



## **NEWS RELEASE**

**Singapore, 28 November 2023**

### **Emerging ASEAN artists display video, sound, and virtual reality installations at second cycle of a joint art programme by NTU Singapore and the European Union Delegation to Singapore**

Emerging ASEAN artists will display their new works, dabbling in video, sound and virtual reality installations, at an exhibition that caps the second cycle of a joint art programme between **Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore)** and the **European Union (EU) Delegation to Singapore**.

This is the second exhibition under **SEA AiR – Studio Residencies for Southeast Asian Artists in the European Union**, a programme developed by **NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore (NTU CCA Singapore)** and funded by the European Union that positions Singapore as a hub for artistic exchange between the EU and Southeast Asia.

Titled ***Passages***, the exhibition features Southeast Asian artists Ms **Priyageetha Dia** (Singapore), Ms **Ngoc Nau** (Vietnam) and Mr **Saroot Supasuthivech** (Thailand).

The artworks in *Passages* are inspired by the artists' three-month-long residencies in Europe earlier this year. As part of the SEA AiR programme, Dia undertook her residency at **Jan van Eyck Academie** (Netherlands), Nau at **Rupert** (Lithuania) and Supasuthivech at **Künstlerhaus Bethanien** (Germany). During their time in Europe, they were also funded for field trips supporting further inquiry into their respective areas of research.

The exhibition, held at NTU CCA Singapore Residencies Studios in Gillman Barracks, opens on 1 December 2023 and is part of **Singapore Art Week 2024**.

**Iwona Piórko, European Union Ambassador to Singapore**, said: "Through the second cycle of SEA AiR – a made-in-Singapore programme – we deepen our ties with Singapore in line with the EU Global Gateway initiative. Global Gateway connects people, goods and services around the world in sustainable ways. We started the project in 2022 when the EU and ASEAN commemorated the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our

partnership. It is only fitting that we conclude the second cycle in another landmark year. 2024 marks 20 years since the establishment of the EU Delegation to Singapore.”

“Through SEA AiR we drive further the development of Southeast Asia’s contemporary art scene and the initiative serves as a springboard for dialogue between European art institutions and Southeast Asian artists. Together with art lovers from the region and beyond, I am looking forward to experiencing how travels and cultural exchanges have shaped the art practices of these talented artists, Priyageetha Dia, Ngoc Nau and Saroot Supasuthivech. We are delighted to premiere their artworks here in Singapore – the thriving engine and beginning and end point of this very inspiring project.”

SEA AiR is supported by the EU’s Foreign Policy Instruments.

**Andreas Roettger, Head of the EU’s Foreign Policy Instruments Regional Team for Asia-Pacific**, said: “SEA AiR is an important public diplomacy project that enhances the EU-Singapore-ASEAN dialogue through a creative, cultural exchange. SEA AiR reinforces the importance and positive impact of cultural mobility and how it can, as a platform, encourage diversity, cross-cultural dialogue and facilitate innovation. Having supported the project from its very inception, I am privileged to be in Singapore to experience first-hand the opening of the Cycle 2 exhibition *Passages* and seeing how the artistic narratives have been shaped by journeys across Europe. With its inclusion in the Singapore Art Week 2024, I am confident the exhibition will receive a wonderful reception from Singapore, the region and from the international audience in the coming two months of its duration.”

*Passages* speaks of the three artists’ journeys across geographical and cultural boundaries from one continent to another; the cultural exchanges that take place during this time; and the continuous development of ideas as they return to their home countries to create new works for the exhibition in Singapore.

With a distinct two-fold framework, SEA AiR interweaves artistic research and production by awarding three Southeast Asian artists with: 1) a three-month residency at an established arts institution in the EU; and 2) resources and curatorial guidance to create new artworks for an exhibition in Singapore.

**Professor Joseph Liow, Dean of the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, NTU**, said: “SEA AiR has been a rewarding and impactful collaboration between the EU Delegation to Singapore and NTU. When the programme was conceived, it had three key objectives: to showcase Southeast Asian creative and artistic talents to European audiences, to connect peoples and ideas from both regions, and to further enhance relations between the EU and Singapore and the

Southeast Asian region. On all three counts, the programme has been a resounding success."

