

# Art Radar Asia

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## 6 Southeast Asian artists to watch in 2014 – curator Louis Ho's predictions

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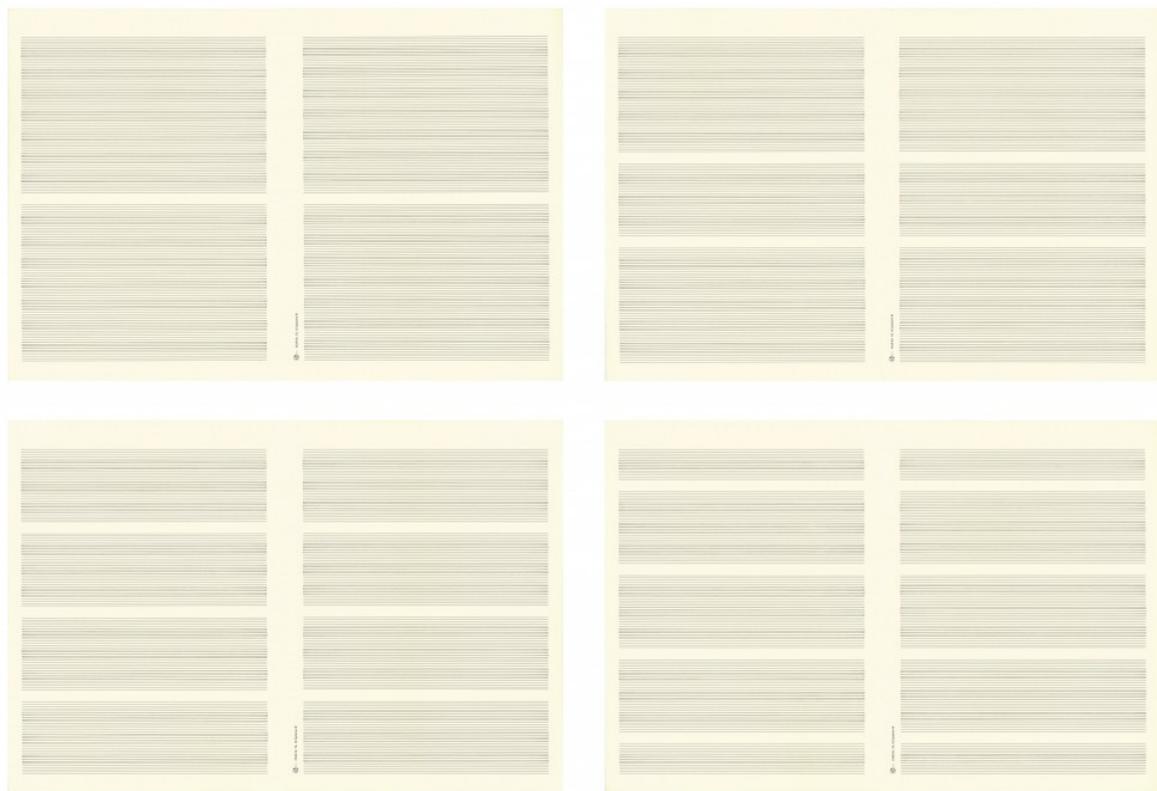
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### Singapore curator Louis Ho reveals his top six Southeast Asian artists for the coming 12 months.

2014 is already upon us and the Year of the Horse is coming up fast. In the second of a two part series, curator Louis Ho gives *Art Radar* an insight into six Southeast Asian artists to watch right now.



Song-Ming Ang, 'Music Manuscript No. 11 – 14', 2013, archival ink on paper. Image courtesy the artist.

## Song-Ming Ang

Song-Ming Ang is fascinated with aural culture. A Singaporean based in Berlin, his chief motif is sound and its myriad roles in contemporary urban life. A recent project involved a mobile karaoke stage installed in the back of a truck, which travelled to various suburban locales in Singapore affording residents a chance to belt out their favourite hits of yesteryear. *Parts and Labour*, a video piece, depicts the artist's four-month stint in a piano workshop, taking apart and painstakingly putting a piano back together again.

An infrequently acknowledged trope in Ang's oeuvre is his concern with craft. "I'm really interested in craft and technique ... and I have a lot of respect for craft," he avers. He interrogates the contexts of music-making in an age of mechanical reproduction, restoring to mass-manufactured products a sense of the manual and the auratic.

Ang's latest show at **FOST Gallery** in Singapore features a series of printed musical sheets on which certain lines were meticulously and scrupulously rendered by hand, in an act of interventionist mark-making that approaches a quiet calligraphic virtuosity. Here, then, is what Walter Benjamin characterised as "**the uniqueness of a work of art ... inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition.**" (pdf)



Victor Balanon, 'Nameless Hundred XXXI', 2013), brush, pen, india ink and masking medium on canvas paper. Image courtesy the artist.

