

## OMBRE

### **Research on artists, curators and activists who work around the subjects of body and sexual minorities in Bangkok, Saigon and Hanoi.**

• Record

Bangkok (June 6<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016)

Ho Chi Minh City (June 16<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>)

Hanoi (June 22<sup>nd</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup>)

I, Sho Akita visited Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, and Hanoi for the dual purposes of building a network of artists and curators, and performing research in order to introduce, share and examine foreign artists and their works in the video screening series Normal Screen, which has been active since 2015.

Normal Screen primarily introduces artists and works that express the experiences of sexual minorities unapologetically, and as part of this research I interviewed artists and curators who have a strong interest in the body, sexuality, and identity. Also, because one of the characteristics of Normal Screen is to screen films in spaces that are neither galleries nor movie theaters, I observed spaces called “alternative art spaces” in the cities I visited.

Expression by sexual minorities that is not confined to the framework or form of conventional expression is frequently referred to as “queer art”, and has been extensively studied in the field of academia in the West since the 1980s. The impact of diversity and globalization cannot be ignored in this field, and there is a strong trend to grasp, research, and enjoy movements around the world regardless of country.

However, there is less information about queer art from Asia than from countries in the Americas or Europe, so many researchers and enthusiasts have been paying attention on what is actually happening in Asia. One of my purposes is to find what queer art looks like in Southeast Asia at present. Yet simultaneously, because “queer” is a word and idea frequently used in the West, in Asia it is necessary to research and accept art without being bound to this word, and there is a chance to encounter “other” forms of expression in various senses of the word. This field and the artists and curators who work in it are social minorities who have a history of being oppressed, and there are not many support systems for them. Therefore, it is important to experience these circumstances firsthand, and build a network that spans across national borders.

After returning to Japan, I named this project “OMBRE”. It means the gradation of color, and is often seen in graphic design today. In the process of my research, I witnessed a borderless and vibrant world that stretches

smoothly across the spectrum. The people I interviewed are skeptical of binary, and they believe in the flexibility humans possess, so this word is appropriate.

The research findings are primarily introduced as three different types. The results of interviews with film artists will be presented and shared as screening projects of Normal Screen, and interviews with artists outside of film will be presented as articles on the Normal Screen website. The alternative spaces I visited will also be introduced on the website, where I expect they will stimulate curators and art aficionados in Japan from activities outside Japan that are not beholden to predefined concepts. Of course, travelers from Japan can also make use of this.

## Bangkok 6/6-14, 2016

• "Contact me when you arrive so we can decide the schedule." I was often told this by artists and curators I had contacted in advance, and I departed from Narita Airport with only a broad plan. Therefore, I started arrange plans after arriving in Bangkok. As I expected, this project got off to a slow start. It was my first time visiting Bangkok, and because I arrived at the start of the rainy season, vicious heat during the day only cooled off in the evening and mornings.



• There were 6 young filmmakers in Thailand who really caught my attention during the research stage. A curator residing in Phuket had already told me the contact information for some of them who lived in Bangkok. Coincidentally, many of them were connected through the film screening series Film Virus, and I learned later that the Japan Foundation, Bangkok had supported their activities by offering film rentals.



• One of these film makers, Ratchapoom Boonbunchachoke, had continued his own film production while working as a scriptwriter for movies and TV dramas. Until graduating from university, he had pursued his own gender and sexuality in the themes of his works, but currently he produces films with a strong interest in politics. I had already seen one of his works as he had shared it with me in advance. This work themed on "post colonialism" in Thailand was truly fascinating. While Ratchapoom was shy at first, but before I knew it he had become quite talkative, and he spent over 4 hours passionately explaining his own works, as well as movies, pop culture, history, politics, and the diverse ethnicities and religions in Thailand.



