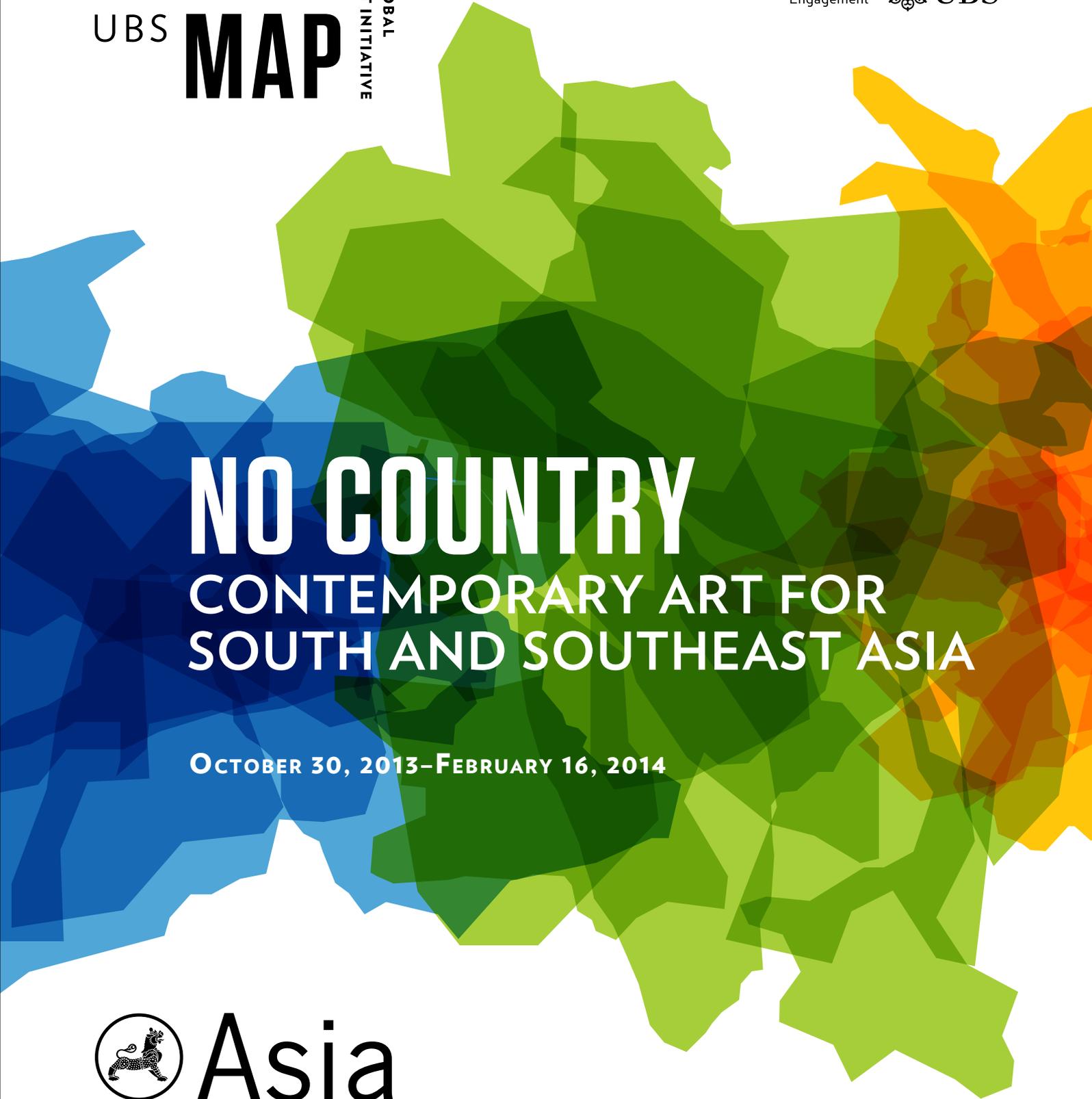


GUGGENHEIM
UBS **MAP** GLOBAL
ART INITIATIVE

A Cultural
Engagement  UBS



NO COUNTRY

CONTEMPORARY ART FOR SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

OCTOBER 30, 2013–FEBRUARY 16, 2014



Asia
Society

Hong Kong Center

NO COUNTRY

CONTEMPORARY ART FOR SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

October 30, 2013–February 16, 2014

A Cultural Engagement  UBS

Teacher Resource Guide

NOTE TO TEACHERS

This Resource Guide focuses on five of the artists whose work is included in *No Country: Contemporary Art for South and Southeast Asia*, the inaugural exhibition of the Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative. This guide suggests techniques for exploring both the visual arts and other areas of the curriculum. It is also available on Asia Society Hong Kong Center's website at asiasociety.org/hong-kong. Before bringing your class to Asia Society Hong Kong Center (ASHKC), we invite you to visit the exhibition, read the guide, and decide which aspects of the exhibition are most relevant to your students. For more information on scheduling a visit for your students, please call 2103 9511 or email us at educationhk@asiasociety.org.