**Ute Meta Bauer, Founding Director, NTU CCA Singapore and Professor, School of Art, Design and Media, NTU**, said: "The overwhelming number of visitors to SEA AiR's first-cycle exhibition and the opportunities that had been offered to the first three artists following their residencies underscore the intention of SEA AiR: to serve as a platform that provides visibility for creative and artistic practices of emerging Southeast Asian artists, through cultural exchanges in and with Europe. At the same time, we witnessed the increased attention to participating artists not only from the host countries but also within their home countries. For the artists in the second cycle, what surprisingly transpired from this geographical translocation is the discovery by each artist of elements of their own culture embedded in another."

Employing new media technologies to aid their storytelling, each artist created speculative narratives that traverse time and space, shifting between the past and present.

Dia's research on the colonial impact on Malayan plantations is manifested through soundscapes and animation. Nau's video work navigates the fast-changing urban and social landscape in Vietnam against a backdrop of its Socialist past. Supasuthivech's installation traces the evolution of Thai funerary rituals and practices as they travel. While distinct in their artistic research and practices, their works evoke memories and explore meanings in liminal spaces, reverberating in their journey from one passage to the next.

Singaporean artist **Priyageetha Dia** said: "In retrospect, the time I spent at Jan van Eyck Academie for the SEA AiR residency programme offered me a space to ponder and reflect on the ongoing processes of the production of culture, environment and digital media in my practice. My engagement within this interdisciplinary milieu not only afforded me the privilege to observe, partake, and react to the dissemination and exchange of knowledge, but also granted me access to multiple cultural engagements, newfound connections and kinships."

Artist **Ngoc Nau** from Vietnam said: "My residency at Rupert in Vilnius, along with the field trip to Germany, were incredibly rich experiences. They enabled me to collect valuable information for my work, while exploring the city's captivating landscape and its unique blend of Soviet architecture and lush greenery, which sometimes reminded me of my childhood memories in Vietnam. Equally important was the time I spent with fellow artists, curators, and researchers, as well as the thoughtful discussions that fostered stimulating exchanges and further expanded my horizons. It felt like an all-inclusive artistic journey and significantly contributed to my artistic growth and enriched my perspective. I left with the realisation of what I value, and the changes I wish for in my country."

Artist **Saroot Supasuthivech** from Thailand said: “My time in the SEA AiR programme and at Künstlerhaus Bethanien has been a transformative journey. The invaluable interactions with the Berlin art community and the rich cultural tapestry in the city exceeded my initial expectations. I gained deeper insights into the stories of Thai immigrants and the diverse cultures there, which have profoundly influenced my artwork. This residency has not only equipped me with new artistic skills but also offered me a broader lens through which to view the world. I am eager to share this evolved perspective in my upcoming exhibition.”

*Passages* will be held through Singapore Art Week 2024, with a public programme taking place on 20 January 2024. Details of the programme can be found at <https://ntu.ccasingapore.org/collaboration/sea-air-cycle-2/>.

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## **ANNEX A – Artist Biographies**

### **Priyageetha Dia (b. 1992, Singapore)**

Priyageetha Dia works with time-based media and installation. Her practice is braided between plantation ecologies, postcolonial memory(ies), migration politics, and the production of labour and data economics. Structured through fieldwork and archival research, she engages in nonlinear and speculative processes as a practice of refusal against dominant narratives. Her recent exhibitions include Frieze Seoul (2023); Singapore Art Museum (2023); Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Kerala (2022–2023); La Trobe Art Institute, Australia (2022); National Gallery Singapore (2020); and Art Science Museum, Singapore (2019). She was an artist-in-residence at the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore in 2022. She was also the recipient of the IMPART award by Art Outreach in 2019.

### **Ngoc Nau (b. 1989, Vietnam)**

The multimedia practice of Nau encompasses photography, holograms and augmented reality (AR). She is currently working with 3D software and other open-source technologies to create new possibilities for video installation. In Nau's work, different materials and techniques attempt to capture the subtle ways in which new media shape and dictate our views of reality. Blending traditional culture and spiritual beliefs with modern technologies and lifestyles, her work often responds to Vietnam's accelerated urban development. Her works have been featured in several exhibitions across Asia, including the Thailand Biennale, Korat (2021) and the Singapore Biennale (2019) among others. She also participated in documenta fifteen, Kassel (2022) with Sa Sa Art Projects.

