RETHINKING ABOUT EXHIBITIONS

Towards a Mystical Reality through Exhibitionary Space

by Seng Yu Jin

In 1974, Redza Piyadasa and Sulaiman Esa organised the exhibition *Towards a Mystical Reality*: *A Documentation of Jointly Initiated Experiences (TMR)* (Fig. 1). Piyadasa and Esa taught fine art at the Mara Institute of Technology (MIT, now known as Universiti Teknologi Mara) in Kuala Lumpur. They were part of a broader intellectual movement centred on a critical attitude towards dominant aesthetic conventions circumscribed by Euro-American notions of art.[1] The exhibition included 'found objects' such as half-drunk Coke bottles, human hair, worn shoes, empty canvases, a chair, a bird cage, and even living things like a potted plant. These objects were displayed like artworks, with detailed descriptions, as well as factual information on the time and place of the collection of exhibited objects, providing more context to the audience. *TMR* advanced a decolonial method of thinking about art and artmaking by producing a manifesto calling for Asian artists to "emphasise the 'spiritual essence' rather than the 'outward form' as an alternative way to think about and make art." It also transformed the passive viewer of an exhibition into an active participant involved in making meanings by drawing on their own subjective realities to interpret the various objects in the exhibition.

In 2011, Sulaiman Esa restaged *TMR* at the National Art Gallery, Malaysia, as part of the retrospective exhibition *Raja'ah: Art, Idea and Creativity of Sulaiman Esa from 1950s-2011*. Esa has subsequently restaged *TMR* as part of *Soil and Stones, Souls and Songs* at Para Site, Hong Kong, which travelled to the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, Manila, in 2016 (Fig. 2), and to the Jim Thompson House, Bangkok, in 2017. The multiple restagings of *TMR* establish this exhibition as a case study and entry point into how methodologies for exhibition histories as a discipline can be developed within the context of Asian art. I propose the possibility that the intersections between the curatorial and restaging break the impasse between historical art and the exhibition.

FIG. 1

Publication of *Towards a Mystical Reality: A Documentation of Jointly Initiated Experienced by Redza Piyadasa and Suleiman Esa*. Courtesy of Sulaiman Esa and the Estate of Redza Piyadasa.

FIG. 2

Installation view of *Towards a Mystical Reality* restaged at Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, Manila (2016). Courtesy of Simon Soon.

This essay reflects on how I restaged *TMR* by reconstructing an exhibition model of the exhibition to expand existing understandings of "exhibitionary spaces."[2] Exhibitionary spaces include the exhibition's spatial experience and flow, the exhibition texts' typography, lighting, display strategies, and other sensory elements like sound. These aspects are usually overlooked in favour of analyses of curatorial texts and artists' intentions. Even the exhibition's reception is usually restricted to appraising published exhibition reviews over oral accounts of audiences who experienced the exhibition due to a bias towards written sources over oral ones. Acknowledging exhibitionary spaces as active rather than static and homogeneous shifts how we think about exhibitions. Reimagining the exhibitionary space as a constellation of elements in critical dialogue enables an understanding of the interrelations of the exhibition components (e.g. the artworks, lighting, modes of display, and wall texts), which are not discrete but contingent elements. This essay proposes methodologies to aid in studying exhibitions as an experiential and spatial assemblage. Using the exhibition model opens up new pathways into how scholars study exhibitions—not only as text or discursively, but experientially, akin to how we ourselves experience an exhibition that extends beyond seeing into our mental and sensory faculties.

This experiential mode of studying exhibitions breaks the dominant methodology of reading exhibitions as text, whether in terms of focusing primarily on the exhibition texts or reading the artworks like texts by comparing one of two artworks without taking into account how artworks engage in a dialogue with each other and the exhibition space itself as a phenomenological experience.

