

**ART STAGE
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MEDIA RELEASE

NOMINATED ARTISTS FOR THE INAUGURAL JOSEPH BALESTIER AWARD FOR THE FREEDOM OF ART

Singapore, 8 January 2015 – The U.S. Embassy in Singapore and Art Stage Singapore jointly announce the nominees for the inaugural Joseph Balestier Award for the Freedom of Art 2015. Seven artists from the region have been nominated for the Award.

The nominated artists are from Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. They are:

- Aye Ko (Myanmar)
- FX Harsono (Indonesia)
- Lee Wen (Singapore)
- Manit Sriwanichpoom (Thailand)
- Nadiah Bamadhaj (Malaysia)
- Pablo Baen Santos (Philippines)
- Svay Sareth (Cambodia)

The seven artists were shortlisted for nomination by the U.S. Embassy and Art Stage Singapore in consultation with advisors from the respective regional countries. All seven artists have been nominated based on their active commitment to the ideals of freedom of art, expression, and liberty, and through their work, continually seek to express these ideals.

(Please see Annex A for artist biographies and reasons for nomination.)

The Joseph Balestier Award for the Freedom of Art will consist of a trophy, certificate and grant of US\$5,000 to help the awardee continue his or her work. The winner will be announced on the evening of January 20, 2015 at an award presentation ceremony at the U.S. Ambassador to Singapore's residence. The Joseph Balestier Award for the Freedom of Art will be jointly presented by His Excellency Mr. Kirk Wagar, U.S. Ambassador to Singapore and Mr. Lorenzo Rudolf, Founder and Fair Director, Art Stage Singapore.

About the U.S. Embassy Singapore

The United States Embassy in Singapore consists of 28 U.S. Federal Government agencies working in Singapore and the region. Through the U.S. Embassy, the United States maintains a strong bilateral relationship with the Government of Singapore and stands ready to assist the more than 30,000 American citizens in Singapore, many of whom work for American businesses with offices in this country. Additional information about the U.S. Embassy in Singapore can be found at <http://singapore.usembassy.gov>.

About Art Stage Singapore

Art Stage Singapore is the leading Asian art fair connecting the world to the best of Asian contemporary art. With a deep understanding of Asia's dynamic visual arts scene, Art Stage Singapore presents the diversity of contemporary art rising from the region. Presenting handpicked galleries from Asian and Western countries that complement each other, Art Stage Singapore promotes dialogue not only between Asia and the West but amongst the countries of the Asian region as well. Art Stage Singapore's consistent support of Asian galleries, artists and art practices positions the fair as the region's international voice, representing the interests of Asian contemporary art in the global arena. More than a market platform, Art Stage Singapore is the definitive rendezvous point for discourse and exchange of ideas on the ever evolving Asian art scene. For more information, visit <http://artstagesingapore.com/>.

About Joseph Balestier

Joseph Balestier was the first Consul General of the United States of America to Singapore, serving between 1836-1852. Balestier was officially recognized as the Consul at Singapore in June 1837, when ships from America were permitted by the British East India Company to trade on an equal footing. In the mid-1830s, Joseph Balestier was one of the first men to own a 1,000-acre sugar-cane plantation, known as the Balestier Plantation located on the Balestier Plain. Today, the centrally located Balestier Road runs alongside what used to be his sugar estate in Singapore.

His wife, Maria Revere Balestier, was the daughter of Paul Revere, the revolutionary hero during the American War of Independence whose famed midnight ride helped secure America's freedom. She and her husband donated the famed Revere Bell to St. Andrew's Church in 1843. It is now part of the permanent exhibition of the Singapore History Gallery at the National Museum of Singapore.

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Annex A

NOMINATED ARTISTS FOR THE JOSEPH BALESTIER AWARD FOR THE FREEDOM OF ART

AYE KO (MYANMAR)

Bio:

Aye Ko was born in 1963 in Patheingyi. Though trained in classic and traditional painting under the master artist, U Min Soe, it is Aye Ko's contemporary expressions that have become his hallmark and established his position as one of Myanmar's most profiled contemporary artists internationally. For the past two decades, Aye Ko's practice has interrogated the meeting of politics and nature in the broadest sense. Generally viewed as a performance artist, Aye Ko has sought to stimulate the viewer to cross the line into his personal realm.

Aye Ko has exhibited extensively and amongst his notable shows has been a solo exhibition in New York in 2002 and his participation in the exhibition *Thermocline of Art - New Asian Waves* at the ZKM Museum of Contemporary Art in Karlsruhe, Germany in 2007. A renowned performance artist, Aye Ko has participated almost annually in Performance Art Festivals in Southeast Asia, Japan, China and in the USA. His art is included in numerous private collections internationally as well as in the private ZKM Museum of Contemporary Art in Karlsruhe, Germany.