### **Saroot Supasuthivech (b. 1991, Thailand)**

Supasuthivech employs a multifarious research approach to reimagine a range of localities, merging chronologies and perspectives. Not only does he look at geographical and political facts, he also takes into account the ways specific sites are situated and depicted in memory and discourse. Reacting to popular and official narratives, he examines the corruption of histories and the dissolution of our identities. Ritual also emerges as a particular window of insight for him as he delves into ancient traditions and their waning relevance, inspecting the present through a lens of the past. His moving images transcend aesthetic or documentary dimensions; often combining installation, image and sound to conjure the intangible aura of a socio-historical location. In studying the ritualistic, his artistic practice performs a rite in itself, offering a ceremony of remembrance. His latest video installation, *River Kwai: This Memorial Service Was Held in the Memory of the Deceased* (2022), was featured in the Discoveries Section at Art Basel Hong Kong (2022).

## **ANNEX B – Artwork Information**

### **Priyageetha Dia, *Sap Sonic* and *Sap Script*, 2023**

As an extension of her research into the plantations of Southeast Asia and their colonial histories, including those of migrant labour and structures of production and power, Priyageetha Dia explores gaps in historical records that are not only text-based, but also non-textual ones such as photographs, artefacts and oral interviews. Her resulting four-channel sound installation *Sap Sonic* is a sonification of images from the photo album of the Sumatra Caoutchouc Company, a rubber planting company in the Dutch East Indies, from the archives of Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. The album charts the growth of palm oil and rubber trees in the company's plantations in Sumatra in the first half of the 20th century, documenting its operations, landscapes and activities.

Beyond their visual representations, the images bear witness to the power dynamics at play between the coloniser and labourers, evident in their postures, gazes, and spatial arrangements; as well as the hierarchy between nature and machine. Reframing this landscape from a visual to a sonic one, *Sap Sonic* serves as an aural gateway to the plantations as it delves into the lived yet unspoken experiences of those who work on and inhabit the plantations, both human and nonhuman. Emulating a uniform and controlled green lighting environment, *Sap Sonic* reflects the artificial and human-engineered nature of a monochromatic environment. Perceiving that which is not visible from the images or historical narratives, Dia reimagines and deconstructs plantation soundscapes by sampling, mixing and manipulating found sound files including the synthesis of frequencies from image to sound conversion and AI voice modulation. From pulsating and echoing strengths, marked by oscillatory and spatial disturbances, the resulting sonic tapestry represents a liminal space where past and present, real and imagined, intersect and converse with each other.

Accompanying the work, *Sap Script* is a text installation in white latex paint on a black, obsidian-like background. The choice of material references the sap from the rubber (also “Caoutchouc” in French) tree, hence the titles *Sap Sonic* and *Sap Script*. The typeface of *Sap Script* echoes the slender and linear structure of rubber trees, distorted to resemble the waveform of sound waves. Through the intangible, unseen nature of sound, *Sap Sonic* probes the aspects of the visual world agitated by the listening sense, hence expanding the agential possibilities of the uncounted and the underheard.

## **Ngoc Nau, *Virtual Reverie: Echoes of a Forgotten Utopia*, 2023**

***Virtual Reverie: Echoes of a Forgotten Utopia*** by Ngoc Nau is a video installation exploring the multifaceted aspects of post-Soviet realities in Vietnam. Portraying contemporary life amidst the remnants of socialist architecture and monuments using 3D animation and visual effects, the work demonstrates the transformative power of technology in reshaping our perceptions of reality.

Central to the work is a meticulously constructed three-dimensional representation of the Vietnam-Soviet Friendship Palace of Culture and Labour, a venue still being used for events today. Serving as a stage for five hip-hop dancers embarking on a symbolic journey, the building is iconic of the enduring influence of socialist architecture in a contemporary landscape. During their journey, the dancers interact with various elements drawn from historical references in Vietnam and Lithuania; representing the preservation of a bygone era and the relics of a once-powerful regime.

Playing a significant role in the work is an evocative three-dimensional scan of a Lenin statue originally erected at Lukiškės Square in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius. Its removal in 1991, with legs severed, became a powerful emblem of historical upheaval and transformation: the collapse of socialism as well as the restoration of independence. As the dancers traverse across time and space, they bridge the gap between historical artifacts and contemporary experiences. New meanings are formed as past memories evolve, shaped by the dancers' movements and interactions with their environment. Their passage echoes the ebb and flow of ideologies, bearing witness to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of shifting landscapes.

The projection screen in the installation is created by the artist using papier mâché, a technique also used by mask makers in Vietnam. Its textured surface provides a topographic landscape onto which the moving image is projected. Accompanying the video work is an essay *Lenin Park* by Nau's collaborator Phuong Phan, a Berlin-based Vietnamese researcher and writer. Taking the Lenin Park in Hanoi as a point of departure, the essay contextualises socialism in Vietnam in the present time.