THINKING ABOUT EXHIBITIONARY HISTORIES

Scholars have considered the problems of exhibition histories in various ways. Art historian T.J. Clark outlined the task of art history as being to make "connecting links between artistic form, the available systems of visual representation, the current theories of art, other ideologies, social classes, and more general historical structures and processes."[3] Exhibitions are the manifestations of Clark's proposed set of links. Martha Ward, another art historian, places the goal of the history of exhibitions as a field "to track the pervasive form of the exhibition and its impact across the modern period," focusing on practices related to the display of objects.[4] Early exhibitionary histories focused on universal expositions such as the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in 1851 in London, the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1889, and world fairs that were part of the colonial enterprise to showcase the industrial might of the colonisers. Ian Dunlop's *The Shock of the New: Seven Historic Exhibitions of Modern Art*, published in 1972, provided one of the earliest pieces of scholarship on the history of exhibitions by examining the impact of practice on boundary-pushing modern art.[5] However, by excluding any study of exhibitions held outside Euroamerica, Dunlop's narrative of exhibition history was Eurocentric. This art historiographical issue requires urgent attention today, even as efforts to decolonise art history and museums have gained ground in recent years.

In 1995, in *The Birth of the Museum: History Theory and Politics*, Tony Bennett proposed a theory of exhibitions he termed the "exhibitionary complex." This concept was drawn from the philosopher Michel Foucault's theories on institutions such as asylums, prisons, and hospitals as institutional articulations of power and discipline, defined as "a set of cultural technologies concerned to organise a voluntary self-regulating citizenry" that provide a "context for the *permanent* display of power/knowledge."[6] Bennett's exhibitionary complex was a Foucauldian theory for exhibitions that dealt with the problem of order but in a more nuanced way that sought to "win the hearts and minds, as well as the discipline and training of bodies."[7] Following Bennett's work, *Thinking About Exhibitions* of 1996, edited by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, broke new ground in the study of exhibitions, with the authors stating that "despite the growing importance of exhibitions, their histories, their structures and their socio-political implications are only now beginning to be written about and theorised."[8] *Thinking About Exhibitions* identified the gap in scholarship on exhibitions, with contributions from curators, scholars, art critics and artists challenging the idea of the exhibition as a neutral space by making visible how exhibitions construct narratives that advance the aims and objectives of the curators, exhibition designers, and host museums.

Much recent scholarship on exhibitionary histories has been focused on contemporary art exhibitions. For example, the *Exhibition Histories* series published in 2011 by Afterall Books is "dedicated to shows of contemporary art that have shaped the way art is experienced, made and discussed."[9] Bruce Altshuler's monumental collation of archival materials into two books, *Salon to Biennial: Exhibitions that Made History 1863–1959* and *Biennials*

and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made History 1962-2002, published in 2008 and 2013 respectively, were linked to a race to canonise certain exhibitions in line with particular authorities and tastes. To Altshuler's credit, his compendium of two books provides an important resource on seminal exhibitions that shaped modern and contemporary art history and artistic practices. The focus on archival photographs and exhibition text excerpts and discourse produced in these exhibitions gives insights into how they were critically received and debated. Altshuler's publications traced the history of exhibitions primarily from Euroamerica, except for one exhibition that occurred in Asia, *China/Avant-Garde* (held in Beijing in 1989). This raises questions about Altshuler's project: was the inclusion of *China/Avant-Garde* a form of tokenism, a minor nod of recognition towards the meteoric rise of Chinese contemporary art internationally? The exclusion of exhibitions outside Euroamerica is couched in a deference to the global art world. This approach diminishes the importance of locality and placeness in exhibitions that emerge in particular historical conditions.