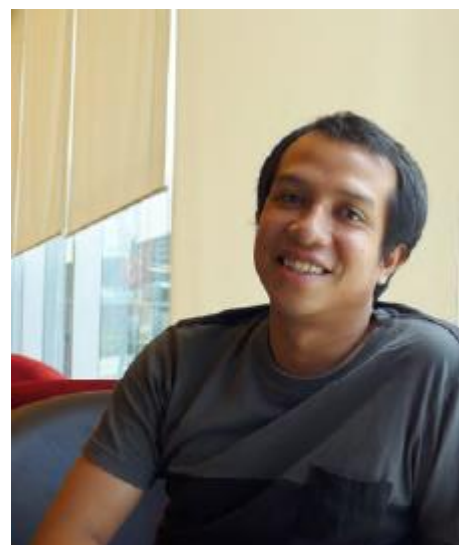
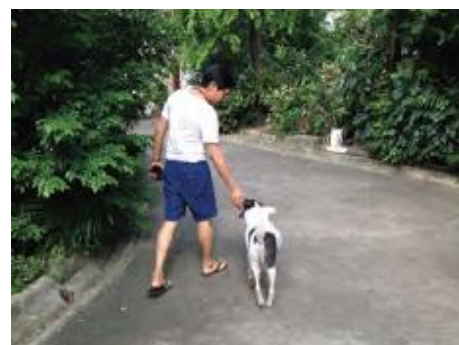
• There were many young artists in the café at Bangkok Art and Culture Center (BACC) where I interviewed Ratchapoom, and I thought it was nice to have an art museum where artists can gather casually. Yet afterwards I heard from many different people about the development of the BACC and dissatisfaction they had with it. I was not mistaken in my first impression of the BACC "looking like an art shopping mall". In a past art map by the Japan Foundation, there was an article concerned about the future of the BACC, but each of the three times I visited, there were many visitors and the exhibits were worth seeing. When I visited the basement library on a Sunday, it was



crowded.

• I also spoke at length with Jakkai Siributr, an artist who does not use film at all. He has been active since the late 1990s, and is planning an individual exhibit at BACC next year. As someone who often meets with artists in the same generation, I visited his home and studio with great apprehension. We exchanged basic information in his large foyer which was decorated in salon style with many two dimensional works mainly by Thai artists, after which he picked up explained to me both his past works and works in progress in his studio. Many of his works were themed on politics of Thailand overall, but some of his works deal with pressure on Muslims in southern Thailand, such as the work “78” that depicts the Tak Bai Incident in which 78 citizens who were arrested at a demonstration Tak Bai in southern Thailand died while being transported, so I felt that Jakkai was also aware of the suffering of minorities outside of Bangkok. Most of the artists whom I met in Bangkok were also deeply interested in problems outside of Bangkok. We continued our discussion in his foyer, when a picture hung inconspicuously on a corner caught my eye. It was a picture of a boy holding a withered tree branch over his head while looking at his wristwatch. The title was “Unworthy of Waiting”. Jakkai noticed this and explained the work to me, and eventually introduced me to the artist who made it.

• The artist who created that picture was Tada Hengsapkul. On the day of the interview, he opened a scratched up Macbook that looked like a dropped smartphone and explained his works to me. His works looked like as though he had taken off his friend’s clothes and used a camera to play around. However, while each work was simple, there was deep dissatisfaction and doubts in the government in nearly all of the subjects shown within them. At an exhibit held in China, the government ordered the removal of Tada’s works, and he had to be careful about his exhibits in Bangkok as well. However, he laughed this off calmly, saying “Even if I am restricted, I never take this into account and censor my own works.” His work looks effortless, but I felt a special (even mysterious) power in him as though he would do something great soon. Recently he has also gotten involved in moving image and music, and the music video he created for his friend’s band as an extension of his photography was very good. When we parted, he introduced me to the Nova Contemporary



art gallery. It was a gallery I had never heard of.

• Nova Contemporary featured the exhibit “Today Is The Day: The Proposition Of Our Future” which the Miyauchi Art Foundation from Hiroshima was involved in. When I told the young director of the gallery Sutima Sucharitakul the reason I had come there, she actually showed me a work by Tada that was in possession of the gallery. After that I spoke with her about female artists in Thailand. There are few female artists in the first place, and she told me with a sense of regret that most female artists recently were photographers. The space was very relaxed, and nearby pedestrians knew about this gallery, but they told me that it had just opened in April of this year.



• I visited other new art spaces as well. TARS Gallery was an artist-run space opened in 2015 (the name being an acronym for “The Artists Run Space”), and the owners Pierre Bèchon and Pokchat Worasub were in the gallery. Although they also conducted residencies, they were still a young organization so they provided a venue and conducted activities according to circumstances as a base for activities by artists who had received funding. While three people had originally started the gallery, now there were only 2. Pierre was once a performer, now focused on curation, while Pokchat was an artist who uses pictures. The space was open 3 days per week, and only available for reservation on other days. I felt an edgy atmosphere here, not conscious of the market or trends, where artists were free to experiment.



