

WHERE ART HAPPENS SESSION 3

Feeding Creativity: Art Residencies and Grants

Saturday 27th June 2009. **Moderator: Adeline Ooi**, RogueArt

Through the month of June 2009 RogueArt held a series of three talks on the theme “Where Art Happens”. The aim of the talks was to introduce questions and open discussions of how art is presented to and supported by the larger community. Museum and gallery directors, corporate sponsors, art managers, art patrons, and artists, both in Malaysia and within the Southeast Asian region, came together to share their experiences and ideas. The project was made possible with the support of Yayasan Sime Darby. Our media partner was Off The Edge Magazine.

ABOUT THE PROJECT SPONSOR

Yayasan Sime Darby endeavours to support and promote the development of arts and culture in Malaysia. Its aim is to encourage creativity and foster talent amongst Malaysia's multicultural peoples, regardless of age. It will sponsor initiatives to strengthen arts institutions, develop cultural knowledge and resources, and encourage contributions from artists to enhance the quality of life in a multi-cultural society. The desired result of such initiatives is the instilling of awareness and appreciation for the richness of Malaysia's unique cultural heritage and legacy.

General

Session 1 of WAH looked at “Art Spaces: Policies, Agendas, Ways Forward” surveying institutions, commercial galleries, alternative spaces and the challenges they face in Malaysia and the region through presentations by and dialogue with museum and gallery directors, and art space managers. Session 2, “Getting Out There: Art in the Community” explored specific art projects and strategies in engaging communities, looking at the impact and legacy of such projects, with presentations by some of the most dynamic and influential of local and regional artists working with public projects. Session 3 looks at ways in which artists are supported by the local and international community – through grants, residencies and other programmes run through corporate support, private initiatives and arts bodies, through the experiences of both the “givers” and the “takers”.

MORNING SESSION

In the morning, we heard about some of the leading artist support programmes thriving locally, from their instigators and also welcomed Mella Jaarsma co-founder of Cemeti Art House in Jogjakarta.

Rahel Joseph shared her experiences setting up artist residencies when she served as Cultural Affairs Director at the Australian High Commission and then as Head of exhibitions and public programming at Galeri Petronas.

The Australian High Commission (AHC)'s philosophy has always involved cultural exchange, people to people links, rather than importing Australian culture to Malaysia, and the AHC had been a frequent venue for local exhibitions until security measures after 9/11 started to limit this. Launched in 2003, the AHC Visual Arts Residency Award was devised to give Malaysian artists the opportunity to stay and work in Australia over extended periods of time, funding a Malaysian artist through open application every year for a return airfare, residential studio and 10 weeks living expenses in Australia. Gunnery Studios, and then Gertrude Contemporary Art

Spaces in Melbourne were hosts to the residents. The six resident artists awarded the residency were Yee I-Lann, Multhalib Musa, Noor Mahnun Mohamed, Ise, Sharon Chin and Susyilawati Sulaiman. Teething problems included the artists feeling a little isolated but on the whole, the outcomes were positive with good media in both Australia and Malaysia. Strong exhibitions came out from the residency. Ise was invited for a solo show at 4a Gallery in Sydney while Sharon Chin took part in a series of performance art events in Sydney. Ise's visual diary, "Keluar 90 hari", gave a personal account of his residency experience.

When Rahel joined Galeri Petronas she wanted to initiate a similar residency program, feeling that a Malaysian institution should be funding such a program. In 2008 the Galeri Petronas International Arts Residency was launched, its first partner being Red Gate Gallery in Beijing who hosted Chan Kok Hooi. A second host partner was to be Selasar Sunaryo in Bandung, although the program has been put on hold. "I hope that institutions and corporations would continue to fund these residencies which play such a vital part in contemporary art development in this country."

Laura Fan asked how Rahel's personal feelings about travel structured her programming. Rahel: Leaving your country, going somewhere new broadens your horizons, just to be able to see larger things happening in the world. I've seen how residencies have shaped other people's experiences and the future direction of their practice.

