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## In this Issue

Paramita Paul



When we first decided to invite Choi (Director of the Casco Art Institute, from Korea/the Netherlands), Ghouse (writer and curator, from India, living in Germany), Yap (Director of Curatorial and Collections, SAM, from Singapore), and Younis (artist and curator, from Jordan) to write about this edition of the biennale, we envisioned four articles in which we would combine a curatorial piece with an interview with each of the authors. However, in our discussions, it became clear that Choi, Ghouse, Yap, and Younis designed this biennale specifically as a site to reflect on the very idea of personhood, on living, and on relating to what is around us. They gave the biennale a name: *Natasha*. By naming the exhibition, the authors aimed to extend “an invitation to encounter presence,” to ponder it, to “ask what it is composed of,” and to “consider how it is felt.” Therefore, the first four pages of *The Tone* in this issue of *The Newsletter* extend beyond interviews with individuals to questions of social being itself. Their articles are about ancient stone tablets, sketches of photographs, a plot of land, and digital works. Each offers up new understandings of ourselves and the world.



Combinations of two different sketches of AI-generated faces from <https://thispersondoesnotexist.com>. Sketches by Xiaolan Lin (@xiaolanlan65).

Also in this issue's *The Tone* is an article on the 23rd Meinung Yellow Butterfly Festival held in Meinung, Taiwan, in 2021. Meiqin Wang shows how this festival of eco-public art integrates the protection of natural ecosystems and community building, and how it is a “much-needed endeavor in our age of climate change.”

These five *The Tone* articles all reflect the goals with which we set out to redesign this section. They think in broader terms about artistic output, and push the boundaries of art and traditional writing about art.

What is personhood? What is our relationship to the earth and the cosmos? This issue of *The Newsletter* opens with *The Tone*, a new section we launched in the summer of 2022. This edition of *The Tone* begins with four critical investigations on self and existence by Binna Choi, Nida Ghouse, June Yap, and Ala Younis, the four Co-Artistic Directors of the Singapore Biennale. Organized by the Singapore Art Museum (SAM), and commissioned by the National Arts Council, Singapore (NAC), the seventh edition of the Singapore Biennale engages participants and audiences in Singapore and around the world. While the program spans over a one-year period, its main event runs from October 16, 2022, through March 19, 2023, across a network of sites in Singapore.

### The Study, The Focus, and The Region

*The Study*, our section dedicated to stand-alone research articles, starts with a piece by John Smith, who reports on the current crisis in Sri Lanka. The country has gone bankrupt, social unrest has escalated, and it is unclear how the new establishment will rebuild the nation.

In a year that marks 75 years of independence for India and Pakistan, Sambarta Rakshit writes about women revolutionaries in the Indian struggle for independence in his article “Of Extremist Grandmothers.” Rakshit documents the story of his grandmother Banalata Sen (1950-1989), and he connects her experiences to those of the well-known female revolutionary Bina Das (1911-1986).

2022 also marks 400 years since the Battle of Macau, fought between Portugal and the Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie or VOC). In “Revisiting the Battle of Macau in 1622: A Polyphonic Narrative,” Caspar Chan compares different narratives of this event by different individuals.

Looking to the future, Yoichi Mine envisions Africa and Asia as one large region in his article “Afrasia: An Emerging Macro-Region.” Mine created a map centered on what ancient Greek sailors called the Erythraean Sea, and he posits that “it will be critically important to organize a heuristic dialogue between Africa and Asia in the 22nd century.”

In “Ambassadors of K-Culture: Korean Americans, Korea, and K-Pop,” Jayson M. Chun and Eun Bin Suk introduce us to the “Pop-Pacific.” The authors coined this term to describe “a larger cultural sphere... [consisting] mostly of the US, Japan, and Korea... which combine to create a transnational Pacific culture.” K-pop, an aspect of the “Pop-Pacific,” is an influential part of Asian-American culture and has transcended the Pacific to become a world culture. It reflects the rise of Korea as a cultural production center, but it is essentially transnational.

Sandunika Hasangani takes us on a journey through Tokyo's manner posters in “Social Control or Trust?” These posters instruct passengers on social etiquette in railway spaces. Hasangani argues that, rather than induce subtle social control, the posters “construct a shared value system among daily commuters” and “yield mutual trust among passengers.”

Theang Teron completes *The Study* with his article “Cultural Hijacking: Clash of Storyworlds.” In this piece, Teron discusses the appropriation of non-mainstream narratives by majoritarian cultures in ways that homogenize, flatten, and simplify them. Specifically, the author investigates the situation of the Karbi people, whose indigenous ways of life and belief systems are threatened by a mainstream Hindu right-wing nationalist agenda. Teron suggests that we consciously “create spaces for cultures to flourish” and “enable multiple storyworlds to exist.”



Jewellord Nem Singh is the guest editor of this issue's *The Focus* on “Environmental Governance amidst the Climate Crisis and Energy Transition in the 21st Century.” The five articles of this *Focus* consider China, Kazakhstan, the wider region of Central Asia, Cambodia, and the ultra-deep sea beyond national borders. Climate change is a collective experience, but distinctive contexts face distinctive challenges. The authors elaborate on different pathways towards meeting global climate targets, and in so doing, the essays explore problems of inequality, hierarchy, and power differences. They urge the public to become part of a wider political discussion.



Our regional editors Su-Ann Oh and Ilhong Ko update us on research in Asian Studies at the ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore and the Seoul National University Asia Center (SNUAC), respectively. The ISEAS pages report on a webinar series about what archaeology and art history can tell us about Southeast Asia in the second millennium. SNUAC compiles narratives of heritage in Northeast Asia, addressing the problem of a black-and-white understanding of heritage being either tangible or intangible.

### New section: The Slate

In this issue, we launch a new section called *The Slate*. In addition to facilitating research, exchange, and collaboration with scholars and practitioners throughout the world, another of IIAS' important pillars is education and learning, broadly conceived. In *The Slate*, we invite educators and researchers to explore the debates, practices, challenges, and opportunities of 21st-century education. Contributions can take many forms, and authors are welcome to submit personal reflections, articles on practical resources, and critical essays on traditional education. For this first iteration of *The Slate*, Monisha Bajaj writes about pedagogies of Partition. She offers three areas through which we can engage these pedagogies in the classroom and beyond, to learn from this painful history. Violetta Ravagnoli discusses how she uses graphic novels for histories of Asian migration. She shows how well-researched and effectively illustrated graphic novels, combined with academic publications, can fulfill important educational purposes.

Paramita Paul,  
Chief Editor of *The Newsletter*

If you would like to contribute to *The Slate*, or to any of our other sections, please go to [www.iias.asia/the-newsletter](https://www.iias.asia/the-newsletter) for more information, and reach out to the editorial team at [thenewsletter@iias.nl](mailto:thenewsletter@iias.nl)

