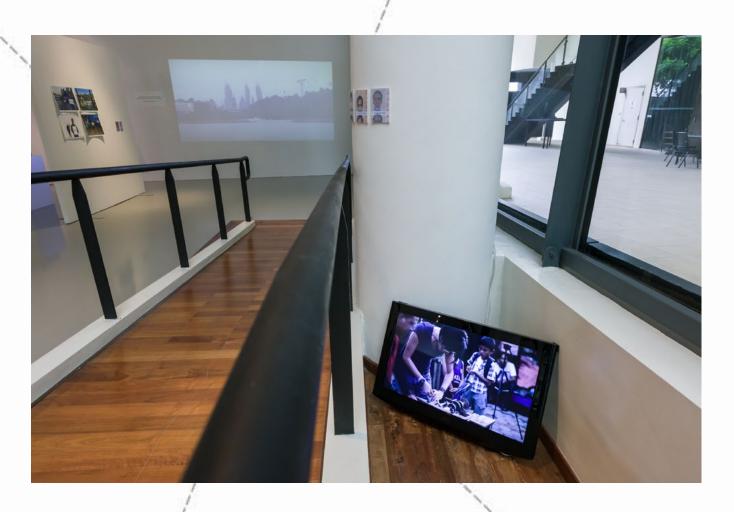
I, the monk Atiéa Dipamkara Srijnana, have sailed for thirteen months to reach the place where Master Serlingpa lives.

Atisa, The journey to the master



























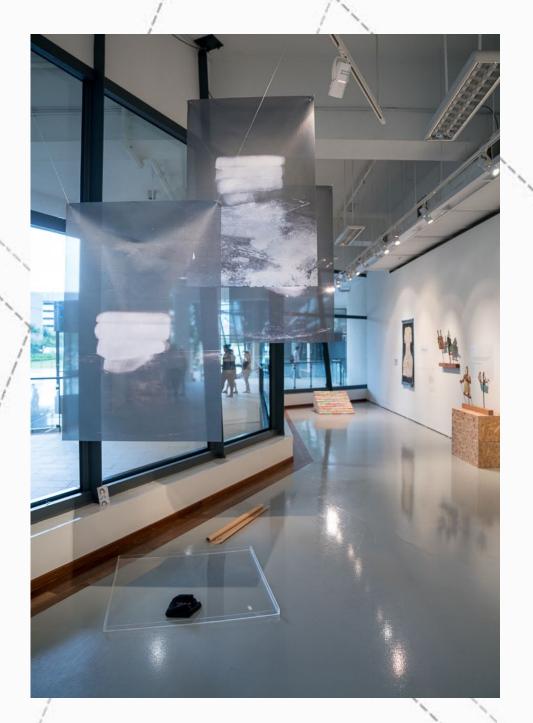


















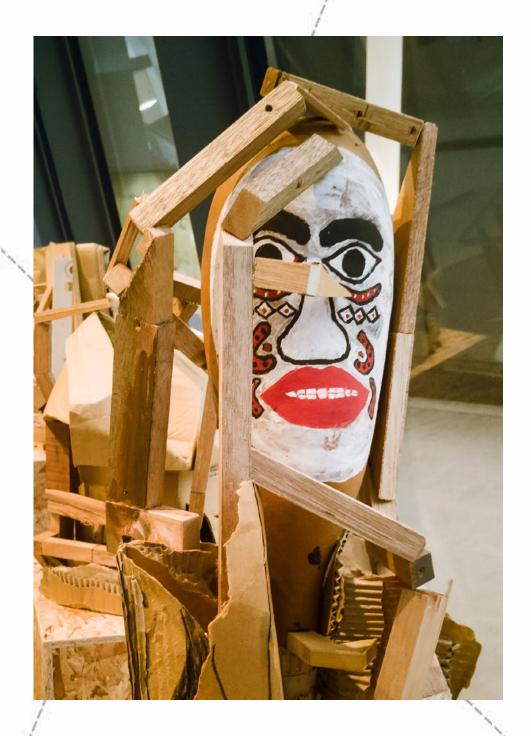






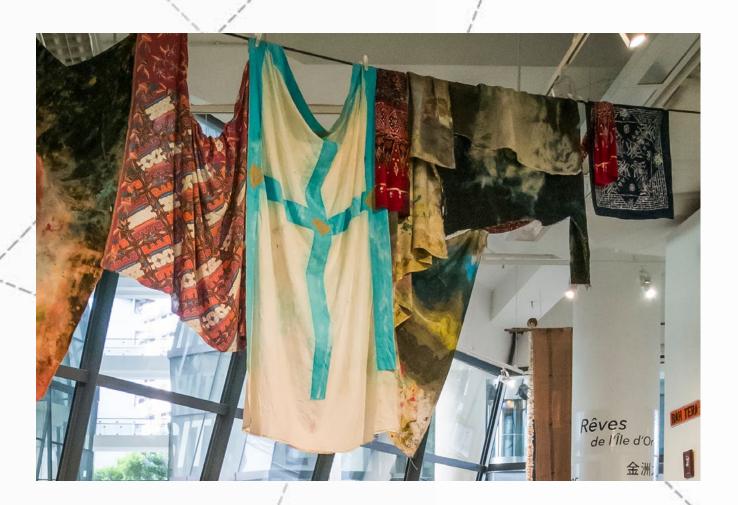


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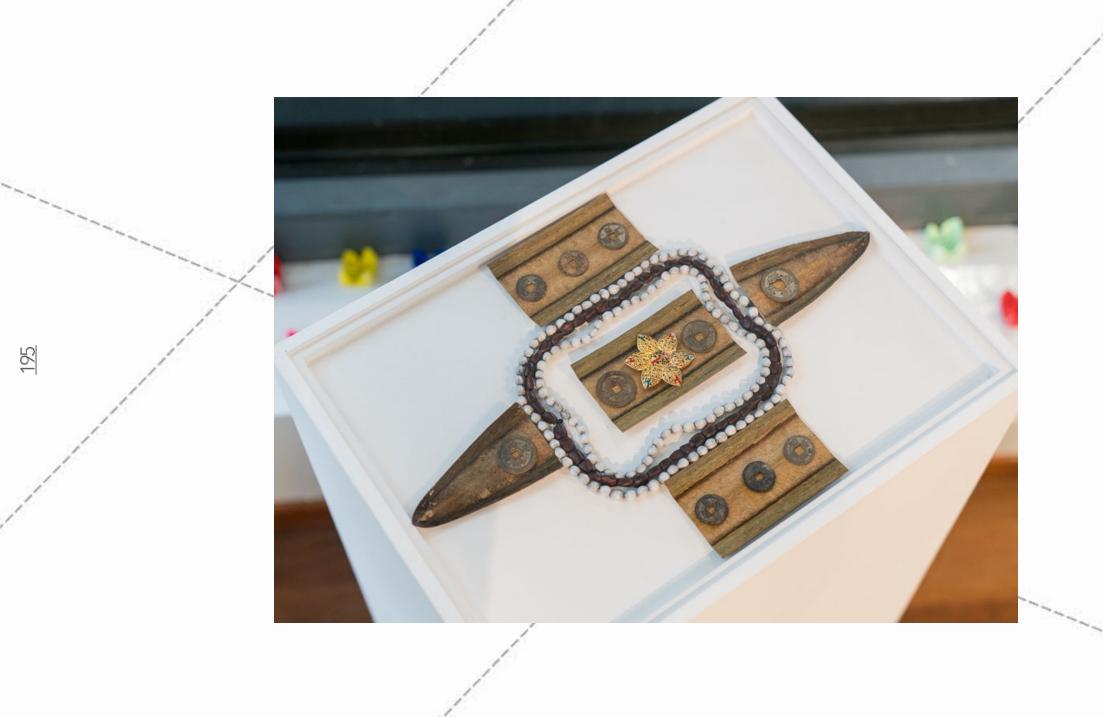






















