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Making Line and Medium

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Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia, Volume 3, Number 1, March 2019, pp. 13-21 (Article)

Published by NUS Press Pte Ltd

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sen.2019.0001>



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The Gender in Southeast Asian Art Histories symposium at the University of Sydney, from which this special issue grew, gave me a few persistent questions to chew over. The topics and themes of most of the presentations reminded me that the longstanding issue of whether gender is, in this context, a euphemism for ‘women and art history’ remains central. The theme as it unfolded in practice made me wonder what effects the more direct framing might have had on the discussions at the symposium itself, and what possibilities might open up for the writings and activities that this timely event will no doubt continue to generate. It made me curious to try resuscitating a few strategies from the feminism of a previous era, to see how they might germinate lines of departure threading into the unknown in the here and now in Southeast Asia. An offspring of Womanifesto as a lazy and quiet all-women gathering with no expectation of productivity, public performance or facilitation of public engagement, and with childcare for those who need it. A ban on the microphone. A sharing session where men who identify as progressive intellectuals, artists or cultural activists are asked to keep quiet and take detailed notes.

One of the things that have stuck with me, as it was close to home, was the frustrated and, dare I say it, somewhat weary way that we encircled the old conundrum about the politics of disciplinary frame of reference. How to decolonise the field, its key texts, curricula and exhibition conventions,

[Southeast of Now
Vol. 3 No. 1 (March 2019), pp. 13–21]

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