No Country: Contemporary Art for South and Southeast Asia provides an opportunity for students to learn more about the strategies that contemporary artists are using to address the issues and concerns of our time.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition was first seen in New York at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (February 22–May 22, 2013) as part of the Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative, a multi-year collaboration charting contemporary art practice in three geographic regions—South and Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa—and encompassing curatorial residencies, international touring exhibitions, audience-driven educational programming, and acquisitions for the Guggenheim's permanent collection. All works have been newly acquired for the Guggenheim's collection under the auspices of the Guggenheim UBS MAP Purchase Fund. Following its presentation in Hong Kong, the exhibition will travel to Singapore.

No Country investigates the notion of culture as fundamentally borderless, revealing networks of influence and exchange within the region. Drawn from the opening line of William Butler Yeats's poem "Sailing to Byzantium" (1928), which later inspired the title of Cormac McCarthy's novel *No Country for Old Men* (2005), the exhibition title underscores a central question: How is the designation "South and Southeast Asia" defined and understood internationally? *No Country* considers the impact of ethno-nationalism, historical colonization, and present-day globalization on identities in the region, and examines how it is marked culturally by intertwined histories and shared social, religious, and creative traditions.

No Country examines the region from within, looking at the geopolitics of South and Southeast Asia through the work of a cross-generational selection of artists. The exhibition includes painting, sculpture, photography, video, and performance documentation, and examines a range of topics emerging from Ms. Yap's curatorial investigations. These include cross-cultural encounters and negotiations; conceptions of nation, identity, and religion; historical interpretation and narratives; quasi-archival responses to cultural appropriation, and new developments in media and aesthetics.

ABOUT SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

The nation-states of South and Southeast Asia are relatively young, having emerged from colonial resistance, intranational division, and economic and political necessity. Yet culturally, the region is marked by its intertwined histories, and shared social, religious, and cultural practices. These continue to surface in spite of economic and political pressures for a definition of identity through distinctness. The region is also one of the most diverse areas in the world. This diversity is manifest in numerous ways, including differing economic regimes and degrees of development, and uneven income levels.

While the rest of the world's continents can be neatly compartmentalized, the nations that make up South and Southeast Asia often have more differences than they do similarities. Diverse histories and geographical features, economic and political systems, and religious and cultural heritages across the region result in a multitude of cultural traditions and perspectives.

Southeast Asian countries include Brunei, Myanmar (formerly known as Burma), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. South Asia comprises the countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. However, the United Nations notes that the "assignment of countries or areas to specific groupings is for statistical convenience and does not imply any assumption regarding political or other affiliation of countries or territories."

Geographically, South and Southeast Asia are vast and diverse, and have been at the crossroads of many influences. Indian traders brought ancient Hinduism to Cambodia. The Hindus who settled in Bali mixed their religion with local animism to create a unique sect. Seafaring Arab merchants imported Islam to coastal areas of Malaysia and Indonesia. In Vietnam, the only Southeast Asian nation to fall directly under the control of past Chinese empires, China's cultural influence remains powerful. From the late 1400s onward, Europeans imported Western culture to cities such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Penang, and Melaka; the European colonial imprint is still visible in the architecture and cuisine of most countries in the region.

Many religious beliefs are represented, including the teachings of Buddhism, the deities of Christianity and Hinduism, and the rules of Islam. Mixed with ancient spiritual teaching is the frenetic buzz of modernity. Cosmopolitan cities such as Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and Mumbai are already major urban hubs, while up-and-coming cities such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), and Bangalore combine modern development with traditional customs. The culture, business, and fashion in its major urban centers challenges the biggest European and American cities for their status as global hubs.