## Victor Balanon

Victor Balanon inhabits a celluloid world of black and white. Almost as if in reaction to the teeming life of his native Manila – its riot of colours, sounds and smells – Balanon's work recontextualises the cool, lamp-lit milieu of film noir, of Hitchcock and avant-garde cinema, a fictive universe awash in a sea of soft, spidery lines limned in pencil and ink.

*Nameless Hundred XXXI*, part of an eponymous series, re-imagines a scene from Ingmar Bergman's 1963 film

"The Silence". The figure of the young protagonist, strolling backwards down a carpeted corridor, has been multiplied, the temporal sequence of his bodily gestures captured in spatial terms. Balanon has also erased his visage, bathing the faces of the boy's phantasmal selves in an eerie luminescence.

While evoking the mood of science fiction – think, say, "Village of the Damned" – the reiteration of the body as a means of visualising motion is a return to the formal strategies of Modernism. It owes a debt to the development of stop motion photography, especially the work of Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey, as well as the Futurist and Cubist movements – Giacomo Balla's *Girl Running on a Balcony*, for one, provides a direct aesthetic antecedent. In Victor Balanon's vision, the cinematic and the art historical collide.



Jompet Kuswidananto, 'Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria', 2008, installation. Image courtesy Louis Ho.

### Jompet Kuswidananto

A regiment of spectral soldiers, their imaginary bodies clad in Dutch military headgear and nineteenth-century Javanese warrior costumes, is arrayed before the viewer. They bang out a percussive rhythm on drums and intone a throbbing, staccato chorus, while footage of what looks to be antiquated machinery in operation and a man performing a slow dance against a backdrop of sugarcane fields, plays on the walls – soundtrack overlapping soundtrack, organic movement juxtaposed with automated action, deferred performativity set against immediate sensorial experience.

Jompet Kuswidananto's work is both compelling and dramatic. His installation, *Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria* unnerves, transfixes, entralls. It is emblematic of the artist's abiding interest in the syncretic character of Javanese culture: its encounters with modernity and technology, the palimpsestic nature of its various historical negotiations. Here are the apparitions of the past, corporeal non-entities constituted solely by attire, implement and gesture; plugged into a power grid, they are, quite literally, ghosts in the machine, resurrected through the auspices of electric automation.

The phantom body, a recurrent trope in Kuswidananto's work, is a polysemic bit of iconography – it can be made to signify nearly anything or nothing at all – and its deployment here as a spectre dovetails neatly with allusions to the vanished cultures that have left imprints on the Javanese cultural machine.