• “Bridge” near Saphan Taskin Station opened in July 2014. A café was located on the first floor of this art space, which was one of the few in Bangkok that you can reach from a station without breaking a sweat. The founder was the English Dan Burman. The café space on the first floor had a high ceiling with walls and space to display works of art, while the second and third floors were galleries, drawing a line between this gallery and so-called “café galleries”. I heard that this space hosts screenings and music events, flexibly accommodating a variety of expressions and art communities.





• The bar JAM, located within walking distance of Bridge was holding the one year anniversary event of Queer Mango, a website mostly targeted at lesbians. Members of the audience sang and recited poetry at the open mic event. After the hugely successful event, which had a bigger audience than could even fit in the bar, I spoke with Ilaria and Nedine, two representatives of Queer Mango. They use the word “queer” not to hold events just for the LGBT community, which has gained recognition in the past few years in Thailand, but also to welcome women and people from various other minorities, and provide a place to simultaneously consider their existence and the problems they face.



• Additionally, I visited the Bangkok Gay & Lesbian Film Festival (BGLFF), which acts as a place for the queer community to mingle. It was still only the second time the event had been held, and the programming was directed by Anucha Boonyawatana who had worked on the film “The Blue Hour”. This was just after the mass shooting that occurred at the nightclub Pulse in Orlando, Florida in the US (At the time there was information that 7 people had been killed in a shooting in a gay bar in Mexico in May), and I felt strong will in having sexual minorities gather in one place. At the same time, I considered once more Normal Screen what a “safe space” is for LGBT people, and what it signifies. BGLFF’s ability to attract guests left something to be desired, and when I asked about the first time they hosted it last year, they told me there were even fewer guests to the point of making it awkward. There were many foreign movies that could only be seen here, and the tickets were cheaper than for Hollywood movies, and the location where it was held in a city was very convenient, so I was surprised by the lack of guests. I spoke passionately about both Thai and foreign movies with the people I met there, but movie fans like them were an even smaller minority than I imagined.



• Speaking of films, the director Thunskas Pansittivorakul (often presented without his last name) who was known at international film festivals consented to an interview in Bangkok. He told me that he was currently filming at Thai Film Archive, so I traveled 90 minutes by bus from the Victory Monument to get there. The Film Archive is currently building three new buildings at once, with plans for a larger new facility. Thunskas spoke to me during a break from production, and I found him to be more approachable than I expected. Many of Thunskas’s works explicitly depict love and desire between



JAM Factory

men, so none of his works have been formally screened in Thailand. He sometimes energetically works on several short films in a single year (and had visited Japan with the support of Japan Foundation), and in recent years he has worked on feature length films. However, he has been keeping low profile. He says the reason for this is that it would bring danger upon him if he made statements or activities that stand out. I could say this of many of the artists I met this time, but this is because there is no problem with figurative expression in their works, but if they explain this there is the potential of censorship or even greater danger. Artists who do not have major production companies, but continue independent activities honestly seem to live in fear. I would very much like to screen the works of Thunskaa, who spoke to me specially about this, in Japan. As we parted, he asked me “who will you meet next?” to which I answered “you probably don’t know her, but she’s a young woman named Chama.” He had a troubled look for a moment before telling me “Chama! She’s a real monster!” and laughed out loud. Thunskaa told me that Chama was once a student of his.



• Chama Lekpla does not currently produce films, so it was a struggle to find her contact information. Her films do not exist on the Internet, so I could not watch them. There was scarce information, but I instinctively felt that I wanted to meet this artist no matter what. She could not speak much English, so she brought her friend Pea Panuvatvanich, who can speak English and has even edited her works. She made her works when she was a university student, and has worked as a scriptwriter since graduating. At a Starbucks, they showed me a 15 minute film of hers on a notebook computer. After we finished this work, which was brimming with curiosity and inquiry into sex, I was glad that I had met them. I was glad that I had not given up on finding her contact information. That is how much her works exceeded my expectations. She said that she was preparing to make another film for the first time in a while. Pea was currently teaching film at Bangkok University. The number of students studying film and movies in Thailand had suddenly increased, and Bangkok University had accepted 5 times as many students to study film as other schools.