Angela Hijjas, co-founder of Rimbun Dahan, the longest running art residency programme in Malaysia, gave a visual presentation of the residency and its outcomes.

Since 1994, Rimbun Dahan has had about 80 or 90 people going through its doors for different periods of time. The original idea of the residency was to help bridge the gap between Malaysia and Australia. Hijjas Kasturi and his wife Angela "decided we had big compound, and kids grow up and leave home, so this was an opportunity to develop something interesting".

Rimbun Dahan hosts an Australian artist and a Malaysian artist for one year, who are fully supported for their residency. "Every year is different, depending on who the artists are, their dynamics, if they're interested in each other's work. We select on basis of what we like – no committees, it's not carefully considered like institutional programs". Artists give talks and get to interact with students who visit the residency. Meeting people is instrumental in encouraging students as well as helping visiting artists get to know Malaysia. Rimbun Dahan also has strong ties Asia Link as well as the Australian High Commission, and sometimes supports artists from Southeast Asia. "Our residency for Southeast Asian artists is based on hearsay – we give airfare from ASEAN countries, accommodation and living allowance - it's more about ideas, meeting artists. It's often sight unseen – a spark of the unexpected, and a great addition to our process. With two people in the space for a whole year, it helps to have other visiting artists." It also hosts a residency for writers and choreographers. See <http://www.rimbundahan.org>.

The gallery usually shows Angela and Hijjas' permanent collection – works from artists who've stayed with them. It's not a public institution but it's open over the weekend during the annual show for the resident artists from Malaysia and Australia, and Art for Nature, a yearly fundraising show.

Residency manager Noor Mahnun Mohamed (Anum) organises the residency and promotion, speaking to young artists and the importance of applying. "Get accustomed to putting in applications, if they're rejected, re-apply, apply elsewhere. It's important getting to know what opportunities there are".

“What’s important for our residency – the time and space to work, think about new things, feedback from artists who are there, meeting people from different backgrounds, having time to see their work and studio practice. It’s very enlightening, and I’ve personally found it extremely rewarding seeing what people produce and how they practice.”

Bayu Utomo Radjikin described the House of Matahati (HOM) and their initiatives. HOM is a company that runs and manages the Matahati group, their exhibitions and activities, while it also contributes to the development of the art scene, helping and nurturing young artists by organising shows and programmes for them locally and internationally. See houseofmatahati.blogspot.com

HOM’s programmes include:

Matahati Art Fund (MAF), which raises and collects funds to assist artists faced with health issues, accidents, and disasters, as well as to help initiate art projects and contribute to the development of the art scene. The yearly Art Triangle exhibition creates a three-way art dialogue between participating cities, and gives 50% of artwork sale proceeds to artists and 50% to MAF, raising RM93,000 in the first year, and RM63,000 in the second, given to four individuals in need, and 10 artist projects including LAMU, The Evolutionary Girls Club, Pusaka Kecil Rumah Anai Anai, Visual Art Traffic in Hospitals, CAIS, Vanishing Town, and Jatiwangi festival.

Matahati Art Residency: in the HOM residency local young artists are mentored by the Matahati group, provided a basic allowance for material and transport, and shared studio space for 6 months, with an exhibition at the end of the residency. Project MAGER is an art residency exchange program involving two artist groups from different countries. So far Matahati has done the exchange with Gelaran Budaya from Jogjakarta, and Anting-Anting from the Philippines, where the result in Malaysia was a collaborative mural on the front of the National Art Gallery.

Matahati Emerging Artists Award. Art prizes and awards recognise artists and back the efforts of artists in the local scene. The MEA is designed to help young artists to shine in the local and international scene and consists of cash RM3,000, art materials voucher for RM2,000, a 10-day travel grant and a solo show.

“MAF happened after the tsunami. Some artists felt we had to organise something, but this took time. When a tsunami happens, you need funds there and then. So why not do a programme annually and store the funds? Charity organisations tend to ask for 100% donation. Artists want to donate, but willingly – and they feel good knowing that they are part of the fund.”