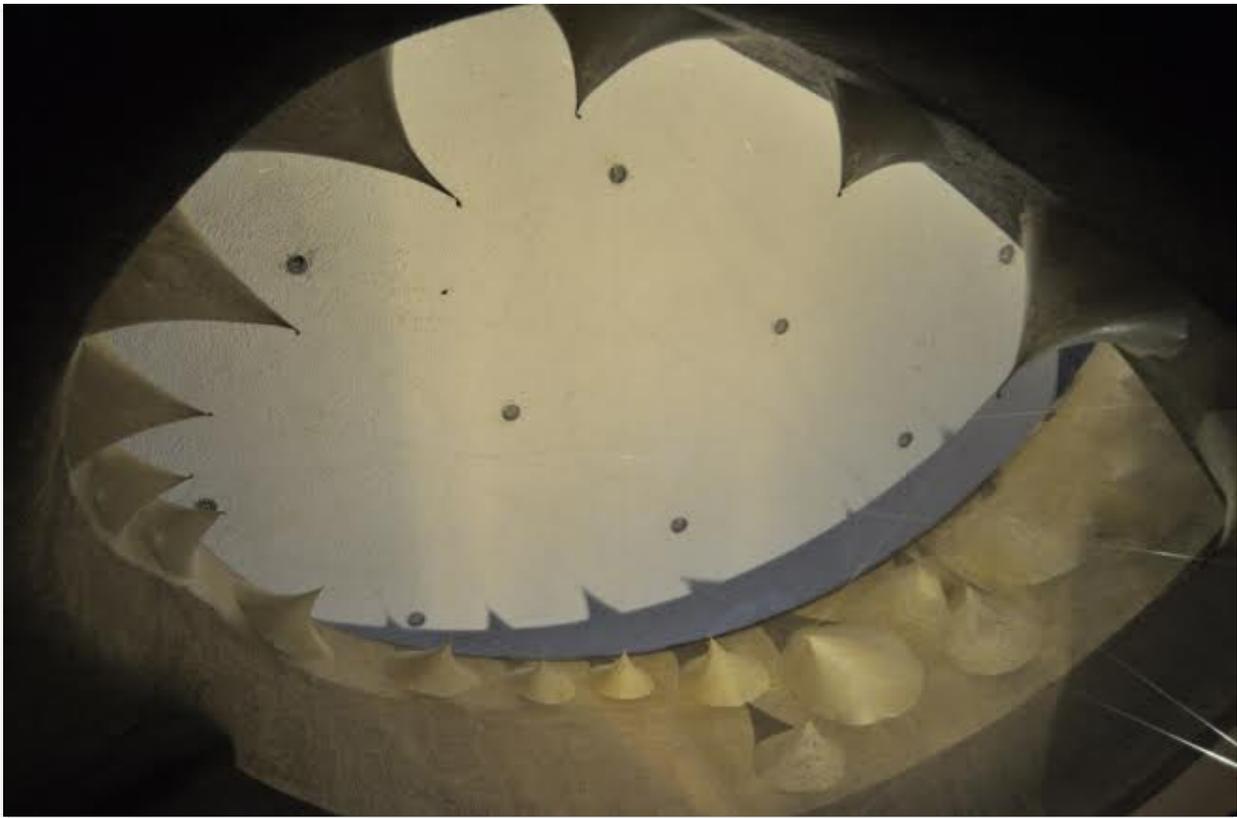


Maryanto, 'Pandora's Box', 2013, charcoal, carbon powder on the wall, woodstick. Image courtesy the artist.

## Maryanto

For his residency project at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, Indonesian artist Maryanto set to work transforming a room measuring some ten metres by five metres into an immersive panorama. Over the space of four walls he brought to life, in charcoal pencil and carbon powder, a desolate terrain ravaged by coal mining, barren vistas subject to the depredations of the shovel and the crusher. "Dystopia Mooi Indië", a *Jakarta Post* article proclaimed, making ironic reference to the genre of beguiling landscape paintings so favoured by the Dutch colonialists.

Maryanto, like his fellow countryman Kuswidananto, is deeply interested in the workings of contemporary Indonesia. He is particularly perturbed by the race for natural resources, and the enmeshed networks of power, corruption and nepotism in Indonesian politics that keep it humming along. The wholesale strip-mining of land in East Kalimantan, for one, has resulted in extensive environmental degradation and health risks for the local populace. And the gold and copper mining businesses in the province of Papua has long entailed blatant human rights abuses. Maryanto's bleak, monumental drawings – the implements of heavy industry hover over the land like ominous portents – stand as stark testament to those realities.



Leeroy New, 'Jonah', 2012, site-specific installation involving latex and nylon string. Image courtesy Francisco Cabuena.

### **Leeroy New**

Sculptor, installation artist and designer Filipino Leeroy New wears a number of hats. Lady Gaga sported a black rubber number by New, created in collaboration with couturier Kermit Tesoro, on the cover of her "Marry the Night" album. His *Balete* work approximated the form of the venerable banyan tree as an installation of red cables and white plastic ties wrapped around the façade of Manila's Ateneo Art Gallery, a medium that he later reworked as outdoor sculptures for the inauguration of the BGC Offsite Gallery.

More recently, however, New made a splash with his project for the Thirteen Artists Award – of which he was one of the recipients – at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. Working with raw latex, he created a series of tent-like shapes in the interior of the structure, stretched by wires across the stairwell into geometric forms resembling giant cocoons.

As the curator of the awards exhibition noted: "New's work for this exhibit is yet another extension of his experimentation with space and structure in relation to the user of the space ... [It is] Part installation, part sculpture ..." Moving between fields – fashion and fine arts – and between genres – sculpture and spatial interventions – Leeroy New seems to embody the most avant-garde of contemporary artistic practice and visual culture.



Jeremy Sharma, gallery view of "Exposition", 2013, at Grey Projects. Various works. Image courtesy Fareez Ahmad.

## Jeremy Sharma

Jeremy Sharma is one of Singapore's most cerebral abstract painters. His work, he notes, is borne of "an aesthetic that reflects our monochromatic and automated world." *Kurosawa*, a wall mural comprised of black and white panels – while ostensibly an homage to the Japanese director's chiaroscuro tableaux – uncannily resembles contemporary urban design, a sly dig at the increasingly porous boundaries between contemporary art and our everyday environment.

Last year, Sharma staged an exhibition of monochromatic canvases at local independent art space, Grey Projects, where his grey pieces – which consisted of poured paint on aluminium – were barely discernible from the dusky walls. If, as Peter Halley remarks, "post-war abstraction was to be dominated by one overriding response to culture: spirituality and phenomenology supplanted by alienation", then here was that sense of existential *ennui* rendered in paint. The urban fabric of Singapore, after all, is one characterised by the homogeneous, modular design of public housing, the often monotonous appearance of which approximates the look – and feel – of assembly-line mass production. The nondescript facelessness of Sharma's compositions, the juxtaposed similitude between one painting and the next, was extended and amplified into an atmosphere of irresistible, inescapable malaise.

**Louis Ho**

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