South and Southeast Asia are experiencing the long-term impact of global forces. Modernization has produced substantial gains in such areas as life expectancy and education, but has also spread dislocation and misery. As the region's economies have grown, the environment has become polluted and natural resources have been savagely exploited. As this transition takes place, people are moving from an era of European colonial economies built on the lucrative spice trade to twenty-first-century technical jobs created in the age of computers, biotechnology, and the Internet.

< KHADIM ALI >

Born in 1978, Khadim Ali grew up in the city of Quetta, Pakistan, near the border with Afghanistan. Trained in the art of contemporary miniature painting at the prestigious National College of Art in Lahore, Pakistan, and in mural painting and calligraphy at Tehran University, Iran, Ali is inspired by his rich cultural heritage and employs traditional artistic techniques to explore the region's complex history. His work is provocative in confronting the social and religious prejudice his family has faced, and considers the effect of such bias on the writing of history, particularly during wartime.

In this series, Ali references the thousand-year-old Persian epic the *Shahnameh* (Book of kings), one of the greatest masterpieces of world literature. For centuries, this text has served as inspiration for artists, particularly those from Iran, Afghanistan, and northwestern Pakistan; as a young child, Ali would sit with his grandfather as he sang its vivid sagas. Composed of some fifty thousand verses, the *Shahnameh* recounts the myths, legends, and history of Iran from the beginning of time to the Arab conquest in the seventh century. One of its mythological heroes is Rustam, the

powerful winged god of Persia, known for his extraordinary strength, bravery, and loyalty. As part of an ethnic minority known as the Hazara, Ali's family was attacked repeatedly by the Taliban, a fundamentalist Muslim group that controlled much of Afghanistan. Ali has used his art to respond to this brutality. Through the medium of miniature painting, he explores storytelling and reveals how established cultural icons can be subverted to serve multiple ends in contemporary life and politics. The work stems from an encounter Ali had with a young boy named Rustam who was unaware that his namesake was a mythological character from the *Shahnameh*. His only association with his name was through the Taliban, who used it to enforce an image of omnipresent vigilance. By associating itself with the kings and heroes of the past, the Taliban seeks to cast itself as an organization of legitimate rulers. Ali inserts personal symbols to counter the hijacking of his culture. For example, the red rope in some of his works is a memorial to those who were killed under the Taliban regime. In these works, warrior-like figures pose as kings, but remain ogres.

Untitled 1, Rustam Series, 2011–12;
Untitled 2, Rustam Series, 2010;
Untitled 3, Rustam Series, 2011–12.
Watercolor, gouache, and ink on paper, 54 x 35
cm, 35 x 29 cm, and 35 x 29 cm, respectively.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,
New York, Guggenheim UBS MAP Purchase
Fund 2012.143–.145. © Khadim Ali.
Photos: Courtesy the artist



View + Discuss

Show: *Untitled, Rustam Series*
(three works on paper)

- ▶ Ask students to look at these works and describe them carefully. What story might they be telling? Record their narratives.
- ▶ Share the information in the introductory essay with the class, then revisit the work. What additional interpretations do students have? How has learning more about the artist and his motivations enabled students to derive additional meaning from the paintings?
- ▶ For Ali, these images portray evil forces posing as heroes. What elements in them suggest the heroic? What elements suggest malevolence?

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Mastering the authentic techniques of miniature painting takes years of experience, great skill, and enormous patience, but students can create their own miniature-inspired paintings with readily available materials. For inspiration, view *The Adventures of Hamza*, an online resource of the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, the Smithsonian Institution, the National Museum of Asian Art, Washington, D.C. at asia.si.edu/exhibitions/online/hamza/hamza.htm.

Then, provide each student with a small sheet of watercolor paper taped to a board, or a sheet of Bristol board, as a substitute for the wasli paper that is the traditional ground for miniatures. Students can use colored pencils, watercolor or acrylic paints, fine paintbrushes, and felt-tipped pens to create their own miniature paintings. Traditional subjects include storytelling, architecture, and geometric and floral designs and patterns. When the paintings are completed, students should discuss their motivations and processes.