---



• In Bangkok, I visited three art centers and galleries located in universities (Silpakorn University, Chulalongkorn University, and Bangkok University). At each of these universities, few students or faculty even knew of the art spaces, and at Chulalongkorn University with its vast campus, a group of students from the art department making art outdoors had not heard of it either, so they looked intensely at a map, searching for the place it might be. I felt that this was the “position” of art in Bangkok overall. Of course, there were no visitors in any of the three galleries. However, the works on display at each of them were very interesting, just as I had been told. At Silpakorn University, there was an exhibit that provoked thought on restricting freedom of speech entitled “Two men look out through the same bars: one sees the mud, and one the stars”. A group exhibit called “Oscillation” was held in the art center of Chulalongkorn University, featuring the works of Eiji Sumi.



• I also visited Wat Po and the Grand Palace. I just happened to visit on June 9<sup>th</sup>, the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the coronation of the King of Thailand, so I couldn't visit at my own pace, but it was interesting to see the great fanfare with my own eyes. It was fascinating to see the environment of the royal family, which is deeply tied to the lives of the Thai people. Even among artists, there are many who speak metaphorically of the king or presence of the king in Thai society, and I could really feel that here. I also visited a movie theater, and felt the atmosphere of the king's hymn, which is sung before screenings. I saw the latest version of this, in which the song is not played but rather lyrics are shown on screen with music like in karaoke.



• Ratchapoom, whom I had met during the first half of my stay, and his friend the film programmer Chayanin Tiangpitayagorn spoke to me until morning about the circumstances of Thai movies and television while sipping on tea. While it is possible to learn what expression and representation exists on the Internet, one can only assume from afar what position they have in society. By listening to these artists who watch the media with keen eyes, I believe I was able to learn the temperature of pop culture accepted by the masses, and the excitement (or dis-excitement) over less accepted unique expression.



From the top:

Silpakorn University Art Center  
MahaNakhon at Silom/Sathon  
Pangina Heals at Magie Choo' s  
A stray dog



## HCMC 6/16-20

· Even up to the minute before arriving in Ho Chi Minh City, I was unfortunately unable to contact the people I wished to interview, nor was I able to find artists that caught my interest. I started by going to San Art, who did not reply when I contacted them by email. On an upper floor of the building San Art was in, there was an exhibition being held for the results of “San Laboratory”, a residency program, which may be their last. San Laboratory had been held eight times thus far, but they were forced to cancel their next residency due to pressure from the government. They have no plans to restart the residency. After viewing works by three artists which were on display, I spoke to a university student intern who was working in a space called the Reading Room just inside the first floor. The intern seemed nervous, but when I continued to ask persistently, I was introduced to the program assistant Hung Duong. Zoe Butt who had participated in an event at the Mori Art Museum was not present. Hung Duong was quite serious at first, but gradually spoke to me about their present situation. We decided to meet and speak more at another date.



· The hot topic of the modern art world in Ho Chi Minh City was of course the design and art space called The Factory which had just opened in April of that year. When I visited, they were preparing for the next exhibit, and it had really become a factory. Yet it was smaller than I imagined. The space just inside the building was used as a display space, so it seemed like a slightly large gallery. They said that the next exhibit would only have one work of art on display. As soon as I entered, a woman from the staff gave me a tour, but it was over in just two minutes. A small bookstore in the same space as the exhibit space was empty and had not opened yet. Five staff members were working in a space like a café on the second floor, which anyone could use as a co-working space. Zoe Butt was there, so I greeted her. On my way out of the building a vendor was making banh mi sandwiches so I tried to buy one, but the vendor refused, saying they were all for the staff. The surrounding area was an upper class neighborhood with few stores. It was 20 minutes by taxi (about 180,000 Vietnamese dong) from the center of the city. I couldn't help but wonder how many people would actually come here.



• Vin's Gallery, located relatively close to The Factory, had recently opened a shop. It seemed that their main project was an art classroom held on the second floor.



• Galerie Quynh is in a famous old apartment on Dong Khoi Street in District 1, so I could certainly feel its history and characteristic. However, they told me that it had been decided to demolish this building and build a shopping mall, so they are currently searching for a new space. This time there were works by the Vietnamese artists Hoang Duong Cam and Truc-Anh on display in the gallery, and I was informed that they are also working on film projects. Quynh is also conducting educational activities (workshops) through art for locals. I regretted the fact that she was very busy and didn't have much time to speak about this.