Disaster on the Land of Melayu Mukhtar hadi (Borju) 2015

The waters of the Batanghari can no longer soothe the thirst lts currents that once ferried glorious tales

Today bring news of disaster to the Golden Island

The Prajnaparamita is petrified with shame
She would like to escape human rapacity

Crying ... moaning

Reduced to silence, she remains petrified

The Earth is burning burning

Disconsolate farmers in parched rice fields

Sit motionless, no trees left for shelter

Clear-cut, they all fell into the pockets of clowns

Wearing the costumes of the select few

All that remains are rotten branches clutching at the sky

All that is left is to die, waiting for the earth to castigate us.

PETAKA DI BUMI MELAYU Mukhtar hadi (Borju) 2015

Bertiup angin selimuti sisah peradapan jambi
Bening batang hari tak mampu lagi obati dahaga
Arusnya yang dahulu membawa kisah kejayaan
Sekarang berubah membawah kisah petaka di pulau emas
Ku coba selami batang hari lalu timbul di tanjung pengharapan dan mati...
Prajnaparamita malu mematung

Berlari... di tengah keserakahan manusia Menangis... mengadu... Ia terdiam tidak mampu bergerak Bumi terlampau panas

Raut murung wajah petani di petak sawa yang mengering Duduk mematung tak ada pohon untuk berteduh Semuanya tumbang jatuh tersungkur dalam kantong-kantong badut Berbusana elit

Kini tinggal ranting lapuk mencakar langit
Mega biru tak lagi biru ia di perkosa
Bumi...tanah... berahim bencana
Anjing penguasa negeri tak lagi menyalak
Kukunya tumpul taring di dempul
Mulutnya terbungkam lembaran uang para pemodal
Bening sungai batang hari menghitam
Asap membumbung tinggi

Hanya darah..darah dan air mata Tinggal rahim berkaca cermin retak Tinggal mati... menanti saat bumi memaki

















<u>True absorption: Prayer</u> <u>flag for Muara Jambi</u> Three months passed since the exhibition 'To leave home is already half the journey', and I too find myself at the cusp of transitioning into another phase of life: graduating from college. On hindsight, the week spent with the Padmasana boys in Singapore felt so long ago, but the emotions and ideas shared remained close to heart. They became quite entwined into the language of my personal interests and sentiment. The title of this reflection is lifted from a short chapter I wrote about PRAYER FLAGS in my thesis.

True absorption deals with the material language of the stain, and thinking about surfaces. The artist Eric Mack eloquently spoke of: "extending (painting's) frame of reference into the political... so we are not thinking about the start of the painting as being a blank canvas but the true of the canvas. What you see is true absorption into the system, into the weave of the textile." This statement stuck with me since because it acknowledges a truth about art that it is consequential; that it is an ethical position one can take to their practice and interactions.

The metaphor of the stain similarly holds this sense of consequence: the stubborn stain that is impossible to fully remove, or indeed the excessively violent act of cleaning that left its own traces of erasure. These are the techniques employed in the treatment of ethnic textiles used in PRAYER FLAGS to bleach and re-stain with batik dyes. For me, it materializes a fundamental truth about identities and place, it is mutually-affecting and a constant negotiation. The bleeding stain is the historical connection that bring these disparate pieces of fabric together. The logic of the weave is one about being implicated but also about the possibility of strength that comes with it.

Here I am also thinking about another type of stain, the black and gold body paint used by the Padmasana boys in their performance The disasters on the land of history. Of course there was an entirely theatrical element of dressing up for the character, in which application and removal of the paint can be seen as ritualistic gestures. Yet while the paint has been completely washed off, the performers returned from the experience transformed. A stain was left in their being. That was the account I heard backstage from Roy and Fitra, as they told me how they went into a trance state and were connected to Muara Jambi's ancestry during the performance. Particularly striking was the energy that could be felt in the space then, I was touched by it too... To call it theatre, performance art or something spiritual is besides the point.

What I perhaps am getting at is an art of consequence, an art that does something. The concepts of socially-engaged or relational are too restrictive to describe the emotional and psychological dimensions of this activity, which is more than just being expressive or narrative. At its core, it is to be open and vulnerable to the stain, or as Judith Butler poignantly wrote: "Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something."



Interview (English) transcripts from participants from 'To Leave Home Is Already Half the Journey' Exhibition (Post 'Crossing the Straits' elective project)

Borju's Interview Audio Transcript (Padmasana) (Translator: ELizabeth Inadiak)

Q: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

Okay, nama saya Mukhtar Hadi. Saya dipanggil Borju oleh teman-teman saya. Usia saya 32 tahun.

Okay, my name is Mukhtar Hadi. I am called Borju by my friends. I am 32 years old.

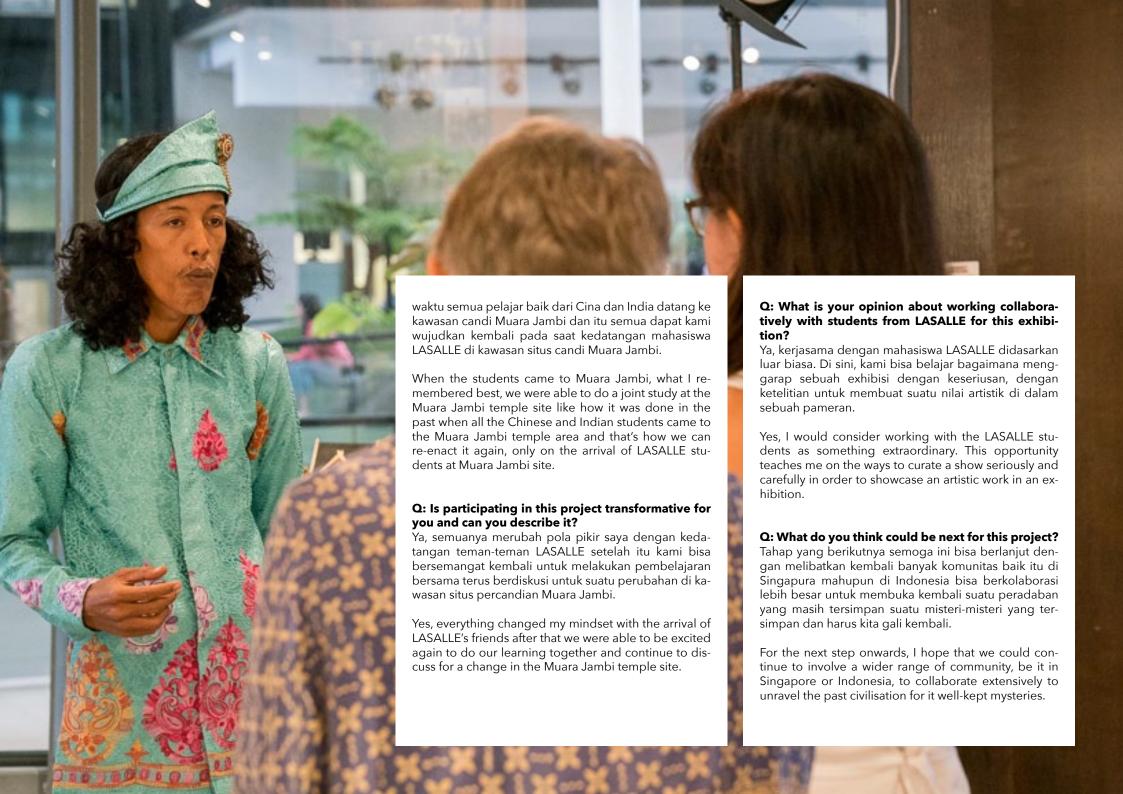
Q: What did you do in the exhibition?