- Ali was born in Afghanistan, a part of the world that has been devastated by war. His people, the Hazara, have been the target of systematic persecution by the Taliban, an Islamic fundamentalist militant movement that has used terrorism to pursue its ideological and political goals. While Afghanistan is not close to Hong Kong, it is a country that we hear about frequently in the news. Excellent resources are available to support students in learning more about the country, its people, and current political and social issues. A teaching unit titled *Afghanistan: People, Places, and Politics: Background, Activities, and Critical Analysis* is available on the PBS News Hour website at pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/world/afghanistan_overview_10-06.html.
- Rustam, Iran's greatest mythological hero, is a Persian Hercules, magnificent in strength and courage, cunning, and endurance, and always committed to the greater good of Iran. Even today, his adventures are recounted in new and modern versions of the *Shahnameh* for children and young adults. Rustam is celebrated as a god with divine powers and a heroic reputation similar to that of Hercules in Greek mythology, or modern American superheroes like Superman and Spider-Man. Ask students to think of their favorite superhero. What features does he or she have that people admire? Can you see any of these in Rustam? Create your own superhero. What is his or her name? What powers does he or she have? What distinguishing characteristics does he or she possess? Is he or she good or evil?

< VINCENT LEONG >

The work of Vincent Leong (b.1978) comments on Malaysia's complicated history and diverse composition. Over the centuries, original Malays have mingled with immigrants from Arabia, India, China, Thailand, Indonesia, and Europe, mixing their cultures into a collaged national identity. While outsiders may perceive a tolerant multicultural society, ethnic loyalties remain strong, and there are undeniable tensions that still contradict the ideal of a unified Malaysian identity. The ethnic and cultural differences within Malaysia have created both cultural richness and conflict and remain a sensitive topic that threatens to surface in political, religious, and economic disagreement.

While at first glance Leong's set of photographs *Keeping Up with the Abdullahs* appears to be from an earlier era, it was produced in 2012 and digitally "aged" to suggest a historical origin. The shots mimic turn-of-the-twentieth-century photographic portraits of the Malay royal family that typically include traditional dress and conspicuous parasols. Leong, however, substitutes Chinese and Indian families for Malay royalty. To those born in Malaysia, the symbolism here is clear, and the artist's statement on otherness and discrimination will resonate.

Leong ponders: "Am I Chinese? But I've never been to China and I don't know how to speak Chinese. Or am I Malaysian? Oh no, I'm Christian and Indian." But his cynicism is mixed with optimism for the future: "I think there's hope. If there isn't, I wouldn't have spent all this time, money, and energy making these works."

Leong emphasizes the Malaysian predicament by titling his work *Keeping Up with the Abdullahs*, a playful twist on the well-known idiom "keeping up with the Joneses." The final flourish of the artist's political and cultural critique is a small plaque on the frame of each photograph that pegs the figures depicted as conclusively "Malaysian" in the languages of Chinese and Tamil, the caption written in an all-embracing Arabic Jawi-script.

These biting political commentaries present the artist's perspectives on contemporary Malaysia through a mixture of nostalgia and humor that also comments on Leong's understanding of himself and his culture. "I used to think that this was a really boring subject," he admits, "but you cannot escape it. At the end of the day, all your ideas come from your own personal identity."



Keeping Up with the Abdullahs 2 and *Keeping Up with the Abdullahs 1*, 2012. Chromogenic print with plaque in artist's frame, 65 x 86 cm, edition 2/8. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Guggenheim UBS MAP Purchase Fund 2012.152. and 2012.151 © Vincent Leong. Photo: Courtesy the artist

View + Discuss

Show: *Keeping Up with the Abdullahs* 1 and 2

► Look carefully at Vincent Leong's *Keeping Up with the Abdullahs* 1 and 2. Although he has created these works using digital technology, what characteristics suggest that they might be from a significantly earlier period? How has the artist achieved the feel of an aged historical photograph? What clues has he included to that let us know that these are actually contemporary works?

► Do these photographs remind you of any you have seen? What is familiar about them? Where have you seen similar images?



First Durbar (Conference of Rulers) held at Kuala Kangsar, Malaya, in 1897

► Leong's work references a historical photograph of the First Durbar (Conference of Rulers) held in Malaya (now Malaysia) in 1897. The council was assembled under the British colonial regime and was comprised of Malay rulers and governors whose main responsibility was to elect the king. Compare Leong's work with the vintage photo. What similarities do you see? What differences? How does seeing this historical photograph change your reading of Leong's work?

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- The Malays are predominantly Muslim, and the name Abdullah (meaning "God's servant") is one of the most common names in the Islamic world. It is also the family name of influential Malaysians including a recent Prime Minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. Leong uses the name Abdullah to signify social, economic, and political aspiration.