• I also went to the opening of Phan Quang, which would be held in the second floor gallery of a restaurant called Blanc Art Center, on the advice of Quynh. It was a portrait gallery of a Japanese family that continued to live in Vietnam even after the end of World War II, taken by an artist who had presented his works and even done a residency in Japan. The artist and many of his subjects were excitedly participating in the opening at the gallery. The work was titled "RE/COVER", and literally the subject was covered in a thin cloth. I also visited Dia Project and HCMC Fine Art Museum.



• I was able to meet Aiden, the founder of a zine titled "Vanguard", which may be the only place in Ho Chi Minh City where art and queer culture intersect. Aiden grew up in Ho Chi Minh until the age of four, after which he and his family immigrated to Boston in the United States. Since a few years earlier, he had visited Ho Chi Minh City from time to time and stayed for nearly three months. The zine was his attempt to create a queer community and connections in Ho Chi Minh City. He also had it in mind to make opportunities for less wealthy common people to come into contact with work. Although it includes sexual content, it does not sell much as a zine, so it is not subjected to censorship. They hold release parties every time they launch a new issue, which must surely be a precious space for parties who do not belong to the existing LGBT movement. Aiden said there are surely many artists making queer art who have not come out to the public yet.



From the top:

Dia Project  
Black Art Gallery  
Phan Quang's RE/COVER  
HCMC Fine Art Museum  
Aiden of Vanguard

· As for film makers, I also met with Tran Phuong Thao, one of the directors of the documentary “Finding Phong”, whom I had contacted in advance. The film was screened as an (American) Pride Month event at the American Center Saigon, so I participated in this. The audience was very young. I had already seen the film, as I had contacted the director in advance. However, Q&A was in Vietnamese only, and all I could do was greet the director. At the same time, I met with Nguyễn Thị Thắm, the director of the film “Madam Phung’s Last Journey” whom I had also requested to interview in advance, and although she promised to meet me again, I could not get in contact so it was canceled. The two of them were to host a three months workshop in Ho Chi Minh City, and were very busy with the preparations. All of the people involved in film whom I met afterwards knew about this workshop, so I could feel the small scale and depth of relationships in the Vietnamese film community.



· Madam Phung’s Last Journey is a feature length documentary which portrays a world quite the opposite of the happier Finding Phong. It follows the season in which gay people and people seeking sex changes but can’t get them do performances as drag queens for local entertainment, and while the subject is appealing, there is a certain tension in the film. The director Thắm is a 31 year old woman, and I look forward to her future works.





## Hanoi 6/22-28

• I had greater hope to spend a fulfilling time in Hanoi, which is much more pedestrian friendly than Ho Chi Minh City. I met with Swann Dubus, who introduced many people that I should meet in Hanoi during the planning stage for this research. He was one of the directors of Finding Phong, and is married to his co-director Tran Phuong Thao. Although he was born in France, he has lived in Vietnam for many years, and you can reliably see him ordering pho on the street. In 2011, they produced the documentary “With or Without Me”, which depicts men battling with heroin addiction in northwest Vietnam, as well as their families and doctors. I asked about Finding Phong, in which the protagonist gets happier by the end, unlike that earlier work which vividly portrays a harsh reality. In fact, this film was a project by the Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment (iSEE), a non-profit organization that works on human rights issues in Vietnam, and the concept prepared from the beginning was to portray a positive image of transgender people. I was worried about the fact that the many concerns transgender people face are not portrayed in the film. However, I noticed a strange stereotype in myself here. I thought that there was no news or information on transgender people in Vietnam, so I felt that it was dangerous that a happy, beautiful trans woman was represented here. Yet, there were in fact representations, and news on violence against and prostitution of transgender people. He also says that these conditions have improved in recent years. I heard in detail what kind of news and representations there were. After that, he introduced me directly to the movie producer Nicole Pham from Cinematheque, and I rode over on the back of Swann’s motorcycle.

• Cinematheque stands at the back of a narrow road, like a hideout or secret garden. I was greeted warmly by Nicole, who has worked there since it opened twelve years ago. When I asked her about Cinematheque today, she told me frankly that they have gotten fewer visitors in recent years. I am certain the Internet has something to do with this, but it is not as though this place was so popular before. It is very difficult to do art cinema in Vietnam, where there is no custom of going to the movies in the first place. But she told me that despite this, the fact that such a place exists in Hanoi is very important in itself. She also gave me her impressions of Vietnamese cinema as someone familiar with





both Vietnamese and foreign films. She also gave me DVDs of some of her recommended Vietnamese films.