Angela: why doesn’t HOM work with other institutions for funding or take on partners, since raising money by yourself can be difficult? Bayu: When we graduated from ITM, we found it difficult to get help funding shows, etc, so what we try to aim to do is provide all these things for the young people, and for ourselves. We want to show that artists can do a lot of things if they group together. We do open ourselves to grants or institutions outside but it must be to support our proposed projects. The funding of our programmes comes from Matahati. It sounds like a marketing strategy but it’s not! But we try to convince people that if they buy Matahati works part of it is to do something more. The success of HOM programs is related to the success of the group.

Rachel Ng of RogueArt: How do you balance your work as full-time artists with organising so many programs? Do you have a management team? Bayu: From an artist’s point of view, you lose quality time for your work. I’m trying to train people to take over what I do. I don’t want the Matahati members to get too involved, so they can concentrate on their artworks.

Stephanie Yeap spoke about how the Malihom-AIR program started “with the family estate out in Balik Palau. When the family vacated the family home my mum started building warehouses there to store the furniture, and eventually we were left with what we now call a gallery. We have to thank Rimbun Dahan - we started our residency after talking to an artist, Chong Siew Ying, who had been a resident there. We had quite a lot of land - we built four studios/residences, and then approached RBS [then ABN AMRO] who sponsored us for the residents' living package. We provide a 6-month residency during two sessions per year from January to June and July to December, with two artists per session, and at the end of 6 months we host an exhibition for them. No commission is taken on sales – everything goes directly back to artists.

We are into the 5th session. We're looking for artists who are quite independent and professional, as we don't have a team of curators/experts to help. It's quite remote as well and it can get a bit lonely, though there is a bus to town. We'd like to offer a town residency also to our artists.

We make our selection through a panel committee, ideally one overseas and one local artist so that they can integrate and exchange ideas. In my experience, though, artists are so independent that they don't share – so that hasn't quite worked out as planned. I personally would like to see more Malaysian artists participate. Foreign artists are great as they infuse new ideas into the art scene but also Malaysian artists should go out, explore and absorb whatever they can.

The exhibitions are normally held at RBS Bank in Penang but I must admit it's not an ideal exhibition space. We brought the show to KL once which was very exciting. The foreign artists don't do well in terms of sales, but the local artists do fairly well if perceived to be good value. We get a lot of purchases from KL as we put the works online. Penang collectors are still exploring and learning, and not quite ready to look at art as investment or collection. We hope to change that culture slowly.”

Mella Jaarsma talked about Cemeti Art House (CAH)'s Landing Soon residency project. Founded in 1988, CAH's main project was to organise exhibitions as well as projects specifically related to communities, residency projects and ad hoc, inter-disciplinary projects, etc. CAH has also brought Indonesian artists into the international scene, putting them in residencies abroad. In 2005, Heden (previously Artoteek den Haag) asked CAH to collaborate on a project bringing Dutch artists to Jogja for residencies over 3 years.

“I liked the idea of residency and came up with idea of connecting the residency with local artists. Indonesian artists get very little support in their own country. “Landing Soon” started in 2006 and hosts one Dutch artist and one Indonesian artist and we put them in a house together. Every 3 months a new group comes in. The main idea is not so much to give space for artists to contemplate or be isolated and see what comes up. The art scene in Jogja is very alive, so the idea is to provoke them and put them in a certain situation in which they are stimulated to develop their ideas.”

A full-time residency manager and assistant were hired to help the artists connect to the local art scene, and to access materials, skills, research. In month 1, the artists give a talk to introduce themselves to the local scene. In month 2, each artist has to contribute something to the community - many choose to do workshops, with orphanages, handicapped children, teenagers. At the end of month 3, the artists give a presentation of their work during the residency – a 1-week exhibition at CAH or some artists decided to do something in the street, garden, village, organised by CAH.