Long before the reality television show *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, the phrase "keeping up with the Joneses" referred to using one's neighbors' material possessions as a benchmark for social status. To fail to "keep up with the Joneses" is to reveal one's socioeconomic or cultural inadequacy. While the phrase was coined years ago, it's perhaps more relevant now than ever. Have a classroom discussion focusing on the pressures that your students perceive to "keep up."

- Create a class portrait. Research online the way class photos are typically composed. What characteristics do they have in common? Ask the class to collaborate on creating a unique class portrait. Brainstorm a list of attributes that you would like to project, then devise a strategy aimed at producing that result.

- What type of clothing will be worn?
- What poses and relationships will be depicted?
- What setting and lighting will you choose?
- What angle or point of view best reflects your collective vision?
- What additional props will you add?

Once the photo is taken it can be further altered and customized using digital programs such as Photoshop and Instagram.

- In the 1970s, the Malaysian government implemented policies that were designed to favor *bumiputras*, the native people of Malaysia, by creating educational and occupational opportunities and defusing inter-ethnic tension. While these policies have succeeded in creating a significant urban Malay middle class, some analysts have noted a backlash of resentment from excluded groups, in particular the sizeable Chinese and Indian Malaysian minorities. As of 2009, *bumiputra* laws still stand, but many Malaysians argue that they are unfair and racist. In your classroom, debate and discuss: Is favoring one group of citizens within a nation ever justified and if so, under what circumstances? Can you think of any examples closer to home?

< SHILPA GUPTA >



Left:
1:14.9, 2011–12. Polyester thread, wood, glass,
and brass, 158 x 56 x 51 cm. 1/2 AP, edition of 3.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Guggenheim UBS MAP Purchase Fund 2012.148.
© Shilpa Gupta. Photo: Courtesy the artist
Right detail:
© Shilpa Gupta. Photo: Courtesy the artist



The end of British rule in India on August 17, 1947, saw the creation of the Radcliffe Line, a boundary between India and the newly created Pakistan that represented an attempt to divide a 175,000-square-mile territory populated by 88 million people. Pakistan was to become a Muslim homeland, while the new India would become a secular state with a Hindu majority. In response, 14 million people left their homes to seek refuge with their own kind. Many were slaughtered by the opposing side, some starved or died of exhaustion, and others were afflicted by those diseases typically suffered by undernourished refugees. An estimated one million people perished.

Since their independence was established, the two countries have fought three major wars and one undeclared war, and have been involved in numerous skirmishes and standoffs. In an effort to curb terrorism, illegal migration, smuggling, trespassing, cattle-lifting, trafficking of drugs and arms, and other such activities, many miles of fencing and floodlighting have been installed

along the Indo-Bangladesh and Indo-Pakistan boundaries. In 2011, the *Economist* dubbed the latter “The world’s most dangerous border.”

Artist Shilpa Gupta (b. 1976), who lives and works in Mumbai, India, asks: “Can you imagine fencing a border?” In response to her country’s tense political situation, she has made a hand-wound ball of thread encased in a vitrine. The work addresses threat, fear, and religious prejudice via an elegant, poetic sculptural form. As updated in 2007, the Indo-Pakistan border is 1,188 1/2 miles long. Alluding to this vast distance through the application of a 14.9-to-1 ratio, Gupta has wound eighty miles of thread into an egg-shaped ball. This inert mass stands in contrast to the volatile border itself.

View + Discuss

Show: 1:14.9

- ▶ Without revealing the artist's motivation, tell students the title of the work and ask them to discuss what they see.
- ▶ What questions do they have about the work? Brainstorm a list of questions generated by students. What information do they feel they need to know in order to appreciate and understand the work?
- ▶ Share with students the artist's motivation, either by reading or distributing copies of the text above. How does knowing the artist's motivation change the perception of the work?
- ▶ According to Gupta, her process is fragile. "I think of it as creating pathways to the viewer," she writes. "The viewer may choose to walk along the path. I would like for the viewer to absorb it and then leave it open-ended. It is almost not possible for anything to have identical meaning. I would not ask for it. But what is possible is some amount of overlap in emotion." What meanings and emotional responses do you think Gupta is hoping to elicit? Do you think she has been successful

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Since the dawn of human civilization, people have felt a fundamental need to divide the world into territories. The original divisions were often based on the availability of agricultural land, or the influence of a group over the surrounding area.