• I also visited iSEE, which funded Finding Phong. They work for the human rights of ethnic minorities and LGBT people, and also have made efforts in lobbying and support to develop laws. They also hold seminars for journalists, workshops to support LGBT people who live in rural areas across Vietnam, and conduct events with famous figures. Their activities are not directly related to those of Normal Screen, but I learned about the growth of the so-called LGBT movement in mainstream Vietnamese society so far. There are both pros and cons between parties, and this is something that sexual minority artists and curators have experienced and watched, so there is great meaning in experiencing this firsthand. On a related note, a law was passed in 2015 recognizing sex changes, and the law will be enacted from 2017. iSEE is cooperating with the government in preparation for this.

• I was also able to speak with a young transgender man who said he is thinking of working at iSEE eventually. His name is Chu Thanh Hà. Hà has worked as a full time intern at the international NGO Oxfam, and believes his experience should be shared, so he interviews other trans people as part of his job. The experience he described to me was broad, including discrimination he suffered while job hunting, the fear of being isolated from even gays and lesbians, antipathy from his grandparents, the problem of there being no treatment or insurance because sex changes are illegal, and even depression. He told me that there are many homeless LGBT on the streets of Vietnam with nowhere to go. As a souvenir, Hà gave me a survey report on the current status of LGBT people which he was recently involved in. Reading this, I found that while there was an organization for parents of LGBT people in Vietnam (PFLAG), there were also things rarely heard of in Japan. For example, there were several cases of aunts or grandmothers calling together relatives to decry the “abnormality” of the LGBT family member. The strength of family bonds frequently mentioned in Vietnam has this side as well. It is painful to think of the pressure on parties subject to this.



From the top

iSEE

Ha

Lý Thái Tổ Park

Six Space Gallery

· Upon reflection, many of the people I met on this trip are people who believe in the power of individual stories and the power of sharing such stories. DinhThị Nhung is a unique person who archives things, places, and stories concerning LGBTQ people in Vietnam. Her activities, which have been featured in the British newspaper The Guardian, have developed since then, becoming more artistic. The origin of her idea for the archive was The Consultation of Investment in Health Promotion (CIHP). Nhung first got involved in the archive there, and struggled to collect newspaper articles and tokens of individual memories, which she then compiled as information online. Even now she continues to conduct interviews, while compiling the history of gays and lesbians remembered by the city with digital technology. She also shares the knowhow she has learned and leads similar exhibitions as a curator in Vietnam, Sweden, and Cambodia. Her staff has often struggled in Hanoi, where they fear censorship when holding exhibits, and censorship is indeed strict, so she said they have also held exhibits for just 12 hours at the Swedish Embassy. It is not easy to hear the experiences of people who have grown up with such oppression. Doing this takes some ingenuity, and one must be creative. I suppose Nhung has many little tricks for doing this. On the day I interviewed her, she had started work again for the first time in a while. When I asked her the reason for this, she told me that her nephew had died ten days earlier, and a few days later she would depart to Myanmar for another project. I would like to thank Nhung for sharing some of her precious time with me when she was so busy.



“A Travers” by Bao at Institut francais

· One of Nhung's friends waiting and worrying for her in Hanoi was the artist Nguyễn Quốc Thành. Thành was my host for this project, and I met with him at DocLab. I had deep feelings about meeting him, as he had gradually supported this project since the previous year. Thành was a member of Nha San Collective, a famous art collective in Vietnam, and he also planned and managed the queer art event Queer Forever! This event was originally held once every two years, but he said that in the future they would hold it as they can procure funds. Thành started by explaining his own works. He seems to be interested in the border between public and private gay identity in the modern age when we all have technology in our hands. Since he had also come to Japan in 2014 for NIPAF (the Nihon Performing Arts Festival), I asked about his experience at that time. It seems that he made efforts for the shy Japanese audience, and the content was informative to me. He often holds talk events when screening films, sometimes bringing filling the venue with his audience, which he can hardly expect. Currently, Thành is programming for the next Queer Forever, which is planned for September. He let me join him in discussions with Vincent, another DocLab staff member and one of his team members. They asked me what I would recommend if they could screen a work from Japan, and I gave them several suggestions.