Substantial art historical scholarship on exhibitions outside Euroamerica has only begun to emerge in the past couple of decades. Wee Wan-Ling's chapter "'We Asians'? Modernity, Visual Art Exhibitions, and East Asia" examined East Asian exhibitions, focussing on contemporary Asian art exhibitions "conceived primarily for viewers in Asia" as opposed to international and largely Euroamerican audiences.[10] Wee forwards the "exhibitionary imaginary," defined as "an articulation of a modern culture that represents the contemporary moment of East Asia... predicated upon a desire to have a comparative understanding of the regional creation of modern artistic culture."[11] For Wee, while the *Asian Art Shows* in 1979 and 1980, organised by the Fukuoka Art Museum, continued to be circumscribed by the nation-state in their display and curatorial model, *Under Construction: New Dimensions of Asian Art* co-organised by the Japan Foundation and the Tokyo City Opera Art Gallery in 2002 broke new ground by adopting postmodernist strategies of the "de-centered, the multiple, and the heterogeneous" in representing the "new" in the region.[12] While Wee's analysis of what is essentially Japan's mapping of contemporary art in Asia through exhibitions marks an important scholarship on exhibitionary histories in East Asia, it is focused on only Japan's exhibitionary mapping, based on textual analysis derived from exhibition catalogues. There is no concurrent examination of the artworks and how they were displayed in these exhibitions. Nor is there a discussion of reception issues within and without Asia and how these exhibitions formed a network that shaped other agents in the art world (such as the art market and art institutions). This omission was addressed in subsequent scholarship.

EXHIBITIONS AS SITES OF CONSTRUCTION

The symposium *Sites of Construction: Exhibitions and the Making of Recent Art History in Asia*, convened by the Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong in 2014, marked a critical moment in focussing attention on how exhibitions are historical sites. Attendee Hammad Nasar argued that "exhibitions—and by extension the curatorial strategies shaping them, institutional demands driving them, and art writing accompanying them—have become the primary sites of art historical construction."[13] The exhibition is particularly significant in Asia, where there is a relative absence of university art history programmes on modern and contemporary art of the region. This includes Southeast Asia, the region that this essay focuses on. These circumstances have resulted in an increased burden for exhibitions (rather than university programmes) to construct art history in terms of display and discourse. This is markedly different to Euroamerica, where art histories are constructed by

both the university and the museum, albeit with significant divergences. The conference and subsequent publication *The Two Art Histories: The Museum and the University,* organised by the Clark Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, in 1999, teased out the tensions between museum and academic professionals.[14] The overarching argument was that the museum is more object-centred and focused on the aesthetics of artefacts, while the university is overly reliant on theory and art's role in society. In Southeast Asia, exhibitions bear the contradictory burden of constructing the 'grand narrative' of national and regional art histories while simultaneously being innovative and critically questioning the same 'grand narrative.' This challenging situation is coupled with the relatively recent writing of art history since post-war Southeast Asia compared to the discipline of modern art history in the West, which was first developed in the nineteenth century. This brings us to the pressing issue of developing a methodology for studying exhibitions that could be extended to Southeast Asian exhibitions, such as *TMR,* that have played a pivotal role in constructing art histories in the region.

In *Sites of Construction*, art historian Patrick D. Flores contributes a paper titled "The Exhibition as Historical Proposition." Flores underlines the need for the notion of methodology, absent in the discussions in his panel, that is worth quoting at length:

> When we study exhibitions, what exactly do we analyse, and how do we do it? I posed this question to the panel and elicited tentative remarks, which was interesting to me because two members were trained historians of art and the other a practising historian of exhibitions. It seems that there is not been a thorough reflection on methodology. I asked this because I wondered if there is a difference between art history and exhibition history or if there is a shift from one to the other in light of the contemporary and the curatorial. Cannot exhibitions and their histories be studies within art history? *And can art historians enlist the methods of art history in studying exhibitions as material that contains material? Or does exhibition history posit a distinct way of investigating its material altogether* [emphasis added]? And if so, from which episteme will it reads the exhibition? From visual culture, aesthetic anthropology, phenomenology? I am interested in the responses because it may well be that the "curatorial" offers a critical speculation and a procedure, that it excites and infuses *frisson. I suspect that it is the curatorial that will break the impasse between the art historical and the exhibitionary* [emphasis added] and hold out a third moment that may finally elaborate on the contemporary.[15]

Flores' call to attention to the need for a methodology to study exhibitions proposes that the exhibition itself as a subject and its material might

demand its own methodology that expands beyond art history to other adjacent fields, such as visual culture.[16]

The lack of a critical reflection on methodology could be extended beyond Flores' panel to the other three symposium panels. A survey of the panellists and contributors to the symposium shows a mix of academics from universities who are trained primarily as historians who do not curate exhibitions, such as Kevin Chua, Pamela N. Corey, Iftikhar Dadi, Sophie Ernst, Lucy Steeds and Joan Kee. Other attendees were art historians who were also curators, such as Patrick Flores, Simon Soon, John Clark, Irit Rogoff, and Gao Shiming. It is perhaps from his own background as an academic trained in art history who is also in the world of curating that Flores proposes the curatorial as a productive field that generates its own methodologies and approaches that could be used to forge connections between art histories and exhibition histories.