Di pameran ini, kami membawa suatu tema yang berhubungan dengan kawasan situs percandian Muara Jambi. Di mana, kami mengimplementasikan dalam sebuah karya yang berupa Mandala yang saya buat dari dua jenis daun yang dianggap suci oleh umat Buddha, iaitu daun cempaga dan daun Bodhi. Dan Mandala ini menggambarkan berupa satu lingkaran yang didalamnya juga terdapat warna hitam yang kami anggap ada satu ruang terputus di dalam sebuah peradaban tetapi kami tetap bertemu di satu titik di pulau Emas. laitu yang kami rasakan pada saat ini.

In this exhibition, we carry a theme that is related to the Muara Jambi site. Where, we implemented an artwork in the form of a Mandala, that is made up with two types of leaves which are considered sacred by the Buddhists, namely the leaf of Cempaga and Bodhi leaf. The Mandala is illustrated in the form of a circle, in which there is also a black color that signifies a broken space in a civilization but we still meet at the apex on the Golden Island. That's what we feel right now.

Q: So what is the memorable part of the students visit to Muara Jambi?

Ya, di saat datangnya mahasiswa ke Muara Jambi, yang paling saya ingat, kami bisa melakukan suatu pembelajaran bersama di kawasan situs percandian Muara Jambi seperti yang dilakukan di masa-masa dahulu di





Iman Kunia's Interview Audio Transcript (Padmasana)

Q: Can you tell us a little about yourself?

My name is Iman Kunia. I'm 40 years old.

Q: What did you do in the exhibition?

I did some video work in this exhibition. I made a video about two countries - Singapore and Indonesia - especially Muara Jambi. I try to mix the two different cultures and countries, which I know Singapore is a modern country... it has human ingenuity and beauty by design. But Muara Jambi or Indonesia, my hometown is beauty by nature, but it is traditional. So I would like to mix them... it's like two different... yin and yang souls, we can make a balance out of it... that's the idea why I made the video. And the video is changing, the frame changes from Indonesia and Singapore.

Q: What is the most memorable aspect of the students' visit to Muara Jambi in 2016?

I thought that Singapore students were individualistic, but they were more sociable. Even when I compared them to Indonesian students, students of LASALLE have a more emotional contact with us and they have a high learning spirit... and I like that. That's why I like to collaborate and work with them. It made me excited to work with them.

Q: How is this project transformative for you?

When I came here to Singapore, usually if I was on a deadline, I will be nervous, and I have to work very fast. But I feel calm here, I don't know if it's the atmosphere of LASALLE... I think it's a good atmosphere for me, so I feel calmer and feel freer to express in my work.

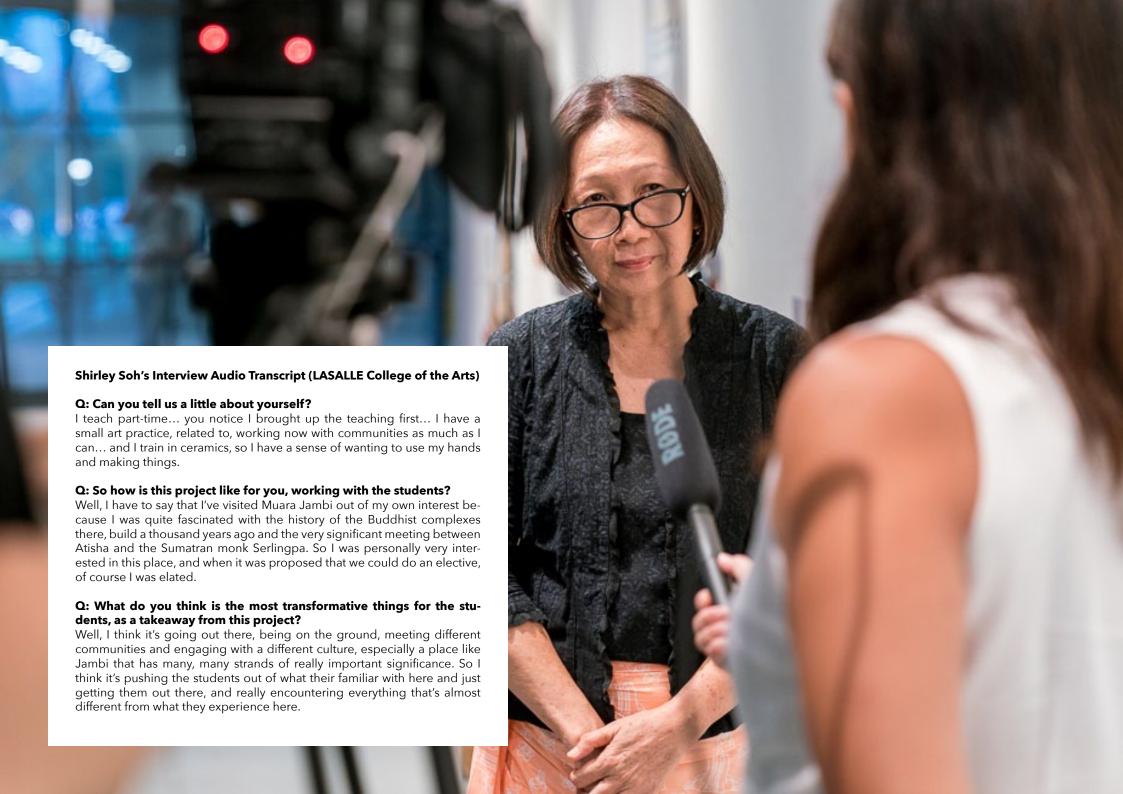
Q: What is your opinion in working collaborative with the students for this exhibition?