· I also met Ngan, who had worked at DocLab until recently. She currently works at the art café Manzi, so I asked her to explain Manzi to me. Perhaps because of the name, I imagined it would be a space centered on magazines and zines, but it had a proper gallery, and they mainly sold two dimensional art. The first floor is a café with a high ceiling, which featured large sculptures when I visited. Because Manzi has a shop and a café, they are able to operate the gallery space on their own without any financial support. Ngan told me that such a space was very rare in Hanoi. When I visited Manzi again, despite the fact that I came outside of her work hours, Ngan brought me three DVDs containing works by artists interested in sexuality from among the works made at DocLab. When I asked her about Hanoi Creative City, a high rise building which includes the Nha San Collective space (currently under construction), she showed me a bitter face, and said "I hate that building". Nha San Collective is on the 15<sup>th</sup> floor of the building, and there are also small shops, talent agencies, a gym, and a café on the first floor. Frankly, it seemed a bit tarnished.

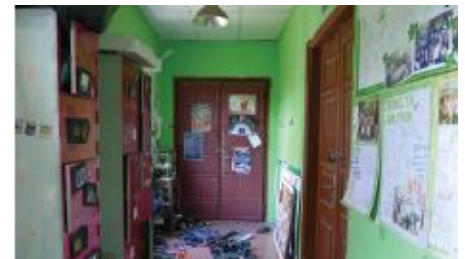




• I visited Creative City again. There is a shared office in the building, where I met the film director Nguyen Hoang Diep. She had taken the trouble to borrow a room in the shared office. What is more, she brought Marcus Cuong Vu from the Yxine Film Festival with her. Diep's work have already been screened twice in Japan, and she is the director of "Flapping in the Middle of Nowhere", a feature length film which will be screened in Fukuoka. The day before the interview she sent me a link for a preview screening of the movie, so I hurried to watch and research it. Diep had a sharp and strong vibe, but I went ahead and asked her about the lead actress in her film, trends among young actors in Vietnam today, sexuality, and metaphorical expression in the drama. The conversation proceeded calmly, but when we reached the subject of funding from Europe, she told me her passionate feelings about her works. There was criticism in Vietnam that her film was too aware of the film festival audience in Europe, and the shock of this had hurt Diep. "Why would I make films for a film festival when I might die tomorrow? This film took five years to complete from the time I procured funding" she said.



• I also visited TPD (The Centre for Assistance and Development of Movie Talents), which is nearby the Japan Foundation, Hanoi. Before I even entered, I found the corridor full of children's shoes. Going inside, five elementary school students were singing Adele songs while editing a silly video on a desktop computer. It reminded me of after school child day care from long ago. I saw no adults around, so I went and spoke to a woman from the staff in a small office on the second floor. She showed me junior high school age children who were actually filming something in another room. She also said this is all they had as a space, but that they also held workshops for adults on and acting classes for high school students on weekends. I was especially interested in the film screenings and discussions they held every Friday. DocLab has an experimental feel, but TPD deals with more on traditional filmmaking. I heard both at DocLab and TPD that the film education of universities in Vietnam has holdovers from propaganda films, and it was commonly recognized that they make no new endeavors or education.





## Future Plans and Prospect

• I received preview DVDs and video links from artists who produce films after interviewing them, and told those whose works I had already seen that I wished to screen their films in Japan as well. I did not receive the film data for any of these works there, so I will discuss with each of them how to arrange materials and subtitles in the future. My current plans include three programs: 1) a Bangkok experimental short film collection, 2) a feature film by Thunskas Pansittivorakul, and 3) Finding Phong. In the future, I hope to have Thanh from Queer Forever! program a Vietnam short film collection.

• When I screen these films, I will make an article of these conversations, and have it read as materials that should be published.

• The artist Ratchapoom and curator Chayanin whom I met in Bangkok were excited about their chance to screen their works in Hanoi this fall. I learned after arriving in Hanoi that Thanh from Nha San Collective is the planner of that screening. Although they had not met, I had met them both, and I was very happy to feel that there is already a network between those two groups and myself (Bangkok, Hanoi, Tokyo). They said it would be great if we could do something together soon. We have already exchanged other information.