Further, the differentiated use of the terms "curatorial" and "art history" echoes the issues raised by Charles W. Haxthausen in *The Two Art Histories: The Museum and the University*. Haxthausen called for both the museum and the university professionals to develop meaningful models of collaboration to bridge both fields, recognising that they sometimes construct different art histories. Art history, in its study of exhibitions, has veered towards analysing texts produced in exhibition collaterals such as catalogues, reviews, invitations, and forms of correspondence related to the exhibition, such as curators' notes and letters in the essays compiled in this anthology. Framing the exhibition this way enables more sensitive attention to specific forms of discourse produced by exhibitions, such as art manifestos. Most studies of exhibitions by art historians provide critical readings of the exhibition writings and marshal forms of documentary evidence, primarily through oral and written sources, as well as photo documentation (if available). Besides discourse analysis, scholars working on Southeast Asian exhibition histories adopt art historical methods such as iconography to analyse each artwork singularly or sometimes in comparison with another artwork in the exhibition. Rarely do they situate and relate the artworks in an exhibition spatially in an active dialogue that could even become a site of tension.

THE EXHIBITION MODEL AS METHOD

Given the complex nature of exhibitions, what methodologies can be adopted to study them? I propose that restaging exhibitions allow us to reconstruct the exhibition spatially and at scale, thus permitting us to study and examine the artworks not in isolation but in active dialogue with each other and the exhibition itself. No longer is the art historian limited to only archival photographic documentation of exhibitions, whether that be the exhibition installation shot that aims to capture the exhibition display from different perspectives or the exhibition opening shot that is often taken not to document the exhibition display but to capture the exhibition opening as an event. The latter shot usually focuses not on the artworks and how they were displayed but on the people who came to the opening. Although such photographs offer useful insights into who came to the exhibition and possibly help identify historically significant artists or personalities who graced the occasion (particularly useful for studying the reception and patronage of these shows), artworks remain out of focus and even obscured by the crowd. Additionally, neither of these images can recreate the spatial experience of attending the exhibition.

FIG. 3

Layout of the artworks in collaboration between the author and Simon Soon.

The reconstruction of the exhibition as a model or restaged exhibition provides documentation that allows scholars to be certain of basic information about the exhibition. When creating an exhibition model, accurate factual information has to be considered, including where the artworks were located within the space, the titles, dimensions, and medium of the artworks, the exhibition flow that visitors would have taken, and which artworks were placed more prominently than others (Fig. 3). There is also a need to account for changes in the exhibition over time caused by interventions or alterations, such as spontaneous performances or censorship that resulted in the removal of artworks. A curator must consider indicating these changes as traces on the exhibition model. In addition to recording these traces, the reconstructed exhibition serves as an archive to record events and information about the exhibition that may otherwise be obscured. For instance, the listing of artworks usually documented in the exhibition catalogue may not necessarily cohere with the artworks shown in the exhibition due to space limitations, the artwork not arriving on time for display, and other contingencies that disrupt any exhibition, no matter how well-planned. The reconstructed exhibition is, therefore, a realistic documentation of the exhibition that does not imagine the organisation of the exhibition as an ideal free from human mistakes. It makes the discrepancies and accidents in most exhibitions visible and alerts scholars to these circumstances by making the exhibition model an archive that interrogates and cross-references other exhibition-related sources, such as exhibition catalogues and oral accounts. This is not to say that the reconstructed exhibition can exclude any errors. However, the model serves as a documentary tool for scholars to piece together the different elements of an exhibition in conversation with other sources of documentation, such as oral histories, the exhibition catalogue, and photographs.