“We’re now in last month of Landing Soon. What we found very interesting was that especially the young Indonesian artists really got focused on their work, their vision, what they wanted with their art. And after publishing a small catalogue, they can use it for promotion. It really helped them to develop a body of work. Young Indonesian artists in Jogja now hardly get an opportunity to do this, they’re very occupied, hopping from one exhibition to another. So it’s important to have a residency programme where they’re forced to focus for three months.”

The residency has hosted a very diverse range of artists – painters, photographers, installation artists, sculptors, video artists, photographers, and many try out new media in Jogja, where so many things are available. Artists are encouraged to work with local people who have certain skills – craftsmen, technicians, also academics for research, architects and it connects residency artists with other Jogja artists.

“For our selection we look for artists outside dominant art areas, eg Malang, Sulawesi. The Dutch foundation sends established older artists so we have to be careful it doesn’t become a mentor pupil relationship. Dutch artists get a very quick introduction through the Indonesian artist. In the end the artists mostly make their own body of works, sometimes there are small works where they collaborate or help each other with. At the end we do wrap-up, talk through what we need to do better. Works are evaluated, artists get comments on what they did.”

Angela: your programmes are often connected to the community – was this deliberate or did it just happen? We’ve tried to start things in our village but haven’t been successful. Mella: sometimes we plan but it depends on the artists. Younger artists are more comfortable with children, so we let them design a workshop. Sometimes schools come to us. It works both ways. Through the years we’ve built up a network with different schools.

Marion D’Cruz talked about the Krishen Jit-ASTRO Fund and Arts Network Asia.

“In 1998, ASTRO approached Five Arts Centre and Dramalab, saying ‘we want to do something for the arts’ and they’ve been supporting us every year towards the rental of our premises. Then very soon after Krishen passed away in 2005, ASTRO approached us again saying that they would like to do something in his name. Looking at the amount of funding available - USD10,000 a year, we decided in discussion with ASTRO to set up the Krishen Jit-ASTRO Fund, and launched this in 2006.”

[Quoting their official statement] “One of the main objectives of Krishen’s pioneering work was about celebrating original Malaysian creativity in as varied and alternative ways as possible in all the areas of the arts. His groundbreaking theatre practice included projects that were inter-disciplinary, multi-cultural, multi-lingual and experimental. Krishen’s work articulated a Malaysian identity that was ever evolving which encouraged practitioners and audiences to reflect on their lives and societies. The Krishen Jit-ASTRO Fund works as an extension of this spirit, to encourage and support creative work in Malaysia.”

“The amount of money that we can give out really doesn’t match the applications that we get. We set up a panel – one representative from ASTRO, two from Five Arts, one representative from the industry, and one from the Ministry of Culture. We give people two months to apply. Five Arts acts as secretariat, categorizing entries and compiling them for the panel. See www.fiveartscentre.org

Every year we can only give out 3 to 4 grants with the money we have. In 2006 we received 80 applications, in 2007, 27, 2008, 47. People were really excited about the fund but were so disappointed – people wanting small money to do really interesting things.

We have specific criteria for our selection process - what is the impact of the project for the applicant and the community, what is the credibility of the applicant? Does the project fit in with Krishen's objectives, pushing boundaries? We do not give more than RM20,000 per grant. We ask for detailed budget and try to give a reasonable amount that at least helps a project get off the ground."

Recipients have included Au Seow Yee, Ray Langenbach, Sharon Chin for her Banned Books exhibition; Amir Muhammad, the LAMU project, Carolyn Lau for The Light Show, Chris Chong for pre-production of Karaoke, Fahmi Redza's Hartal project – for the creation of the website, and FINDARS for their Rain Project.

We're lucky that ASTRO just gives us the money, and don't get involved with who gets grants. What's interesting with people like Matahati and ourselves is that artists are giving artists. It's a shift from other kinds of funders. There's a different way we artists read proposals. We also encourage applicants to apply in the language of their choice."