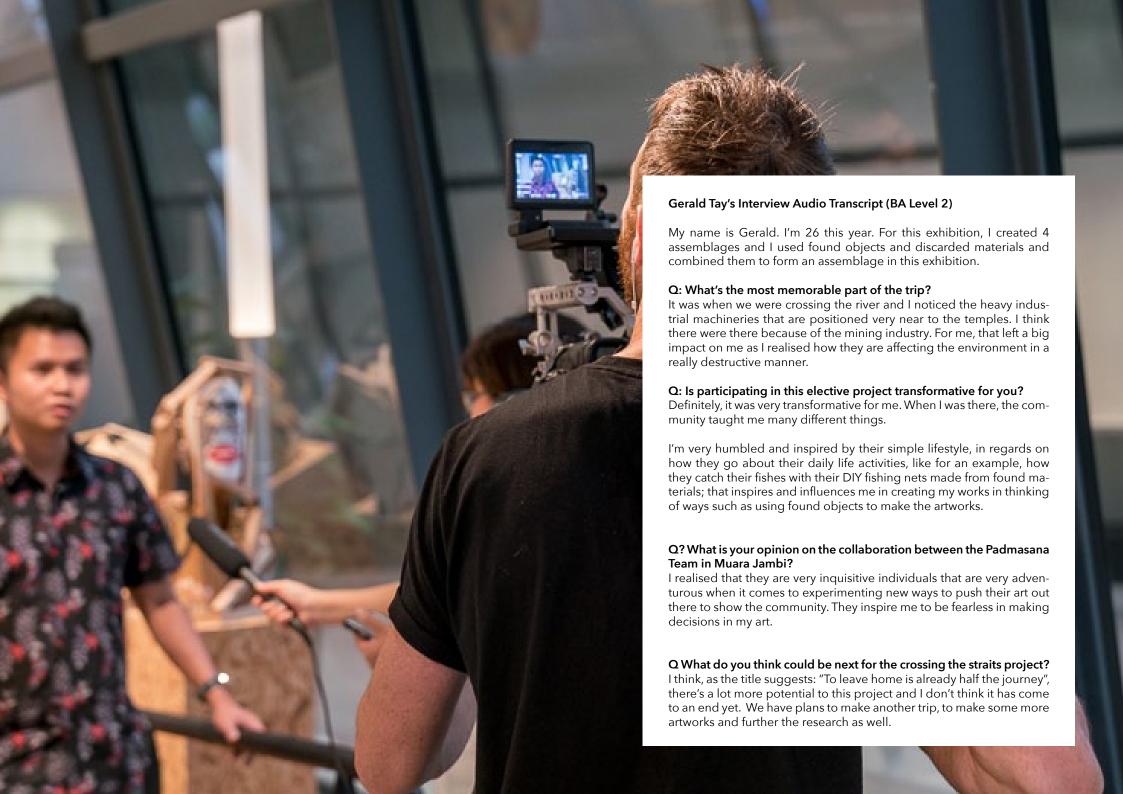
It should continue. I know LASALLE have many spectrums of the art, it's not just Fine Arts. I think we can collaborate in cinematography, in drama... I know art takes many forms, many spectrums, we would like to collaborate further with this different kind of people. With difference, we can achieve further, and I realised that in Singapore. Being different, I can be more creative. That's why I need LASALLE and LASALLE needs me; we need each other.

Q: What do you think could be the future for this project?

In the future, we should make more work on art between countries. We can make a big difference.... like John Lennon's song, Imagine. We are borderless; we are citizens of the world. I don't feel like I'm from Indonesia, I feel a big part of you. So the future, we can be one together.







Siong Chung Hua's Interview Audio Transcript (BA Level 3)

My name is Chung Hua and I'm a fine arts student from the McNally School of Fine Arts and have recently graduated from LASALLE College of the Arts.

Q: What are you doing for this exhibition?

Fabric prints (photography) and an on-site performance, just on the opening day.

Q: What's the most memorable aspect of the trip?

It has opened my mind, eyes and heart on how warm the people of the community are. It is of great importance that we learn about their history. But in order to learn about history, we have be physically at the sites. There's so much you can learn from textbooks or online. In order to immerse and experience that, you have to visit the source.

Q: Is participating in this elective project transformative for u?

Two important things that I have learnt as a practitioner: Humility and the importance of the community.

Humility: the artist's ego always upsets the balance. But learning through the Padmasana people, the community keeps the ego in check. The community may help to make the art, but individuality still remains.

Q: What is your opinion on the collaboration with the Padmasana Team in Muara Jambi?

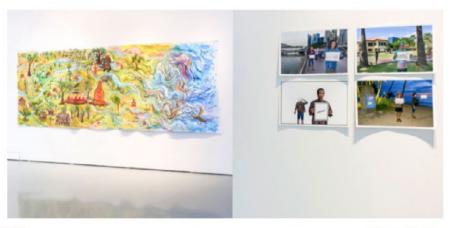
It was an amazing opportunity. The vibe is indescribable. So much positivity and creativity that has been going through back and forth. I don't think the guys (Padamasana Team) even slept at all, so I have to step up my game to match their level!

Q: What do you think could be next for the crossing the straits project?

I hope the students in the future would be able to have the same kind of experience as we did... and continue for the future generations as well; to help them and help the community, just like it did for me.







SENI

"Crossing Street" dan empat foto karya Gilles Massot (kanan).

Singapura-Muarajambi Timbal-Balik

Sebuah pameran di Singapura bertema "Crossing Street". Kerja sama mahasiswa Lasalle College of the Arts Singapura dengan seniman Muarajambi.

ENJA. Lima anak muda asal Desa Muarajambi itu keluar dari lift berkaca yang naik dari ruangan bawah tanah Lasalle College of the Arts. Mereka seolah-olah timbul dari rahim bumi Singapura yang melupakan ikatan purba dengan silsilahnya di seberang Selat Malaka.

Yang berselira kurus-tinggi, namanya Borju, tubuhnya terlapis cat emas. Sedangkan empat kawannya, Putra, Amin, Fitra, dan Cholidin, kulit mereka serba hitam laksana batu bara. Mereka adalah The Padmasana Boys; baru mendarat dari Desa Muarajambi, Sumatera. Mereka menginjak rumput sintetis yang terbentang di antara blok blok raksasa tembus cahaya institut seni rupa swasta ternama itu. Sekuntum padma emas di tangan para pemuda itu menerangi jalan mereka sampai ke Brother Joseph McNally Gallery, lalu layu saat Borju mulai menyerukan syairnya di tengah-te-

ngah hadirin serba rapi:

Bertiup angin selimuti sisah peradapan jambi

Bening batang hari tak mampu lagi obati dahaga

Arusnya yang dahulu membawa kisah kejayaan

Sekarang berubah membawah kisah petaka di pulau emas

Prajnaparamita malu mematung Menangis... mengadu....

Selama deklamasi syair "Petaka di Bumi Melayu" itu, si Golden Boy diserang oleh keempat sosok tubuh kelam tadi. Penabuh Roy memalu bonangnya dengan irama tak terduga. Membawa kamera, Iman merekam suasana acara pembukaan pameran ini yang merupakan hasil kerja sama para mahasiswa Lasalle dan tujuh seniman muda dari Desa Muarajambi, yang di-undang selama satu minggu di Singapura. Judulnya To Leave Home is Already Half The

Journey (Dengan Meninggalkan Tanah Airmu, Kamu Telah Menjelajahi Separuh Jalan).