RESTAGING TOWARDS A MYSTICAL REALITY: THE EXHIBITION MODEL AS METHOD

Now, I will examine the restaging of *Towards a Mystical Reality (TMR),* including my architectural models, to consider how exhibitionary histories can be analysed in a Southeast Asian context through curatorial and historical work. To re-stage the show for Esa's retrospective, we included objects drawn from the 1974 *TMR* catalogue:

1. Empty bird cage after release of bird at 2.46 pm on Monday 10th June 1974
2. Potted plant watered and looked after by the two artists over a period of seven months.
3. Empty chair on which many persons have sat on.
4. Two half drank Coca Cola bottles.
5. An outlined area occupied by the shadow of the poet Usman Awang made at 4.05 pm on Saturday 8th December 1973. 36"X36"
6. Empty canvas on which many shadows have already fallen. 1974. 36" X 36"
7. Discarded silk-screen which was used to make many beautiful prints.
8. Burnt out mosquito coils used to keep away mosquitoes on the night of 25th March 1974.
9. Discarded raincoat found at a Klang rubbish dump at 4.23 pm on Sunday 13th

> January 1974 that must have belonged to someone
> 10. Randomly collected sample of human hair collected from a barber shop in Petaling Jaya.[17]

We placed these everyday objects on white pedestals in a white cube gallery space, immediately prompting the viewer to appreciate these everyday objects formally. The ideology of the white cube signals to the viewer that these objects are to be appraised as artworks.[18]

One of the artists included in *TMR*, Redza Piyadasa, is recorded, giving an account of his relationship to exhibition spaces around the exhibition period. Piyadasa's approach to space and reality from a metaphysical rather than scientific and rational standpoint began before *TMR* in his earlier 1972 exhibition, *dokumentasi 72*:

> There is something very religious about my obsession with actual space. It is almost metaphysical. The emptiness and the detachment are reminiscent of the spirit of Zen. The Zen garden, sand arranged in furrows and a few rocks, is the image of stillness. The more still our position and the less disturbed the immediate environment, the greater the possibility of the deepest penetration of reality. This is exactly what meditation is really about.[19]

Scholars like T.K. Sabapathy have shed light on Piyadasa and Esa's philosophical leanings towards Zen and Daoism.[20] However, the substance of how the artists adopted such philosophies, especially Zen, on space and time needs further scrutiny. How did the Zen garden form the philosophical basis of *TMR*? How did it embody Zen concepts of space, time, and reality? [21]

Piyadasa's reference to the Zen garden to explain his obsession with 'actual space' in terms of Zen metaphysical teachings like emptiness, stillness, and meditation provides insights into how *TMR* was conceived and displayed according to the principles of a Zen garden. Using an exhibition model of *TMR* and exhibition installation documentary photographs allows us to examine how the exhibition appears at first glance to be adopting the display conventions of a white cube exhibition space, with the found objects placed on white pedestals like sculptures, is subverted by the counter-hegemonic strategies of the artists drawing from the ideas of Zen and Daoism as alternative ways of approaching reality. By bringing the outside world into the white cube gallery space, the artists in *TMR* destabilised and disrupted it.

FIG. 4

Exhibition model of *Towards a Mystical Reality* (top view)

FIG. 5

Exhibition model of *Towards a Mystical Reality*

The exhibition model provides insights into how the viewer would have visually and spatially experienced *TMR* (Fig. 4). The varying heights of the white pedestals would have immediately captured the viewer's attention, like the rocks in a Zen garden. The two Coca-Cola bottles perched on one of the