• I think it will be possible to give advice on programming including their screenings, and if I have time, request that they do programming in the future. For example, I might request that Thanh to program a Vietnam short film program.

• Although I did not find any new film makers in Vietnam who caught my attention, I would like to screen the documentary Finding Phong. However, when screening this film, it will be necessary to explain the circumstances of transgender people in Vietnam in the past few years and in the future. I think this will make for good materials to compile the stories I heard from single-minded activists and parties involved. The director Swann has a project which I will participate in on Iwai Island in Yamaguchi Prefecture in August, and I am already cooperating with him as much as I can on research, etc..



Pictures of works, from the top:

Chama Lekpla

Finding Phong

Thunskas

- I have heard that the movie Flapping in the Middle of Nowhere will be screened at the Focus on Asia Fukuoka International Film Festival to be held in September so I plan to post my interviews conducted in this research.

- I hope to convey the mood of the broader Bangkok art scene by making a blog of the interviews with and images of the works of filmmakers and other artists.

## Impressions

• Regarding censorship, because I wished to ask artists mainly about their works, I was not able to ask them much about censorship, but of course they express themselves while suppressing direct political criticism, so their expression is metaphoric. They say that there are works accepted by the audience as spiritual expression, which are in fact political criticism. This can especially be seen in the popularity of Apichatpong outside of Thailand.

• Of the artists I met in Thailand, some said the content of cable television broadcasts and news must also pass censorship, but a friend of mine who works as a journalist at the Thai branch of the Wall Street Journal told me that she normally does her job without worrying about censorship. It is difficult to confirm the factual circumstances of censorship here.

• As for Vietnam, for example the direction of activities of San Art has gained attention from art communities outside the country, and it is sometimes reported in the media, but this attention offends the Vietnamese government, and it seems that they are actually obstructing the activities of San Art. I want to support them, but it seems I must be careful.

• Nha San Collective, DocLab, and Cinematheque also say that in order to avoid getting too much attention from the government, they cannot advertise for events as they wish. Considering this, not having too many art-related tenants in the Creative City building may be good way to escape censorship. If the whole building was filled with art groups, the whole building might be closed. In fact, the previous predecessor of Creative City was a former pharmaceuticals factory, closed by the government after eight months of success. Many artists and creators gathered in this space, called “Zone 9”.

• In Vietnam, I frequently witnessed topics and activities regarding archives and preservation. Videos in which residents calmly recite their own stories have been posted on Facebook under the title “Humans of Hanoi”, and there are people who archive the possessions of individuals along with their stories, like the activities of Đinh Thị Nhung. I believe that these activities are intended to recognize the long history of invasion and colonization which

**SAN ART TEMPORARILY ENDS ITS RESIDENCY PROGRAM AFTER WARNING FROM VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT**



<http://artasiapacific.com>

Vietnam experience, as well as the existence of people who have been oppressed in society to the point of having their very existence erased (for example sexual minorities), and to make these people more visible and spread this to the world. It is the act of writing history. It seems they are doing this now not only because it has become possible, but with awareness of the fact that they do not know how their own existence may be erased in the future. Regardless of whether they are aware of it, every minority in the world shares the fear that their history and presence may be erased. I hope to introduce this strain and passion in future Normal Screen activities.

- Furthermore, many people whom I met in Bangkok and Hanoi only occasionally mention the history of war, colonization, and influx of capital from overseas, and expressed the fact that things are still a mess because of the negative impact from these events. I could not ask them how things were a mess. This may be something they cannot say to visitors from abroad, and of course I realized once again that they feel this way, but I hope to look directly at our tainted past while simultaneously building good relationships.

- In this research, I had precious opportunities to meet many wonderful people, and could not believe how fortunate I was. I was also warmly welcomed by all the staff at the local branches of Japan Foundation, and since I was visiting both places for the first time, this was a source of great encouragement. This is often said, but as someone doing research outside the place I live for the first time, every day I strongly felt the importance of actually meeting people (not just talking with them by email or on the phone). Actually greeting these people and experiencing first-hand the places where they live, the flow of time, and the mood there, made the world I saw far larger than I expected. While they were not negative, several of the stereotypes which I held were smashed to pieces, and I expect that because of this there were several questions that I was able to ask over there, and therefore, there will be a new depth in the research and programming I conduct from Japan in the future.



LGBT Archive Exhibit materials curated by Dinh Thi Nhung