Some borders, such as interstate borders, are open and unguarded. Others are partially or fully controlled, and may be crossed legally only at designated checkpoints. Borders can be an issue of national importance, driving citizens and their governments to anger and even war. The need for new resources such as food, water, and oil to support a growing population often tests the strength of claims and boundaries.

Invite students to describe what geographic borders they have seen. For example, how is the entrance to Hong Kong or your home country marked? What about within the country or city? Have students discuss why borders have developed and what factors determine whether they are peaceful or contentious.

- Gupta provides us with a visual metaphor by asserting a comparison between the heavily reinforced Indo-Pakistani border and a ball of thread.

Think about an issue that is important to you. First, consider all the usual ways you might call attention to this issue, such as making a poster, writing an article, or joining a like-minded group. Then consider ways that you might call attention to your issue *metaphorically*. What are the essential qualities of the issue that you want to convey? Is there a way in which you might create an object that expresses some of these qualities through metaphor?

- To get a better understanding of the border dispute that Gupta refers to, this interactive map allows you to view the various territorial claims from each country's perspective. Go to economist.com/blogs/dailychart/2011/05/indian_pakistani_and_chinese_border_disputes.

◀ TAYEBA BEGUM LIPI ▶

Tayeba Begum Lipi was born in 1969 in Gaibandha, Bangladesh. Although she had originally planned to be a journalist, in the mid-1980s, she decided to pursue art, majoring in drawing and painting at the University of Dhaka. Despite changing her career choice, Lipi retains a journalist's interest in societal issues and uses painting, printmaking, installation, and video to comment on themes including the politics of gender and especially female identity.

Addressing societal contradictions, Lipi focuses on the importance of questioning the sexual stereotypes that dominate women's lives in Bangladesh and beyond. Inspired by the strong women of her childhood, her work questions the representation and roles of women, particularly in Bangladesh, where historical and religious expectations continue to determine what is permissible.

In *Love Bed*, Lipi transforms a place of comfort and relaxation into one of danger and threat. The razor blades that recur in her recent works not only represent violence, but are also a personal reference to a tool used

in the delivery of babies when other medical support is lacking. Printed on the blades is the Bengali name *Balaka*, a popular company that manufactures this Bangladeshi product. Lipi, coming from a large family, associates the strength of the steel blades with the tenacity that she observed among the women around her as she was growing up. Defying the odds, they were optimistic and kept their families and communities together. Lipi's work resists easily read binary opposites. As a symbol, the razor blade is shown to have both positive and negative potential.

In addition to her work as an artist, Lipi has also sought to encourage social engagement with art, promoting workshops where both the public and other artists can interact with one another. In 2002, she cofounded, with her husband and several other artists, Britto Arts Trust, Bangladesh's first artist-run alternative arts association, dedicated to organizing exhibitions, encouraging international dialogue and exchange, and providing support to the country's artists through residencies, workshops, and funding.



Love Bed, 2012. Stainless steel, 79.4 x 184.8 x 221 cm.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Guggenheim UBS MAP
Purchase Fund, 2012, 2012.153. © Tayeba Begum Lipi. Installation view:
No Country: Contemporary Art for South and Southeast Asia, Solomon R.
Guggenheim Museum, New York, February 22–May 22, 2013.
Photo: Kristopher McKay

View + Discuss

Before showing *Love Bed* to your class, ask each student to create a list of five to ten words that they associate with their own bed. Once their individual lists are complete, create a collaborative list of all the words that were generated. Highlight the words that appeared most frequently.

Show: *Love Bed*

- ▶ Have students create another list of words that describe their response to Lipi's *Love Bed*. Compare the two lists. Discuss together the methods by which Lipi has created a work that challenges our usual associations with this common object.
- ▶ Lipi has used razor blades in the construction of many of her recent sculptures. Visit the artist's website tayebalipi.com/ to view her other works. For Lipi, the razor blade has multiple associations. Create your own list of words both positive and negative that you associate with this object. If you were to suggest another object for Lipi to create using razor blades as a medium, what would you suggest and why?

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- *Love Bed* highlights how an artist's choice of medium can impact the meaning of and response to a work of art. Try to imagine or sketch a bed created from only toothpicks, bricks, or cotton balls. How might that change the impact and meaning of the work?