highest pedestals in the exhibition would have particularly drawn the viewer to it, as it formed a visual connection with two other found objects when viewed from specific angles: the hanging bird cage and the empty canvas hung on the wall behind it (Fig. 5). The viewer might, at first, attempt to interpret these found objects within the hegemonic framework of the white cube gallery space, rationally experiencing the exhibition space as found objects occupying a physical space. All the found objects seem suspended in time, motionless, and quiet. The ambiguity of the chair as an artwork or object looms uncomfortably in close proximity to the potted plant, perhaps prompting the viewer to wonder if, unlike the potted plant on a low pedestal that signals its status as an artwork, the chair is merely a chair placed there for a functional rather than artistic reason. Upon closer inspection of the pedestals, the viewer would notice and read the artwork label text, an exhibitionary convention used to provide information of the artwork, such as the artist's identity, the year of production, and the medium. Here, the artists have deployed their strategy of subverting the conventions of the white cube gallery space—the artwork label—by using it to provoke the viewer into shifting from appraising the found objects in a formalist and aesthetic way towards a conceptual attitude. This draws from the Daoist philosophy of experiencing the works as events or, as Krishen Jit articulates it, "live situations" rather than static and physical material objects.[22] The hand-written label for *Randomly Collected Sample of Human Hair Collected from a Barber Shop In Petaling Jaya* pasted on the pedestal itself prompts the viewer to look beyond the valueless and organic human hair that will be discarded as an ephemeral found object. Instead, the viewer is encouraged to enter a mental rather than rational space. The viewer shifts from relying on seeing and the retina with scientific observation as the framework to appraise the found object to being a participant who enters a live situation, using the found object as an event-centred entry point to consider where the hair came from. Did this person live in Petaling Jaya? What can the hair tell us about this person? The value of the found object exceeds the reality of capital and insists on the banal and lived experience. This is similar to the rocks and sand in the Zen garden, valued just for what they are in nature, without meanings manipulated and assigned to create false value. A transformation takes place within the white cube gallery space itself, as the viewer who previously relied on seeing to appraise the found objects now shifts towards becoming an active participant.

The distinction between a viewer and participant is critical to *TMR* and how exhibitions operate to activate the audience. As Arthur Danto has proposed, the viewer relies on seeing to determine art or non-art. Seeing is also mediated by their knowledge of art theories and what the art world accepts as art.[23] In the white cube gallery space, the viewer is required to primarily see the space in an interpretive framework without questioning the invisible ideologies such as the commodification of artworks driven by the capitalist mode of production that reifies all artworks. The concept of the participant, as this paper argues, on the other hand, draws from Guy Debord's critique of the society of the spectacle, in which the participant becomes part of the process of being mentally aware of the white cube's hegemony over how art is conceived and displayed. The participant becomes an activated viewer who does not only rely on the retina or seeing as the only possible way of appraising art. An expanded field of ways to experience art using other sensors and mental faculties, including the metaphysical and the conceptual, becomes equally valid ways to make and receive art.

The strategy of subverting the convention of artwork labels used in white cube gallery spaces as a way of providing factual information to the viewer that is immutable is repeated in other found objects, like three pairs of worn shoes bearing the handwritten text *Well Worn Shoes Belonging to Different Persons* (Fig. 6). This particular found object was not included in

the *TMR* catalogue. However, it was shown in the exhibition itself, which is another important way in which exhibition models serve as an archive of the exhibition that counterchecks the documentary sources that art historians tend to rely on as the main primary sources. Instead of factual information, the label title introduces a different mental space that moves away from the representational mode of thinking to a direct experience aligned with how, as the 1974 exhibition catalogue put it, "Taoist thinking concerns itself with the understanding of life and reality directly instead of in the abstract, linear terms of representational thinking."[24] The chair, one of the few found objects displayed without a pedestal, other than the wind sock suspended from the ceiling, touches the floor and exudes anxiety about function as the viewer is possibly transformed into a participant. The text for the chair reads *Empty chair on which many persons have sat.* The notion of emptiness is repeatedly conveyed through the empty bird cage and the empty canvas hung on the wall. All three works draw the participant into the gallery space to engage with the Zen philosophy of emptiness, central to the Zen garden that seeks to reveal the emptiness of material meaning and our meaningless obsession with what is tangible. The embracing of the intangible, such as the imagined people who have sat on the chair, and shadows in the *Empty canvas on which many shadows have already fallen*, and *Empty bird cage after release of bird at 2.46 pm on Monday 10th June 1974* (Fig. 7) form a line of sight that attracts the attention of the participant. Shadows and emptiness form the core concepts of producing new subjectivities through the participant, who is encouraged to project their real-life experiences. The artists become the mediators, using the found objects to initiate live situations or events that matter to the participant.