Reason for nomination:

Aye Ko is a renowned performance artist who spent many years criticizing the authoritarian regime through his body-based performances. Performance art was then an underground movement and artists who performed did so illegally. Many were also imprisoned. Aye spent three years in prison after the 1988 pro-democracy movement.

FX HARSONO (INDONESIA)

Bio:

FX Harsono, born in 1948, is a seminal figure in the Indonesian contemporary art scene. Since his student days he has been an active critic of Indonesian politics, society and culture, always updating his artistic language to the current new social and cultural contexts. Harsono's own biography and family history are often the basis of his art, pointing at the disconcerting situation of minorities, the socially underprivileged against the backdrop of Indonesia's own history and political development. This intersection of the personal and the political is particularly evident in his most recent works. Furthermore, his oeuvre can be seen

as a constant questioning and reflection of his own position as an artist within society. He deconstructs the concept of the self-portrait, interrogating the conventions of portraiture by deliberately obscuring one of the major components of a portrait, the face.

FX Harsono studied painting at STSRI "ASRI", Yogyakarta (Indonesia) from 1969-74 and at IKJ (Jakarta Art Institute) from 1987-91. Since 2005 he is lecturer at the Faculty of Art and Design, Pelita Harapan University, Tangerang (West Java). Harsono is also an active art critic, regularly writing about social questions and the development of contemporary art.

Recent solo exhibitions include *Things Happen When We Remember / Kita Ingat Maka Terjadilah*, Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, Bandung, Indonesia (2014), *What we have here perceived as truth/we shall some day encounter as beauty*, Jogjakarta National Museum, Jogjakarta, Indonesia (2013), *Writing In The Rain*, Tyler Rollins, New York, USA (2012), *Testimonies*, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore (2010), and *The Erased Time*, National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta (2009).

Recent group exhibitions include *Quota 2013*, Langgeng Art Foundation, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, *Outspoken*, Biasa Art Space, Bali, Indonesia and *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back — Us and Institution, Us as Institution*, Times Museum, Guangzhou, China (all three 2013). He participated at the *Fourth Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art* in Moscow, Russia (2011) and in the exhibitions *Edge of Elsewhere* at 4A, Sydney, Australia (2011 and 2012), *Recent Art From Indonesia: Contemporary Art-Turn* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Shanghai (2010), *Beyond The Dutch* at the Centraal Museum, Utrecht, The Netherlands (2009) and *Highlight at the ISI*, Jogja National Museum, Yogyakarta, Indonesia (2008).

He was also awarded the 2014 Prince Clause Award from Prince Clause Fund, Netherlands and the Anugrah Adhikarya Rupa 2014 Award from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, Indonesia.

Reason for nomination:

Artist FX Harsono has played a crucial role in Indonesia's contemporary art scene for forty years. His critical installation and performance work spans pro-democracy dissent to explorations of the experiences of ethnic minorities. His works are often informed by the repression and feelings of 'otherness' he has encountered. One of his iconic works, *The Voices are Controlled by the Powers* (1994) consists of 100 traditional masks from wayang topeng mask drama to reflect on the present socio-political situation. With severed mouths, the artist also comments upon the tight control of free speech in Indonesia, a theme again

picked up in *Voice Without a Voice/Sign* (1994) where nine screen prints of sign language spell out the word D-E-M-O-K-R-A-S-I, with the "I" represented by a hand which is tied.

LEE WEN (SINGAPORE)

Bio:

Born in 1957, Lee Wen is a Singaporean multidisciplinary artist working on social identity themes. After leaving a banking career to enroll at LASALLE College of the Arts, Lee graduated with a Masters of Fine Art in 2006. Best known for his Yellow Man series of work, Lee is one of the pioneers of Performance Art in Singapore.

Lee Wen relies on the strategic deployment of visual, kinesthetic symbols and signs in his works. Through various constructed personas, his works allow visitors an insight into his roles as an artist. Lee has been exploring different strategies of time-based and performance art since 1989. Lee's work has been strongly motivated by social investigations as well as inner psychological directions using art to interrogate stereotypical perceptions of culture and society. Lee Wen's essays, texts and investigations are an important reference, not only for Singaporean and Asian artists, but also for Performance Art scholars and researchers worldwide.