Inilah kata-kata Atisha, biksu Buddha yang termasyhur dari India. Pada 1012, ia mengarungi laut selama 14 bulan lebih untuk berjumpa dengan gurunya yang paling disayangi dari seluruh masa hidup sebelumnya: Serlingpa, manusia dari Suwarna-dwipa alias Pulau Emas.

Gerakan kamera Iman menyapu wajahwajah hadirin yang terpesona, lalu berhentipada muka Ian Tee, salah satu mahasiswa Singapura yang ikut berpameran malam itu. Tampak di balik kacamata bulatnya, mata Ian berkaca-kaca. Mungkin ia teringat air Sungai Batanghari.

Pada sore hari bulan Desember 2016, Ian bersama delapan kawannya dari Lasai len naik pompong dari tepi timur Sungai Batanghari menuju tepi baratnya yang dihuni masyarakat adat setempat. Tempat penimbunan batu bara mencemari kawasan cagar budaya Muarajambi dan udaranya. Tepat di tengah reruntuhan belasan tapak candi.

Perahu pompong mereka berbendera stupa dan kapal kuno Melayu. Inilah karya seni yang mereka bawa sebagai "upeti" untuk mohon restu para tetua Desa MuaFORG-FOTO: WEIZHONG OF

Singapore - Muara Jambi: A reciprocal journey

Elizabeth Inandiak

Dusk. Five young men from Muara Jambi Village come out is inhabited by local people, right in the middle of the ruins of of the glass lift that goes up from the basement of LASALLE College of the Arts. They seem to arise from the womb of the land of Singapore, from under the subconscious of the people of this city island who forgot the ancient ties with their genealogy across the Strait of Malacca. The lean-looking man is named Borju, his body is covered in gold paint, his four friends, Putra, Amin, Fitra and Cholidin, have their skin all black like coal. They are "The Padmasana Boys", just landed from the village of Muara Jambi, Sumatra. They stepped on a field of synthetic grass that stretches between the gigantic, translucent blocks of the renowned private art institute. A golden lotus in their hand illuminates their way to the Brother Joseph McNally Gallery, then withered as Borju began to declaim his poem in the midst of a well-groomed audience:

Blowing wind blankets the remains of Jambi civilization The waters of the Batanghari can no longer soothe the thirst Its currents that once ferried glorious tales Today bring news of disaster to the Golden Island The Prajnaparamita is petrified with shame Crying ... moaning...

During the declaration of the poem "Disaster on the Malay Land", the Golden Boy is assaulted by the four dark figures. Roy, the drummer, emphasises the drama by hammering its bonang on an unpredictable rhythm. Iman is recording the atmosphere of the opening ceremony of this exhibition which is a cooperation between the students of LASALLE and seven young artists from the village of Muara Jambi who have been invited for a week in Singapore. The title: "To leave home is already half the Journey". These are the words of Atisha, a famous Buddhist monk of India. In 1012, he sailed over the sea for more than 14 months to meet his most beloved teacher from all previous lifetimes: Serlingpa, the Man from Suvarnadvipa, the Golden Island.

Iman's camera movements sweeps the entranced faces of the audience, then stops on the face of lan Tee, one of Singapore's students who takes part in the exhibition tonight. Behind his round glasses, his eyes are filled with tears. Maybe he remembers the waters of the Batanghari river. One afternoon of December 2016, with his eight friends from LASALLE, he rode a pompong boat from the eastern edge of the Batanghari river, where coal stockpiles pollute the heritage site of Muara Jambi and the air, heading to the western shore which

dozens of temples.

Their pompong boat is adorned with two flags depicting a stupa and an ancient Malay vessel. Those are the artworks they bring as a "tribute" to ask for the blessing of the elders of Muara Jambi Village, in the hope that local people will be willing to share their knowledge and wisdom with them, as was the ancient custom, at the time Muara Jambi was a large Buddhist university at the crossroads of the maritime gold road. Ian acts as Yijing, a 7th-century Chinese pilgrim who, on his journey from Canton to India, stopped at Muara Jambi to study Sanskrit and copied hundreds of sutras. Four centuries later, he was followed by Atisha who is now played by Priyageetha, a LASALLE student.

In the first stage, the "work in progress" was named "Crossing the Straits", and was designed by Gilles Massot, an artist from France who has lived in Singapore for 30 years and is a lecturer at LASALLE College. Gilles had done a long research on Bintan Island, which became a book «Bintan, Phoenix Of the Malay Archipelago». The LASALLE lecturer was fascinated by the story of Sang Nila Utama, the Malay prince who, before establishing Singapore, stopped by on Bintan Island to be crowned King of the Malay World by Queen Wan Seri Beni. At the end of his research, Bintan emerged clearly as a sign of the relationship between the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian Archipelago.

Massot says that he can see how many Singaporeans have become more used to fly to London or to Hong Kong than crossing the strait to Tanjung Pinang. That's how the outline of "Crossing the Straits" is born. Hopefully this work in progress will broaden the horizons of Singapore's younger generation to connect them back to the hinterland of Temasek's history, to the lost maritime network, while building bridges between their linear cosmopolitan urban modernity and the life cycle of Mura Jambi villagers. An exchange of knowledge between two young communities driven by the same passion, but separated by a 'strait'.

"Crossing the Straits" began in August 2016, with a workshop in LASALLE by Indonesian artist Heri dono and I (Elizabeth Inandiak) for the narrative. Nine Singaporean students were invited to imagine Muara Jambi from "the opposite shore of the strait" and to materialise their dreamed images in the form of artwork that will be dedicated to the people there. The plan





Karya Gerald Tay, Excavator (kiri), Skidsteer, Dozer, dan Crawler.

Prayer Flags (kiri).

rajambi, dengan harapan penduduk lokal berkenan membagi-bagi ilmu dan kearifannya dengan mereka, sebagaimana adatnya zaman dulu, ketika Muarajambi merupakan universitas besar Buddha di persimpangan jalur laut emas. Ian saat itu berperan sebagai I-Tsing, peziarah Cina abad ketujuh yang dalam perjalanannya dari pelabuhan Canton ke India singgah di Muarajambi untuk mempelajari bahasa Sanskerta dan menyalin ratusan sutra. Empat abad sesudahnya disusul oleh Atisha, yang diperankan oleh Pryageetha, mahasiswi Lasalle.

Dalam tahap pertama, "work in progress" ini dinamai Crossing the Straits (Menyeberangi Selat) dan dirancang oleh Gilles Massot, seniman dari Prancis vang menetap di Singapura sejak 30 tahun lalu dan menjadi dosen di Lasalle College. Massot pernah melakukan penelitian di Pulau Bintan yang dibeberkan dalam buku Bintan: Phoenix of the Malay Archipelago. Dia terpesona oleh kisah Sang Nila Utama, pangeran Melayu yang sebelum mendirikan Singapura singgah di Pulau Bintan untuk dinobatkan sebagai Raja Dunia Melayu oleh Ratu Wan Seri Beni. Pada akhir penelitian Massot, Bintan muncul dengan jelas sebagai pertanda hubungan antara Semenanjung Melayu dan Kepulauan Indonesia.