When the exhibition model of *TMR* is viewed as a whole, the fact that the white pedestals resemble the Zen garden's rocks becomes apparent. The artists, as mediators, are transformed into the *ishitate-so,* monks who meditate as they rake the sand to create the swirl patterns. The meditative quality of the exhibition, with its stillness and quietness, transforms the entire white cube gallery space into a contemplative Zen garden. This opens the participants' minds to what the artists perceived as differences in Euroamerican and Asian perspectives, creating a situation whereby "the western artist's attempt to create works which 'exist within the viewer's own space' then must be quite redundant to the oriental artist."[25] The mental space of the participant becomes the focus of *TMR* as it proposes deeper engagements with Asian philosophies, rejects Euroamerican ways of thinking about art, and puts forward new ways of experiencing art that are not object-centric. While the white cube gallery space sought to keep the outside world out and construct a neutral space that focused on the viewer admiring the formal qualities of the artwork in a singular physical space, *TMR* brought the outside in. The exhibition achieved this by bringing the philosophies of a Zen garden outside into the gallery space, reversing the inside-outside relationship. This produced not singular but multiple events and mental spaces based on the subjectivities of the participants. The subversion of the white cube gallery space is thereby complete, except that the participants themselves questioned the exhibition's aims, which was laudable. There were consequences to the disconnection between *TMR*'s aims and theories and its reception by the participants. This disconnection was most aptly embodied in Salleh Joned's gesture of unzipping his pants to pee in one corner of the exhibition space. In his reply to Piyadasa, who was furious at this gesture, Salleh said: "Think about the arch of my urine fountain—which celebrates the integration of reality: the fine and the rough, the spiritual and the vulgar, the mystical and the concrete; a fact that even your most hailed Zen would agree. So, Piya (and Ms Siti), when I dropped my pants at your historical exhibition, I wasn't 'prostituting dignity' actually; I was exposing reality."[26] Clearly, the reception of *TMR* was not all deferential.

I have demonstrated how methodologies drawn from the curatorial in the exhibition model can be useful in understanding the multi-layered relationship and dialogue between artworks and the exhibition space. Such methods are required to advance scholarship on the history of exhibitions. Adopting the reconstructed exhibition as a methodology will enable scholars to study exhibitions better. In the case of *TMR,* restaging allows art historians to see how the exhibition adopted strategies of either subverting the white cube gallery space or transcending it altogether, setting it apart from other modes of exhibitions in Southeast Asia.

CONCLUSION

Piyadasa's artwork *Entrypoints* bears the text, "ARTWORKS DO NOT EXIST IN TIME, THEY HAVE MULTIPLE 'ENTRY POINTS.'" This could also be read as 'exhibitions do not exist in time; they have multiple entry points.' Exhibitions never exist in a singular time, space, or discussion but continuously slip and slide between temporalities, spaces, and discourses. The assumption of a monolithic and homogenous history of exhibitions needs to be reconsidered with methodologies that expand beyond art history to the curatorial, considering how we encounter an exhibition on the text, space, and time level. These criteria are not fixed but are constantly changing. The reconstructed exhibition as an exhibition model allows scholars to study exhibitions not only as text or discursively but experientially, akin to how we experience an exhibition that extends beyond seeing into our mental and sensory faculties. This experiential mode of studying exhibitions can be achieved by reconstructing exhibition models that break the dominant methodology of reading exhibitions as text (whether in terms of focusing primarily on the exhibition texts or reading the artworks like texts by comparing one of two artworks without taking into account how artworks engage in a dialogue with each other). The exhibition space can be reengaged as a phenomenological experience by reconstructing exhibition models. Exhibitions restaged in recent years, such as *TMR*, are markers of important curatorial gestures that assert the art historical significance and innovation of exhibitions in Asia. At the same time, these restagings open the exhibitions up to contestation and reinterpretation. While there will always be a compulsion to restage exhibitions and experience them anew from their original historical presentations, it remains vital for art historians to re-examine exhibition histories not as conclusive surveys. Instead, each restaging is an opportunity to produce different situations to generate open-ended, contested, and plural narratives.

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