Lee Wen is a contributing member in The Artists Village of Singapore and a participant in the Black Market international performance collective. Lee is also co-organizer of *R.I.T.E.S. – Rooted in the Ephemeral Speak* (2009), a platform to support and develop Performance Art practices, discourse, infrastructure and audiences in Singapore. In 2003, Lee spearheaded the *Future of Imagination* international performance art event, seeing the value of having an annual gathering of international artists in Singapore, to share a continuing interest in the cultural constructs of identity. In 2005, Lee Wen was awarded the Cultural Medallion for his contributions to the development of Contemporary Art in Singapore. In 2012 Lee initiated the Independent Archive And Resource Center, to maintain documentation and encourage discourses on ephemeral forms of art making. In 2014 he was a recipient of the 2014 Artist/Scholar/Activist Award (AVA) given by the board of Performance Studies International.

Reason for nomination:

In 1994, the National Arts Council imposed a proscription that disallowed the sponsorship of performance art practice in Singapore or by Singaporeans in foreign countries. This was a consequence of a controversial performance by one artist who snipped his pubic hair with his back to the audience. The ban made Lee Wen and his colleagues grow firmer in their resolve to continue their practice even without sponsorship as well as bring contemporary art

to a larger audience and prompted Lee to work overseas for an extended period of time. The ban on funding of performance art was lifted in 2004, but Lee Wen continues to fight for more openness both locally and internationally as the battle continues for him even today.

MANIT SRIWANICHPOOM (THAILAND)

Bio:

Born in 1961, Thai artist Manit Sriwanichpoom lives and works in Bangkok. For years, Manit has been a leading figure in Bangkok's lively contemporary art scene. Whether satirizing the foibles of Thai nationalism, or rattling the skeletons of the country's bloody political past, Manit's work is always insightful and provocative. Best known for his acerbic photographic critiques of Thai consumerism, Manit's trademark *Pink Man* series has been exhibited the world over. But his most recent projects mark a return to formal concerns and open up new questions about the future of a country divided by political and symbolic crisis. This is also reflected in his work as a film producer, including of Macbeth-based feature film *Shakespeare Must Die*, banned by Thai government as a national security threat. He is suing the censorship board in Administrative Court to lift the ban and end the banning of films in Thailand.

Manit's work is held in the collection of the Maison Europeenne de la Photographie (Paris), the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum (Japan), the Singapore Art Museum, the National Gallery Singapore, the National Gallery of Australia and the Queensland Art Gallery, KOC Foundation (Turkey) and in numerous private collections. His solo exhibitions include Bangkok in Pink at the Yokohama Museum of Art, Lambs of God at the Centre for Contemporary Photography (Melbourne), Beijing Pink at Highland Gallery (Beijing), Pink Man in Paradise at Galerie VU (Paris) and Obscene at H Gallery (Bangkok). In 2007 he was awarded Japan's prestigious Higashikawa Overseas Photographer Prize and in 2014 French Ministry of Culture awarded him the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

Reason for nomination:

Thai artist Manit Sriwanichpoom does not shy away from the issues facing modern Thailand, from political unrest to social inequality. Through his photography and film projects, Sriwanichpoom presents a different vision of Thailand and asks viewers to question what's really going on in his country. Manit's *Pink Man* series (which criticizes consumerism and the loss of values) and the production of the feature film *Shakespeare Must Die* (which was banned by the Thai government as a threat to national security, as cited by the U.S. State Department's Country Report 2012), as well as *Censor Must Die* the documentary on the

banning, all tackle uncomfortable subjects that are not generally discussed by the Thai public and considered out of bounds by those who run the country.

NADIAH BAMADHAJ (MALAYSIA)

Bio:

Born in Malaysia in 1968, to a Singaporean-born father and a New Zealander-born mother, Nadiah Bamadhaj studied Fine Arts in Canterbury University in New Zealand. From her initial training in sculpture and sociology, she has expanded her practice to include video, drawing, and installation. Also a writer with strong intellectual influences, she is driven by social justice and is conscious of the way in which the institutions of power relate to its constituents, particularly through constructions of architecture, monument, and more recently mythology.