Massot mengatakan ia bisa melihat bagaimana banyak orang Singapura telah
menjadi lebih biasa terbang ke London atau
ke Hong Kong daripada menyeberang selat
ke Tanjung Pinang. Begitulah lahirnya garis besar Crossing the Straits. Massot berharap work in progress ini akan memperluas
cakrawala generasi muda Singapura untuk
menghubungkan mereka kembali dengan
daerah pedalaman sejarah Temasek, dengan jaringan jahur maritim yang telah hilang. Sebuah pertukaran pengetahuan di
antara dua komunitas muda yang digerakkan oleh hasrat yang sama tapi dipisahkan

oleh selat

Crossing the Straits dimulai pada Agustus 2016 dengan workshop di Lasalle oleh seniman Indonesia, Heri Dono, dan saya (Elizabeth Inandiak) sebagai juru riwayat. Sembilan mahasiswa Singapura diajak membayangkan Muarajambi dari "tepi selat yang berlawanan" serta mewujudkan impian dan citra-citra mereka dalam bentuk karya seni yang akan disembahkan kepada masyarakat di sana. Rencananya mereka akan "menyeberangi selat" secara nyata, dengan naik kapal. Tapi ternyata tidak ada lagi lintas laut dari Singapura sampai ke muara Sungai Batanghari, sehingga rombongan mahasiswa Lasalle terpaksa naik pesawat dari Batam ke Kota Jambi, kemudian naik perahu selama dua jam sampaj ke situs Muarajambi.

Selama empat hari, mereka membiasakan diri dengan budaya perdesaan dibimbing oleh Padmasana Foundation, paguyuban yang didirikan pemuda Desa Muarajambi untuk melestarikan sejarah dan lingkungan situs purbakala itu. Lalu, hari terakhir, mereka melakonkan kembali Crossing the Straits oleh I-Tsing dan Atisha dengan naik pompong dari tepi sungai seberang, seakan-akan mereka datang dari jauh-jauh seberang laut.

Di dermaga, mereka disambut oleh para tetua adat dengan seloko dan kalungan kembang parang, lalu diantar dalam iringan riang gembira oleh para penari silat dan penabuh terbang sampai ke Candi Gumpung. Di sana, mereka bersembah-sujud di hadapan sang Guru Serlingpa, yang diperankan dengan halus oleh Borju. Seolaholah masa lampau Buddha dan masa kini Islam lebur, suku Cina, India, dan Melayu menunggal menjadi Insan Kamil.

Rombongan mahasiswa Lasalle dan The Padmasana Boys tidak menyangka akan bersua kembali, sehingga pada acara malam berpisah di pinggir Sungai Batanghari di Kota Jambi, mereka makan jagung bakar bersama-sama sambil menahan tangis.

Tapi Hazel Lim, Programme Leader of BA (Fine Arts) Lasalle, menjadi sadar bahwa Crossing the Straits tidak akan sempurna kalau tidak bersifat timbal-balik. Maka, akhir Januari lalu, giliran The Padmasana Boys menyeberangi selat. "Keindahan modernitas arsitektur Singapura dan keindahan alam Muarajambi saling melengkapi dalam kesiembangan yin and yang. Seperti lagu John Lennon, Imagine." Iman mengungkapkan pengalamannya lewat karya dua video yang diputar di galeri Lasalle, The Crossing: People-The Crossing: Spaces, berdampingan dengan karya para mahasiswa Lasalle.

"Go back to humility and community, inilah yang saya pelajari dari masyarakat Muarajambi," tutur Siong Chung Hua. Pada pembukaan pameran, mahasiswi Singapura ini menata blok-blok es batu seukuran batu merah dari Candi Muarajambi yang segera mencair. Yang tersisa hanyalah air sebagai daya ingat, sehingga karyanya diberi judul Hanya Air yang Tahu Ukuran Pegunungan yang Dikelilingi.

Ada juga Prayer Flags oleh lan Tee; sejumlah lembar kain yang tergantung pada tali jemuran di tengah-tengah galeri. "Karya saya sangat sederhana, seperti ibu-ibu di Muarajambi yang menyapu halaman candi dengan rasa peduli dan perhatian tinggi, semacam sembahyang dalam tugas rumah tangga sehari-hari."

Adapun karya Gerald Tay terdiri atas empat patung dari kardus dan sisa-sisa kayu: Excavator, Skidsteer, Dozer, Crawler. Si Crawler mendekap sebuah topeng yang dipahat oleh Borju dari buah labu. "Patung-patung itu dapat memandang dunia dari hanyak sudut dan melihat konflik multidimensional, seperti The Padmasana Boys yang berani menggali gagasan-gagasan baru dan keluar dari zona nyaman mere-ka."

Kata-kata Gerald itu dibalas oleh The Padmasana Boys dengan karya miniatur rumah panggung Desa Muarajambi yang dapat bertahan saat banjir tahunan Sungai Batanghari. Di balik kaca galeri, rupanya kecil mungil berhadapan dengan gedung maha-maju Lasalle College of the Arts. Judulnya herbunyi rendah hati sekaligus tinggi rasa: Here We Live, Di Sini Kami Tinggal.

• ELIZABETH D. INANDIAK, PEMERHATI BUDAYA

Blowing wind blankets the remains of Jambi civilization

The waters of the Batanghari
can no longer
soothe the thirst

<u>Its currents that once</u> <u>ferried glorious tales</u>

Today bring news of disaster to the Golden Island

The Prajnaparamita is petrified with shame Crying ... moaning...

was that they will "cross the strait" in real, by boarding a ship. But it turns out that there is no longer maritime connection from Singapore to the mouth of the river Batanghari, so the LASALLE student group was forced to board the plane from Batam to the city of Jambi, then journeying on a small boat for two hours until the site of Muara Jambi.

For four days, they familiarise themselves with the rural culture, guided by Padmasana Foundation, a community founded by the youth of Muara Jambi village to preserve the history and environment of the archaeological site. Then the last day, they re-inacted the crossing of the straits by Yijing and Atisha on a pompong boat from the opposite bank, as if they were coming from far overseas. At the pier, they were greeted by the elders with seloko poem and a parang kembang flower garlands, then they marches in a joyful procession with the silat martial art dancers and the drummers up to the Gumpung temple. There, they bowed before the Master Serlingpa, splendidly played by Borju. It was as if the Buddhist past and the Muslim present were fusing, Chinese, Indian and Malay became one perfect being.

The LASALLE students and the Padmasana boys did not expect to meet again, so on the night of the farewell party on the shore of the river Batanghari in Jambi, they ate together grilled corn while holding back tears.