"Arts Network Asia (ANA) was started by Ong Keng Sen in 1999. Artists in Asia were being funded to visit, study, do residencies or collaborations with Australia, Euro-America and Japan, because that's where the funding came from. ANA encourages collaboration, study, workshops between Asian artists, with a focus on Southeast Asia, with quite a lot of money from Ford Foundation Jakarta. Artists and arts managers form the panel. Again, artists are making decisions to give artists. It's now in its 10th year, running with Theaterworks in Singapore for the first 3 years, with Five Arts from 2004-06, and is now back in Singapore. ANA gives 10 to 15 grants a year ranging from USD1,000 to USD10,000. The juicy carrot dangled is that the host gets money to conduct a regional project. Five Arts did Asian Youth Arts Mall, bringing together practitioners from Asia who were doing youth work in a 10-day exchange to share best practice."

"For me as manager of KJAF, there is a frustration with the amount of money we have compared to the number of really interesting projects. There are a lot of people out there with good ideas and good projects. Either there's not enough money out there or the money is not made accessible to people."

Sharon Lai represented Bacardi Martini Malaysia, managing Bombay Sapphire in Malaysia. She talked about how Bombay Sapphire was first associated with design, beginning with the a design competition for a Bombay Sapphire-inspired martini glass, and then branched out to contemporary art. In Malaysian Bombay Sapphire started its art support programme in 2007. Vincent Leong kicked off the Bombay Sapphire Art Project. In 2008, it grew bigger with a series of three projects – Chang Yong Chia's "Safe House", Lim Kok Yoong's "When you are not your body", both installation projects, and the KL Art Map, listing art galleries as well as F & B outlets.

"In terms of supporting up and coming artists we found it was very important for them to have great publicity and media exposure, so in 08 we tried to give as much exposure as needed. For this year we are still fine-tuning, and thinking how to bridge the gap of Bombay Sapphire is related to art, making it more Bombay-inspired."

DISCUSSION

Adeline brought up the issue of funding for self-initiated programmes and what happens when the money runs out. For Angela, “it’s more productive planning for the future no matter how tenuous that is.” Although finding new funding can be difficult, intelligent planning, new initiatives are important to sustain programmes. For institutional and corporate programs, much depends on directives from the top – unfortunately the AHC residency was discontinued after Rahel left, and Bombay Sapphire’s programs depend on the company’s global policy. For HOM, the larger and long-term outcome of their residency has to be assessed to measure its usefulness.

Beverly Yong of RogueArt asked “Why support artists? Is it because public infrastructure is lacking – do you see yourself as part of that infrastructure or independent of it?” Most of the panellists agreed that their efforts have gone towards filling a gap, created by a poor education system, and limited support of creativity and the arts. For Angela it was about “putting money where your mouth is, supporting creativity, because you see so much potential there that’s not being developed”. Marion: As an artist I want somebody to give me a grant, I want somebody to say here’s RM10,000 to do your work – you’re a good artist, you can change society. Now I’m in the position to say that. I think in Malaysia we really are in serious deep shit. Every initiative that is going to get information out there, stuff out there that is making people reconsider the shit that’s going on needs to be supported. HOM sees themselves “just providing programs that artists need. We don’t want to think it’s up to the Ministry of Education to do it”. For Stephanie’s parents, one incentive for the residency was to bring art back to Penang, which was once a hub of art activity.

AFTERNOON SESSION

The afternoon session, the last of the series, fittingly came back to local artists and their experiences.

Ahmad Fuad Osman gave a slick and entertaining picture presentation about three residencies he had participated in.

“In 2004, by chance I met a fellow artist who’d just come back from Balai with application forms for the Vermont Studio Centre. I filled in the form, sent it in and I got it, which was lucky. I purposely asked them for a winter residency, I wanted to have a very very different experience. It was a real eye-opener. Every time I went outside I felt like a child, very excited about everything.