Artists have used every conceivable medium to create art including flower pollen, blocks of chocolate, and spools of colored thread, to name only a few. Make your own sculpture from an atypical material that has personal and multiple meanings for you. How does your choice of material add to the meaning of the work?
- Most people would view the razor blades in Lipi's work as signifiers of danger and violence, but Lipi also views these objects as symbols of strength and self-reliance. Choose an object that might have a number of both positive and negative connotations. Create a list of all the possible associations. For example, an apple can represent knowledge and sustenance as well as temptation and evil.
- Lipi's homeland of Bangladesh has a turbulent political history that ranges across the war of independence from Pakistan in the 1970s and the military dictatorship of the 1980s, governmental corruption, widespread poverty, and overcrowding. Divide students into working groups and ask each group to research more about the country's history, geography, politics, economy, and culture. Each group should report back to the class. How does learning more about Bangladesh inform student responses to Lipi's work?

< TANG DA WU >

Tang Da Wu was born in 1943. Growing up, he disliked studying English and mathematics and was often scolded by his teachers. He preferred playing after school with neighborhood children, and also enjoyed drawing, gaining further confidence when his high-school paintings were accepted into art competitions.

In 1988, Tang founded the Artists Village, Singapore's first art colony, with the aim of encouraging experimentation. Members of the Village were among the first nontraditional artists in Singapore, and also among the first to begin practicing installation and performance art. There, Tang has mentored younger artists and shared his knowledge of artistic developments in other parts of the world.

In addition to his work as an artist and activist, Tang teaches art education at the National Institute of Education (NIE). He has expressed great concern for the current state of education, having encountered numerous young adults who are afraid to give the "wrong answer," and who retreat from experimentation and innovation. He wonders how we can nurture a future generation to be fearless in its pursuit of knowledge and experience, and dreams of setting up a forum on art education to consider ways to support creativity.

Tang works in many mediums including painting, drawing, sculpture, installation, and performance. In *Our Children*, he refers to a story from Chinese opera in Teochew, the region in South China from which his family hails. The story focuses on the virtue of respect for one's parents ("filial piety") and the importance of cultural values, and the artist's sculpture represents an abstracted baby goat kneeling beneath its mother. The act of suckling is represented by a pitcher of milk



Our Children, 2012. Galvanized steel, glass, and milk, three parts: 157.5 × 227.3 × 59.7 cm, 66.7 × 113 × 30.5 cm, and 21.6 × 7.9 × 7.9 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Guggenheim UBS MAP Purchase Fund, 2012, 2012.147. © Tang Da Wu. Installation view: *No Country: Contemporary Art for South and Southeast Asia*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, February 22–May 22, 2013. Photo: Kristopher McKay

that sits atop the steel-and-glass form. In the Teochew parable, a young boy experiences a humbling moment of enlightenment at the sight of a kneeling baby goat being fed by its mother. In *Our Children*, the two figures, while seemingly stationary, are also in dynamic tension, and resemble Chinese characters, symbolizing the narrative in spare strokes and lines.

For Tang, aesthetic expression is not only representative, but also has the potential to provoke action and change. *Our Children* demonstrates Tang's skillful transfiguration of idea into form. He believes in the potential of the individual and the collective to effect social change, and through his art aims to nudge society toward a greater awareness of environmental and social issues.

View + Discuss

Show: *Our Children*

- ▶ What is your initial impression of this work? What might it be about?
- ▶ Recreate the gestures of the sculpture with your own body. How does it feel to be the larger animal? How does it feel to be the crouching smaller one?
- ▶ Although Tang is showing us an abstract sculpture depicting a baby goat kneeling beneath its mother, he has titled the work *Our Children*. Knowing a bit about Tang's philosophy and life's work, what messages do you think he might want to convey?
- ▶ Although Tang has pared down the bodies of his subjects to a series of lines, the relationship between them remains perceptible. Take some time to look carefully at the interaction between any two living things—fish in a tank, squirrels in the park, your own pets. You may want to make some quick drawings that capture different moments of interaction. Then, simplify those gestures into a series of intersecting lines by bending and connecting pipe cleaners to suggest the poses and relationships you have observed. When done, ask classmates to respond to your work. Are they able to sense the interaction you intended?