## **Saroot Supasuthivech, *Spirit-forward in G Major*, 2023**



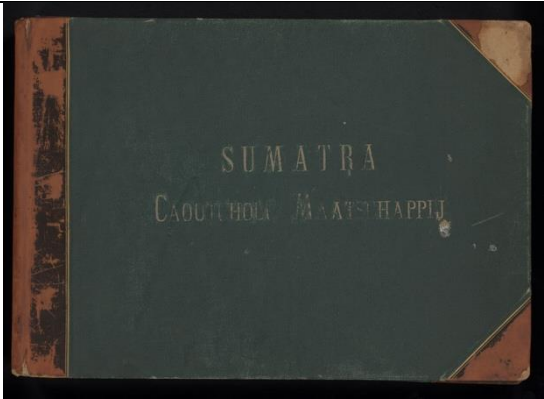

***Spirit-forward in G Major*** is an exploration of the transformative journey experienced by Thai expatriates in Germany, told through a metaphoric cycle of life, death and rebirth. This project encapsulates the interplay of tradition, adaptation, and preservation within an evolving cultural landscape, emphasising the resilience of the human spirit.

Presented primarily as a video and virtual reality (VR) installation, the work's narrative unfolds in four parts. "New Beginnings" uses therapeutic dialogues to depict the initial migrant experience of stepping into a dreamy yet unknown world; evoking a feeling of optimism amidst uncertainty. Subsequently, "A Surreal Interlude" transports viewers into a realm of magic and mortality inspired by Grimms' fairy tales. Based on interviews conducted with Thai monks and nuns in Berlin, it touches on the challenges and transformation that comes with cultural assimilation. The third segment focuses on a Thai music score *Sai Samon*, the oldest documented, played in G major on the violin in a *Sala Thai* (a Thai pavilion) in Bad Homburg, Germany. Finally, "A Glimpse Beyond", experienced via VR, dives into a poetic meditation on death and the afterlife, told from the viewpoint of the deceased. Serving as a mirror reflecting the cycle of life and death, this poignant culmination is an exploration into a liminal reality between the familiar and the surreal. Alternating between the two, it echoes the fragmentation and reconstitution inherent in a migrant experience. Using photogrammetry techniques, images of real-world locations and architecture taken during the artist's residency, such as Alter St Matthäus Kirchhof (Old St. Matthew's Churchyard) and Märchenbrunnen (Fountain of Fairytales), are digitally reconstructed, distorted and fragmented to create an ethereal, otherworldly environment.

Adding to this experience are brass etchings comprising elements from the migrant journey: a flower that mirrors the ones around the *Sala* in Bad Homburg; the *Sai Samon* music score; and Cinderella from Grimms' *Children and Household Tales* (1833).



## ANNEX C – ARTWORK IMAGES AND CAPTIONS

| Priyageetha Dia   |  |
|---|--|
|    | Priyageetha Dia in her studio at Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht, Netherlands, 2023. Courtesy the artist.  |
|   | Screenshot of Participant Presentation by Priyageetha Dia at Jan van Eyck Academie, 24 May 2023. Courtesy the artist.  |
|  | Photo album of the Sumatra Caoutchouc Company about the Pernantian plantation in Sumatra (NG-1992-4-2), 1935–39. Courtesy Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.  |
|  | View of the fields with three-year-old plantings of rubber trees <i>Hevea Brasiliensis</i> , 1930. Part of Photo album of the Sumatra Caoutchouc Company about the Pernantian plantation in Sumatra (NG-1992-4-2), 1935–39. Courtesy Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. |

## Ngoc Nau



Portrait of Ngoc Nau in a CGI-generated landscape. Courtesy the artist.



Ngoc Nau, *Virtual Reverie: Echoes of a Forgotten Utopia*, 2023, video still. Courtesy the artist.



Ngoc Nau, *Virtual Reverie: Echoes of a Forgotten Utopia*, 2023, video still. Courtesy the artist.



Ngoc Nau, *Virtual Reverie: Echoes of a Forgotten Utopia*, 2023, video still. Courtesy the artist.

## Saroot Supasuthivech



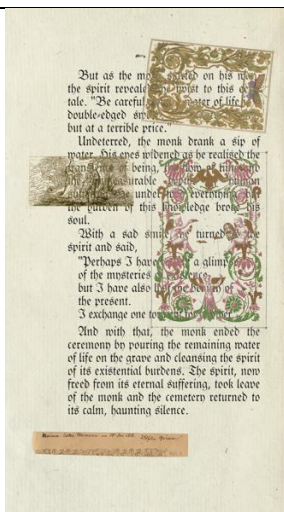
Saroot Supasuthivech in Berlin, Germany, 2023. Photograph by Sareena Sattapon. Courtesy the artist.