It affected me so much that my work at the time was based on landscape, while before this I’d never really worked with landscape. I had only two months there – for the first month I just walked around, observed, talked to people, absorbed things around me. Some residencies ask for proposals but I don’t like to give a proposal. I believe the essence of a residency is to go there first, eat the food, what comes out from here is the essence of residency, even if it was a challenge with only two months.

One of the first things I got was the sense of being a full time artist. I had been dreaming of this till that time, I’d never really had the opportunity. Here all the focus was on the work – no worries about bills to pay every month etc.

In Vermont they were very organised – we got breakfast, lunch and dinner, a small library, a small social space with a piano, ping pong table. Every night we’d mix and share a lot of things.

During the exhibition in Vermont, I did a performance as a reaction to the experience. The other thing I got from the residency was some small money for a travel grant to New York – I went to the museums, got this exposure. At the Vermont Centre, every month they invite established American/European artists to give a lecture/slide presentation. Participants could also share, give slide presentations.

In 2005, I was feeling stuck. Whenever you go out and you come back and stay for a while, you get this mental block, you have to go out to refresh things again. I was sent to Korea for a year-long residency at Goyang Studio, 20 minutes from Seoul. The experience was completely different from Vermont – I got exposure to things like the DMZ, Korean life, Seoul, the Arario Museum. I went to three weddings, went to karaoke. There's a mix of old traditions and modern society – a strong connection as well as a clash. There was an open studio program, seminars, workshops for sharing. You can notice that my work here was very different from in Vermont, how the new environment affects the artist – it's very important.

Right at the end of the residency, I had a feeling of anxiety about coming back even though I didn't really enjoy the residency. Right up to this point I still had to do something else than rely on my work – stage production, TV, theater jobs. But after two residencies feeling like a full time artist, I didn't want to go back to this life again, so I applied for Rimbun Dahan. This was again a different environment, a beautiful place. During 2007 we were celebrating the 50th anniversary of Malayan independence, and everyone was talking about Malaysian history so my work here reflects that.

Angela: It makes clear that the experience of going overseas is what's important to Malaysian artists. I think it's important for Malaysian artists to know they are at an advantage applying for overseas residencies as Asian artists – there are many places that would welcome Malaysian artists, and they should research and apply.

Chang Yoong Chia introduced two main series of his works he pursued during the five residencies he participated in between 2006 and 2008 – Flora and Fauna, work based on personal experiences, using painting and objects, and Quilt of the Dead, which has become a community artwork that talks about death using embroidery and workshops. He then presented a colour-coded “review” of the residencies.

Rimbun Dahan was his first long-term artist residency, offering a year for him to concentrate on developing a body of art works. “Over the year I realised that the environment I stayed in had a relationship to the creation of art works. I thought it was a good idea to use natural elements and found organic elements. For example, after heavy rain thousands of termites gather around light, and the next day there are thousands of discarded wings – I used this material to make a self-portrait.

The Sapporo Artist in Residence (S-AIR) program invites two artists for 2 months at a time. “Every Monday, we had a meeting where we discussed what we planned to do, any problems, what we were interested in and wanted to develop. For technical support there was not much budget but there was a tight network of staff and volunteers, and other artists as a resource. Hokkaido was very different from Tokyo, very connected to the land, with very harsh winters, and in summer there's a glut of live seafood. I wanted to make work out of discarded seafood.” S-AIR arranged for a 7-hour excursion to the annual sea urchin festival to help him get sea urchin shells for his work.

Art as Environment is a community-based artist residency scattered throughout Chiayi country in the centre of Taiwan. 20-over artists mainly Taiwanese, are placed in different locations, living

with local families and creating artworks with the community. Different host associations provide accommodation or technical support. Chia and his wife Ming Wah were based in Xingang, a small agricultural town, and were hosted by Xingang Foundation for Culture and Education.