But Hazel Lim, the programme leader of BA (Fine Arts) from MSoFA, became aware that "Crossing the Straits" would not be completed if not reciprocal. So, by the end of January 2018, it was the Padmasana boys' turn to cross the strait. "The beauty of Singapore's architectural modernity and the natural beauty of Muara Jambi complement each other in the bal-

ance of yin and yang. Like the song of John Lennon, "Imagine". "Iman reveals his experience through the work of two videos played in the LASALLE gallery" The crossing: people - The crossing: spaces "side by side with the works of the LASALLE students.

"Return back to humility and the community, this is what I've learned from the villagers of Muara Jambi" says Siong Chung Hua. At the opening of the exhibition, this Singaporean student arranged blocks of ice-stones, the size of the red stones from Muara Jambi temple, that immediately melted. All that remains is water as a memory, so her work is entitled: "Only water knows the size of the mountain it flows around."

There are also a "prayer flags" by Ian Tee, a number of pieces of fabrics hanging on a clothesline in the middle of the gallery: "My work is very simple, like the women in Muara Jambi who sweep the temple yard with care and mindfulness, a kind of prayer in daily household chores".

As for Gerald Tay, he presents four statues of cardboard and wooden remnants: "Excavator, Skid steer, Dozer, Crawler". The Crawler hugged a mask carved by Borju from a pumpkin. "The statues can look at the world from many angles and see multidimensional conflicts, such as the Padmasana Boys who dare to explore new ideas and get out of their comfort zone." Gerald's words are echoed by the Padmasana Boys with a miniature house on stilts from the village of Muara Jambi that resists the annual flooding of the Batanghari river. From behind the glass windows of the gallery, the tiny house faces the very modern and colossal building of LASALLE College of the Arts. The title sounds as much as humble as noble: "Here we live".





Crossing the strait, bukan hanya misi menyambung dua negara, tapi percampuran antara dua pusat peradaban masa lampau dan masa kini. Persilangan antara beauty by nature dengan beauty by design, yin dan yang menghasilkan keseimbangan. Di interpretasi melalui seni. Seni yang tidak mengenal batas negara, tidak mengenal warga negara mana, borderless. Karena kita menyatu sebagai warga dunia. Menyatu tidak harus sama, karena perbedaan menghasilkan kekuatan, seperti diferensial pada gearbox engineering. semakin besar diferensial, semakin kuatlah torsi motoriknya.

Saya mendapatkan kesan dan pengalaman yang banyak sejak programme ini bergulir 2017. Saya hanya tidak menyangka programme ini menginspirasi banyak orang. Yang jelas kolaborasi antara komunitas lokal dengan praktisi seni menghasilkan manfaat baik material maupun spiritual.

Lebih dari seminggu kita berkolaborasi di Singapore, sangat banyak yang kami pelajari, seperti, selalu cek saldo ez-link card pada saat scanning di stasiun atau bus, berhati-hati diruang platform! baca peta sebelum naik MRT supaya gak kesasar, tunggu signal green man sebelum menyeberang. Kalo makan tanya dulu yang udah pengalaman, menu yang rekomended apa, kalo gak tau bisa-bisa pagi siang malam cuma taunya nasi goreng.

Kami merasa dirumah sendiri di kampus LA-SALLE yang megah dan artistik. Mulai dari mahasiswa, dosen dan administratornya sangat ramah. Kami dapat tiket VIP untuk menyaksikan pekan seni Singapura, pameran seni kontemporer lukis, rupa, dan instalasi yang sangat indah. Terima kasih untuk Shirley Soh.

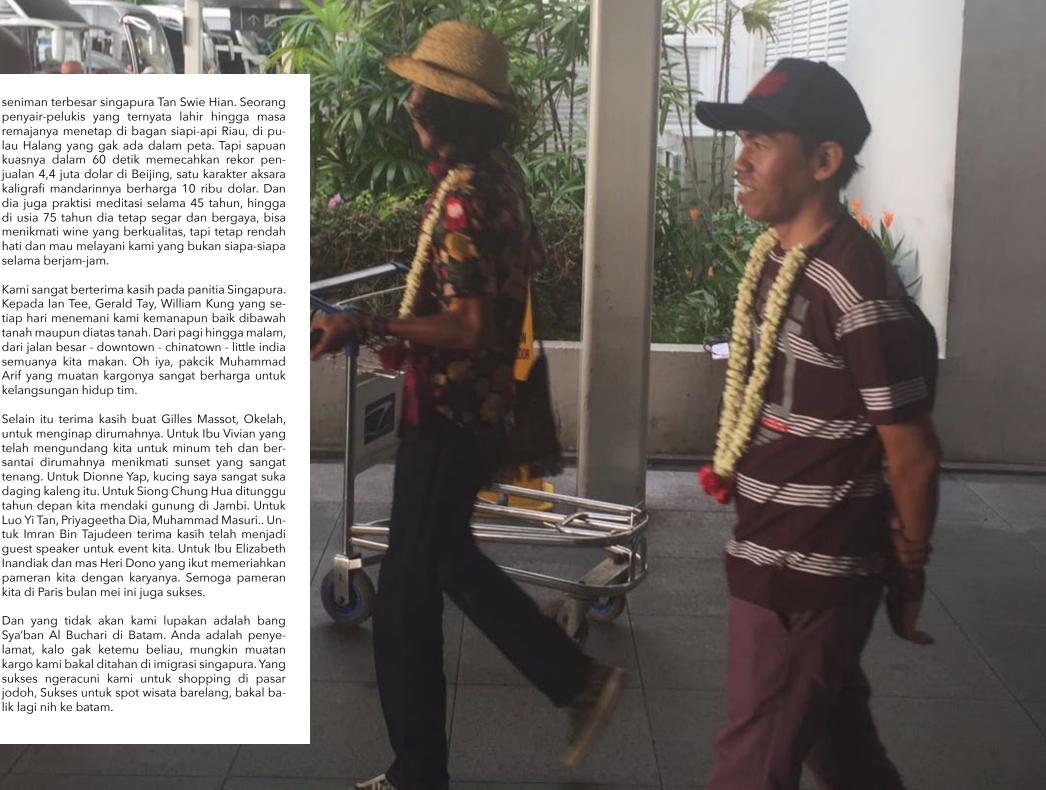
Kami merasa bukan "seniman", tapi kami mendapat kehormatan diundang kerumah

seniman terbesar singapura Tan Swie Hian. Seorang penyair-pelukis yang ternyata lahir hingga masa remajanya menetap di bagan siapi-api Riau, di pulau Halang yang gak ada dalam peta. Tapi sapuan kuasnya dalam 60 detik memecahkan rekor penjualan 4,4 juta dolar di Beijing, satu karakter aksara kaligrafi mandarinnya berharga 10 ribu dolar. Dan dia juga praktisi meditasi selama 45 tahun, hingga di usia 75 tahun dia tetap segar dan bergaya, bisa menikmati wine yang berkualitas, tapi tetap rendah hati dan mau melayani kami yang bukan siapa-siapa selama berjam-jam. Kami sangat berterima kasih pada panitia Singapura. Kepada lan Tee, Gerald Tay, William Kung yang setiap hari menemani kami kemanapun baik dibawah tanah maupun diatas tanah. Dari pagi hingga malam, dari jalan besar - downtown - chinatown - little india semuanya kita makan. Oh iya, pakcik Muhammad

Selain itu terima kasih buat Gilles Massot, Okelah, untuk menginap dirumahnya. Untuk Ibu Vivian yang telah mengundang kita untuk minum teh dan bersantai dirumahnya menikmati sunset yang sangat tenang. Untuk Dionne Yap, kucing saya sangat suka daging kaleng itu. Untuk Siong Chung Hua ditunggu tahun depan kita mendaki gunung di Jambi. Untuk Luo Yi Tan, Priyageetha Dia, Muhammad Masuri.. Untuk Imran Bin Tajudeen terima kasih telah menjadi guest speaker untuk event kita. Untuk Ibu Elizabeth Inandiak dan mas Heri Dono yang ikut memeriahkan pameran kita dengan karyanya. Semoga pameran kita di Paris bulan mei ini juga sukses.

kelangsungan hidup tim.