Reason for nomination:

Nadiah Bamadhaj's work is often strongly critical of the political and social machinery that drives communal direction. Bamadhaj's practice is informed by her unfixed geographical position vs. origin and her personal interest in regional human rights. In 2002 she undertook a year-long Nippon Foundation fellowship in Yogyakarta, where she has lived and worked ever since. Over the past decade, her practice has been motivated by a strong personal interest in political events and social phenomena that have shaped or affected her identity and outlook, expressed through varied interpretations of their geo-historical positioning. It seeks some truth or reason behind the posturing and assumptions offered up to 'local' and 'global' audiences alike as a gloss on the historical and contemporary reality of her regional nexus. This nexus incorporates Malaysia, where she was born and grew up; Singapore, the long-time seat of her paternal family history; and Indonesia, a site of traumatic violence that she has chosen as a current base. Subjectivity in Nadiah's practice is dialectic – the personal is clearly a space of competing agendas of political, historical, religious, ethnic and sexual identity. Where her own image appears, it is always as both object and objectifier, pawn and chess player, as a reflexive strategy that tries to understand the self as a political, social, historical subject.

PABLO BAEN SANTOS (PHILIPPINES)

Bio:

Pablo Baen Santos (b.1943) was born in the Philippines and is a major figure in the Social Realist movement there. He was trained in the University of the Philippines, College of Fine Arts. Baen who signs his artworks as such, was an illustrator in one of Philippines' leading newspaper, Manila Times, and also one of the founding members of the Kaisahan, a social

realist art group formed in 1976. He was also elected the group's Founding Chairman leading the group in discussions until it came out with a manifesto towards achieving national identity in Philippine art. It came out in the group's first exhibit in 1976. His works highlight the plight of the rural and urban poor and his concerns about the Filipino social conditions with symbols, such as flags. Belonging to the first wave of social realist artists, Baen Santos' works advocate change and address a wide range of issues that plagued the urban workers then. Throughout 1970s and 1980s, his works often feature the impoverished working class and their struggle.

Pablo Baen Santos is one of the recipients of the 13 Artists Awards given by the Cultural Centre of the Philippines in 1990. His works have been showcased in solo and group exhibitions locally and abroad. His works are in the collections of Metropolitan Museum of Manila, Central Bank of the Philippines, Philippine National Museum and at Singapore Art Museum where he was invited to participate in Singapore Biennale in 2006.

Reason for nomination:

Artist Pablo Baen Santos is one of the frontrunners of Philippine social realism. He is one of the founding members of Kaisahan (a subversive painting collective) during the political turmoil of the Marcos regime. In the period of martial law during the Marcos regime, Baen Santos wrote and did illustrations for an underground newspaper. In a 1975 gallery exhibition, he presented allegorical works, which demonstrated against martial rule. As part of Kaisahan, he worked with its members who were secretly mobilized to create street murals and other popular forms of art to protest the dictatorial rule. The dark years of the dictatorship became a rich mine for artistic rumination and powerful protest by Filipino artists.

SVAY SARETH (CAMBODIA)

Bio:

Born in 1972 in Battambang, Cambodia, Svay Sareth lives and works in Siem Reap. A member of the small and historic group of children who studied art in the Site 2 refugee camps with Véronique Decrop, Svay went on to co-found Phare Phonlue Selepak, an art school in Battambang where he was a teacher. Svay holds an MFA/Diplôme National Supérieur d'Études des Arts Plastiques, Caen de Mer, France (2009).

Svay's artistic practice responds to themes of his life and traverses both present and historical moments. His work in sculpture, installation and performance questions the politics of power, processes of survival, or the more playful idea of adventure. Until recently his

practice has centered on the lasting effects of war, but his more current works mark a clear shift to the present tense, in which he interrogates the notion and use of power with the driving idea that “the present is also a dangerous time.”

Svay’s solo exhibitions include *Churning*, World Financial Centre, New York City (2013), *The Traffic Circle*, SA SA BASSAC, Phnom Penh (2012), *Tuesday/Mardi*, Hotel de la Paix Arts Lounge, Siem Reap (2011), and *La Terre Ferme*, French Cultural Center, Phnom Penh (2010). Select group exhibitions include *Traitor and Tradition*, ARNDT, Berlin (2014), *The Mirror and Monitor of Democracy in Asia*, Gwangju Museum of Art, Gwangju (2014), *Phnom Penh Rescue Archaeology: The Body and the Lens in the City*, Goldsmiths University of London for SEA Fest, UK (2014), *If The World Changed*, 4th Singapore Biennale, Singapore (2013), *Mon Boulet*, French Institute, Phnom Penh and *Merging Metaphors*, a Southeast Asian touring exhibition (2012). Svay was a 2011 nominee of the Signature Art Prize.

Reason for nomination:

Artist Svay Sareth grew up in a refugee camp. In addition to his own personal experience his art also reflects on the collective memories of the Cambodian people which is marked by a long history of war and tragedy. His work in sculpture, installation and durational performance questions the power struggles in modern society and reveals the close relationships between past, present and future.