Uijae Art Studio Artist in Residence programme in Gwangju Korea is run by the grandson of the 19th century artist philosopher Uijae, himself an artist and tea-plantation owner. The program directors hired from Seoul divide their time between Seoul and Kwangju. There were two staff, five Korean artists who mostly couldn't speak English, and eight Asian artists, so there was a language and communication problem. Lots of time-consuming cultural activities were organised but with no notice given to the artists.

Wanakio is a site-specific based residency which hosts 20 Japanese and international artists in various locations in Okinawa. "The Wanakio project was so big that it was sometimes not well organised, with a lot of artists neglected." Yoong Chia was based in Sakaimichi wet market in the city of Naha. He was interested in Okinawa's distinctive culture and history, its role in World War II when it was heavily destroyed.

Yoong Chia had very mixed experiences with each of the residencies. Both S-AIR and the Xingang Foundation were extremely supportive in his Quilt of the Dead project where he did workshops with the locals, helping to communicate, gather participants and organise exhibitions of the results. By contrast, in Uijae, he had such difficulty collecting information and materials that in the end he could not manage to have a show, but instead worked with the 518 memorial foundation who invited him to do a workshop with over 120 participants about the victims of the May 18 1980 uprising in Gwangju. In Okinawa, he wanted to dialogue with survivors among the Himeyuri schoolgirls, 14-16 year-old children recruited as nurses during WWII but was unable to get help to organise a workshop, and after a series of failed attempts, was asked by Wanakio at the last minute to use the Himeyuri images for a workshop during the NPO Art Forum that had come to town.

However, "residencies in general are a good experience, we're brought out of our environment – like a child, with no ability to speak but having these different sensory experiences. I'm still digesting what I've experienced and hopefully this will come out in my other works."

On a lighter note, **Ise (Roslisham Ismail)** took us on a very entertaining romp through three residencies that have affected his career.

"My first residency was in 2003 in India. I was really shocked – I'd just graduated, I brought a few photos of my work and CV and thought I had no chance at all. After 2 months they emailed me to come for the residency in summer. The residency was geared towards finished works – everybody had a studio, working like an artist, provided with materials etc. I made works about the Lord of the Key, fairytales – the residency was like a magical key. I met artists there from India, Kenya, Pakistan.

In 2004 I was invited for a residency at ruang rupa in Jakarta. I was shocked that there was no studio. On the first night they said 'let's go party' – we went to something called Monday Mayhem at a club. When I first arrived I was just alone, at the end of the residency I knew everybody at the party. The Jakarta residency was more about process, discourse – I'd never learned about these things in Malaysia before this, or even in India. There was all this talking talking, and documenting. It was a culture shock – I learned that the finished product is important but process was really important in my work. In 2005 RR invited me to go on an Istanbul Biennale residency with them – we went around partying, and did the work at the last

minute. We tried to find an Istanbul superhero, went around interviewing Istanbul people on the street, and we did a T-Shirt project.”

In 2006 Ise became the fourth artist to be awarded the AHC residency program in Sydney. “Three artists before me had complained about feeling isolated in Sydney but I knew a few people there from RR contacts, and they introduced me other people. My schedule there was full – partying, meeting people. I had an agreement to do a show when I got back to KL. When Rahel visited me in Sydney, I asked her ‘can I make a book?’, record who I met, to erase the myth of isolation. For my last project in Sydney I had a big party in my studio – I called it ‘Lucky Ise, not so isolated’ and invited everyone I met over 3 month period. My work was just to take photos of people. They gave me enough money but I cut costs to save money to pay rent in KL. From Drum and Bass magazines, I made collage, compiling everything – text messages, emails, to make a book. I had a last minute solo exhibition at Gallery 4A – I’d never had a chance to make solo in Malaysia before.”

“In India my residency was about making work, in Jakarta it was about process. I learnt from these two residencies, and I came up with a book so I could do process, compile process, and still party.”

Vincent Leong talked about the works he developed from the end Nov 06 to mid 07 during which he went on two 1-month residencies and was commissioned for the 1st Bombay Sapphire Art Project.