Dan yang tidak akan kami lupakan adalah bang Sya'ban Al Buchari di Batam. Anda adalah penyelamat, kalo gak ketemu beliau, mungkin muatan kargo kami bakal ditahan di imigrasi singapura. Yang sukses ngeracuni kami untuk shopping di pasar jodoh, Sukses untuk spot wisata barelang, bakal balik lagi nih ke batam.









PART TWO: SPACE





During the Crossing the Straits project when we visited Muara Jambi, I was most taken by the traditional craft of weaving floor mats with dried pandan leaves, or as it is known in the Indonesian language, tikar. These mats are made mostly by women for use in the home, with many uses that make up their daily lives. Tikar making was not unique to Muara Jambi, but the motifs and techniques used by the women come in huge varieties across the different villages in Sumatra, with each village having its own. Hence, this craft, despite its humble context, makes up a large part of the culture and identity of the people in Muara Jambi, and it was fascinating to me that this rich source of cultural heritage that made up such a big part of their mundane lives came purely from the women.

As such, in June 2018, when I found my practice gravitating towards an investigation of domestic practices, I travelled to Muara Jambi again with the intention of studying tikar-making in mind. With the support of the Fieldwork Research Grant from McNally School of Fine Arts, Lasalle, I was funded for this trip to conduct my study. This time round, I had a more specific objective to understand not only the technique of the tikar-making, but also the cultural context of this craft. I was conscious of the potentially exoticising angle that this research could take, and under Chandra's guidance, angled the study towards an ethnographic approach instead.

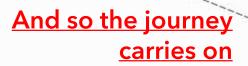
My days in Jambi was one part learning how to make a basic tikar, and another part doing documentation and conducting interviews with the people who make and use tikar in their lives. With the help of our friends from Padmasana, Wawan and Iman, I managed the interviews despite the language barrier that exists. My teacher while I was there is a lady that we all call Nenek, a respectful term, meaning grandmother, that is reserved for addressing elders. It had been an arduous process, as I was not used to intricate craft work or sitting on the ground for long hours, and I was amazed, again, at the incredible speed and efficiency with which Nenek was creating the tikar. With her patient guidance, even my clumsy fingers managed to get a hang of the basic tikar-making process, and managed to create a small piece. Of course, my skills are still far from what is necessary for making a full sized tikar. Nenek packed a large bag of some of the dried pandan leaves and told me to practise more when I went back to Singapore. She promised that once I can handle making the basic structure of the tikar, she will teach me how to make motifs and patterns when I return to Jambi again.

I was very fortunate to have had the company and support of our friends from Jambi during my trip there. Wawan and Iman not only assisted in the translations and ferried me around in their car, but also invited me to their home to partake in meals with them. As such, even though I am in a foreign land with little knowledge of the culture and language, I never once felt lost or alone, and I am ever grateful for their friendship. On the last evening of my stay in Jambi, Borjoe invited me to Sipin Lake, a scenic lake right in the heart of Jambi City, requiring visitors to travel through a small alleyway to reach. He and his team had set up an art installation park at the lake, creating a beautiful place for locals to relax, hang out, and take selfies, with food and professional photography services provided at a small fee. It is a pocket of space that is hidden in the urban jungle of the bustling city and I was amazed, again, at how brilliant things can be achieved by the Padmasana team despite limited resources. As I watched the sunset across the lake, joining in with the local visitors in selfie-taking, I was reminded again how the best things in Jambi are its people.

As this first part of my fieldwork research has concluded, I am planning another to learn more about making motifs in tikar, as well as conducting more interviews with Muara Jambi villagers so as to fully understand the significance of the humble tikar in their lives. Just like how individual strands of pandan leaves are tightly interwoven with each other, I find that Muara Jambi has been interwoven with my person. This place, with its rich Buddhist history, cultural significance, and with wonderful people whom I call friends, will always have a precious place in my memory for time to come.







Gerald Tay



To leave home is already half the journey. Little did I know when I enrolled for the Crossing the Straits elective in 2016 that I would find myself crossing the same straits again two years later but this time round to reach Yogyakarta in central Java. My purpose in going there was to meet Pak Jamhari, a self-taught mask maker in Bebekan, a village in the southern district of the city center, and hopefully study under his guidance. Leaving up to my expectation, the two-week stay in Bebekan turned out to be a real eye-opening experience. Pak Jamhari sources his materials from Mother Nature herself. The wood he uses comes exclusively from fallen trees and the colour dyes are extracted from flowers and plants. Patiently initiating me to the most secret parts of his process, he generously agreed to share with me the results of his life-long experimentations that taught him how to select the appropriate type of wood and natural pigments. I could see how this at once practical and spiritual knowledge acquired through patient trials and errors had developed into a uniquely personal understanding of the natural world embodied in his masks.

And so the process began. He first took me to the remote areas of the village and guided me into forested land to look for our materials. Then came the teaching of the craft proper. The making of a mask is an arduous process. Excess parts have to





be manually carved out slowly from the wood block and any mistakes can leave a permanent mark on the wood. I spent most of my time observing Pak Jamhari's carving skills and listening to his insights. He mentioned that it is okay to make mistakes, just redo and make the work again. And again. And again. Clearly, his mastery had been acquired by constantly stepping out his comfort zone, by taking risks in order to better his craft. This idea to which I had been exposed during my academic fine art studies, was now taking an altogether different dimension, much more real, much more demanding, much more fulfilling. The two-weeks stay under the tutelage of Pak Jamhari marked a new beginning in practice.

This year, I will travel again to Java to continue my woodcarving practices under the guidance of Pak Jamhari in Bebekan. I intend to focus on making sculptures and gain a better understanding of making an artwork in 3-dimensional form. But the long-term impact of the Crossing the Straits elective isn't just limited to artistic practice. I am also planning to return to Muara Jambi. My purpose this time round is to get in touch with the members of Padmasana and join them in their meditation practices. I am looking forward to the sunset meditation at Gumpung Temple. This trip will allow me to step out of the confining studio space and help me with own spiritual development. I can see now how the way to Muara Jambi turned out to be lined up with multiple forms of inspirations that will guide me in my life long journey. Leaving home was indeed already half the journey.