Saroot Supasuthivech, *Spirit-forward in G Major*, 2023, VR still. Courtesy the artist.



Saroot Supasuthivech, *Spirit-forward in G Major*, 2023, video still. Courtesy the artist.



Saroot Supasuthivech, *Spirit-forward in G Major*, 2023, video still. Courtesy the artist.

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## ***About Nanyang Technological University, Singapore***

A research-intensive public university, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore) has 33,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students in the Engineering, Business, Science, Medicine, Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences, and Graduate colleges.

NTU is also home to world-renowned autonomous institutes – the National Institute of Education, S Rajaratnam School of International Studies and Singapore Centre for Environmental Life Sciences Engineering – and various leading research centres such as the Earth Observatory of Singapore, Nanyang Environment & Water Research Institute (NEWRI) and Energy Research Institute @ NTU (ERI@N).

Under the NTU Smart Campus vision, the University harnesses the power of digital technology and tech-enabled solutions to support better learning and living experiences, the discovery of new knowledge, and the sustainability of resources.

Ranked amongst the world's top universities, the University's main campus is also frequently listed among the world's most beautiful. Known for its sustainability, NTU has achieved 100% Green Mark Platinum certification for all its eligible building projects. Apart from its main campus, NTU also has a medical campus in Novena, Singapore's healthcare district.

For more information, visit [www.ntu.edu.sg](http://www.ntu.edu.sg)

## ***About NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore (NTU CCA Singapore)***

Situated within Singapore's premier art precinct Gillman Barracks, NTU CCA Singapore is a pioneering institution that has been instrumental in shaping the contemporary art landscape in Singapore and beyond. With a focus on fostering creativity, innovation, and critical thinking, the Centre's programmes have consistently challenged the status quo, encouraging artists to explore new realms of artistic expression.

### ***SPACES OF THE CURATORIAL***

The centre seeks to engage the potential of "curating" and its expanded field. What are the infrastructures and modes of presenting and discussing artistic and cultural production in diverse cultural settings and in particular throughout Southeast Asia's vastly changing societies?

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## **About the European Union**

The European Union (EU) is an economic and political union of 27 Member States. Together, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. With the help of over 140 diplomatic representations around the world, the EU cooperates closely with its Member States to promote the values and interests of the EU and establish networks and partnerships, promoting multilateral-based solutions to common challenges. The EU is the largest trade block in the world, as well as the world's main source and the top global destination of foreign direct investment.

In 2012, the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for advancing the causes of peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe.

The 27 EU Member States are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

## **About the European Union Delegation to Singapore**

The European Union Delegation to Singapore opened on **30<sup>th</sup> June 2004**. Since then, the EU's diplomatic representation has worked to promote closer ties between the EU and Singapore.

The wide-ranging relationship has further strengthened and expanded in its scope over the years. In close coordination with the diplomatic missions of the EU Member States, the Delegation ensures consistency and effectiveness of the EU's external action in Singapore.

With 27 countries, nearly 450 million people and the largest GDP in the world, the EU is of increasing importance to Singapore, especially since the entry into force of the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (EUSFTA) on 21 November 2019, and the elevation of its relationship with ASEAN to a Strategic Partnership in December 2020.

The Delegation covers a range of issues such as trade, foreign policy, climate change, environment, transport, industrial policy, research and innovation as well as education projects such as the Study In Europe higher education fair and the EU at Your School initiative. On the cultural front, the Delegation presents Studio Residencies for Southeast Asian Artists in the European Union - SEA AiR (in partnership with Nanyang Technological University's Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore) and the annual European Film Festival (EUFF).

On **1<sup>st</sup> February 2023**, the **EU-Singapore Digital Partnership** was signed in Brussels. This partnership expands the robust EU-Singapore relationship into the digital realm, which has a transformative potential for the future of our economies. The Digital Partnership builds on long-standing cooperation between the EU and Singapore on trade, research and technology. It will also serve as a strategic pathfinder for closer region-to-region digital connectivity. On the same occasion, Digital Trade Principles, a key deliverable of the Digital Partnership, were also signed. The principles seek to facilitate the free flow of goods and services in the digital economy, while upholding privacy.

## **Connect**

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