In Nov 06 I went to Gwangju for the Asian Cultural Content Creation workshop for 1 month. Out of the 10 artists doing research there, there was just me and a Thai artist who were not Korean. Gwangju is a really quiet city festival city. I was there to do a video installation but I couldn’t find anything to video – nothing happens there, it’s really quiet. Me and the Thai artist were put up in a really nice apartment, but it was empty. They gave us a lot of money but expected us to buy everything. I couldn’t communicate at all – nobody spoke English. In the end I shot the subway for my video installation. It was winter and snowing and very cold. I experimented with trying to capture movement in a still city. I put two cameras on the front and back of a subway train to capture forward and backward movement. I found a 180 degree concave mirror and eventually used two sets of concave mirrors for the projection to get the whole room to move in forward and backward motion.

The artists would individually make our way to studios by 3pm and work till midnight. There were night discussions with artists, drinking until sunrise, karaoke.

I then went to Sculpture Square in Singapore for another 1-month residency. I continued with my Tropical Paradise stencilled wallpaper series since I only had a month. For this series, I go to each country, take their national cultural icons, and make “wallpaper” [spraying paint over a stencil on the wall]. Because it was a solo show I felt this was not enough so I tried to organise a performative piece for the opening – “Party like you’re back home”, and made flyers to pass out, inviting non-Singaporeans to the opening. Sculpture Square is close to Little India, where they are mostly foreigners. Problems with the management meant it was not publicised properly. Burmese, Indonesians and Malaysians came. We had a lucky draw, festive things.”

“At the end of May I did the Bombay Sapphire Art Project – VVFA’s first project for their Project Room. I wanted a white room, to paint shadows. This was my way of documenting the process of installing an exhibition – people hanging canvases, carrying ladders, drilling holes. It was called ‘The Exhibition that Was’. There were four fixed sources of light. When the audience

came in their shadows fell into same position as the painting – it merged the timelines of past and present. I did it in 2 weeks with assistants.

DISCUSSION

Adeline/Rachel asked how the artists chose residencies to apply to. The artists generally agreed that facilities were important, but looked for different things – Fuad was open to experience all kinds of places, Vincent looked for residencies which support his new media practice and places he wanted to go, after Okinawa, Yoong Chia wanted to go somewhere with that kind of history.

Laura Fan, who was involved with Vincent's exhibition at Sculpture Square, talked about the poor management of the residency, and asked what the artists would recommend to other artists when negotiating a residency. Vincent felt that artists do need the full support of the host institution, their encouragement and involvement, since "It's quite difficult for an artist to go to someone's place and say I want this, I want that." During a bad experience with a little blah blah in Saigon, Ise found other ways to make the most of his time there through making other contacts.

Adeline asked what's a comfortable residency period? **Chia** felt that different length-residencies provoked different responses and strategies – "in a year-long residency, you become more relaxed, you discover things slowly. For the short-term you look for something that attracts you the most to work with."

Tan Nan See asked about what opportunities residencies provided in the artists' careers. All the artist agreed residencies were great for meeting new people and networking, and strengthening their portfolios, also boosting confidence and opportunities for exhibiting (Fuad). For Vincent "it can also be quite stressful – everyone's looking at you with expectation, and I'm usually trying to do something new so there's that expectation too."

Vincent: One thing I really enjoy that's good when I come back from residencies is that I feel excited about making art again. I stay in Malaysia for one month and that starts to disappear.

Fuad: When you go out it's easier for you to see inside from outside. We tend to take a lot of things for granted – we're too comfortable. As an artist it is very important from time to time to put yourself in an imbalanced situation so that it will sharpen our senses. The questions from the people out there – they'll ask about your country, yourself, your culture, then you think again – you realise how little you do know.

Rachel asked if there was something they felt could be improved on in the residencies in general. Most agreed that different places had different problems, but Chia talked about the importance of the honesty of the organisation and their agenda – "if there is honesty of the organisation, it's easy to do things".