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Tang has participated in numerous community and public art projects, workshops, and performances. He believes that an artist should introduce his experiences and perceptions to others, not with entertainment or decoration in mind, but in order to provoke thought. What do your students think is an artist's role and responsibility in society? Ask each student write a paragraph that begins: "An artist should" Have students share their writing and discuss the variety of ways that artists can function in society.
- Says Tang: "I want you to know my way of working. Play. Play is the most important part of my work. And when I grow up I still want to play." Tang believes that children should be encouraged to play and has challenged educators and parents to encourage play and creativity as ways of supporting the development of the *whole* child. Do you agree with this philosophy? What do you think can be learned in the process of playing?
- In Confucian philosophy, *filial piety* is the virtue of showing respect for one's parents and ancestors. For six hundred years, Chinese children have learned how to respect their parents by reading a set of classic folktales called *The Twenty-four Paragons of Filial Piety*, including one story about a fourteen-year-old who strangled a tiger to save his father, and another that tells of a boy who offered himself as a human sacrifice to swarms of mosquitoes so his mother and father would not be bitten. Although filial piety is central to Chinese culture, it is less significant in a Western society that emphasizes the individual and self-determination over family ties and responsibilities.

Even in China, however, filial piety is a shifting concept. In 2011, the Chinese government released a new set of filial piety guidelines designed to encourage good behavior in the "modern era." The original text is full of heroic deeds performed by children on behalf of their parents; the modern version suggests more commonplace acts of kindness such as: "Teach your mother and father how to use the Internet"; "Visit them as often as possible during the holidays," and even "Listen carefully to their stories." Add your own filial piety guidelines to these suggestions; what acts of kindness do you think would be most important to your elders?

Reference:

telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/9476847/China-updates-600-year-old-guide-to-respecting-parents.html

offbeatchina.com/the-new-24-exemplars-of-filial-piety

RESOURCES

Books

Adams, Kathleen, M. *Everyday Life in Southeast Asia*. Indiana University Press, 2011.

Sardesai, D. R. *Southeast Asia: Past and Present*. 6th ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009.

Mines, Diane P.; Lamb, Sarah E. *Everyday Life in South Asia*. 2nd ed. Indiana University Press, 2010.

Lockard, Craig A. *Southeast Asia in World History*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

Osborne, Milton. *Southeast Asia, An Introductory History*. 10th ed. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2010.

Ricklefs, M.C.; Lockhart, Bruce; Lau, Albert; Reyes, Portia. *A New History of Southeast Asia*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

For Young People

Cultures of the World. 3rd ed. Tarrytown, New York: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2012.

Titles in this series cover India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.

Enchantment of the World. New York: Children's Press, various dates.

Titles in the series include books on Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Kindersley, Barnabas and Anabel. *Children Just Like Me*. New York: DK Publishing, 1995.

An illustrated collection of profiles of children from around the world.

Phillips, Douglas A. *Southeast Asia (Modern World Cultures)*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2006.

Visual Geography Series, Minneapolis: Lerner Publications.

Titles in the series include books on Afghanistan, India, Myanmar, Pakistan, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Websites

Asia Society
asiasociety.org/education

Freer/Sackler, The Smithsonian's Museums of Asian Art
asia.si.edu/explore/shahnama/default.asp

Visual Geography Series
vgsbooks.com

The Dynamic Earth @ National Museum of Natural History Smithsonian Institution
mnh.si.edu/earth

Contemporary Miniatures, Education Resource, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art
qagoma.qld.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0004/107887/Contemporary_Miniatures_education_resource

Khadim Ali
khadimali.com

Tayeba Begum Lipi
tayebalipi.com

Shilpa Gupta
shilpagupta.com

FILIAL PIETY

Reverence for one's parents, considered in Chinese ethics to be the prime virtue and the basis of all right human relations.

INSTALLATION ART

Art designed for a specific exhibition space. Its components are to be viewed as a single work of art.

MUGHAL PAINTING

A style of South Asian miniature painting that uses opaque and translucent watercolor paint on wasli paper. The style emerged from Mongol Persian miniature painting—with Indian Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist influences—and was developed largely in the court of the Mughal Empire in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. It later spread to other Indian courts, Muslim, Hindu, and later Sikh. Recently, some contemporary artists have revived the form.

PERFORMANCE ART

Art that employs elements of movement, theater, cinema, music, and/or other forms of public expression, so as to act out concepts before an audience, usually in a choreographed fashion.

WASLI PAPER

A type of handmade paper specifically used for painting miniatures first produced in India in the tenth century. Wasli is acid-free and has archival qualities. A sheet of wasli is made by gluing together several layers of paper then polishing them by hand, usually with a stone, until they are shiny and smooth with minimal perceptible grain.