

5 Southeast Asian Artists Modelling Wise Woman Archetype

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Installation view of Maestro's work at Philippines Pavilion. Photo: Paolo Luca. Courtesy of the Philippine Arts in Venice Biennale Project





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Naima Morelli is an art writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written...

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From Jogjakarta to Manila, here are five Southeast Asian women artists who carry the heart of the visionary and set the example for the younger generations

TEXTS: Naima Morelli

IMAGES: Courtesy of the artists

While modern mainstream culture often devalues women as they age, contemporary art shows us another reality. Indeed, many artists in their mature age are examples of holding and replenishing one's centre. Through their life and artwork, these women show us how to move from one's soul.

In the words of poet, psychoanalyst and writer Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes (author of the celebrated “Women Who Run with the Wolves”) the key is being “old while young, and young while old”. To her, we are born with two forces inside of us: the wild and ever-young force of imagination, which contains intuition and instinct, and the wise elder force of knowledge, which holds boundaries and carries the heart of the visionary.

In her new tome dedicated to the wise woman archetype titled: ***The Dangerous Old Woman***, she tells how senior daring women – considered dangerous for centuries – manifest themselves as creative souls and artists. We have had many examples of their artistic power in the West; from Georgia O’Keeffe to Louise Bourgeois, these artists are today points of reference for the younger generation. But what about the East?

Here at CoBo we want to present five amazing women artists hailing from Asia, who connect us with universal wisdom and who were able to reach a unique power of expression.



Kartika Affandi (Indonesia)

The story of modern artist Kartika is the one of a woman determined to express herself on her own terms. Born into a society and a time in which artistic freedom was unprecedented and considered an impossible goal for a woman, she defied all odds.

Taught to paint by her parents, the legendary Affandi and her mother Maryati, she worked hard to overcome his father’s artistic shadow, and studied in Indonesia and abroad to hone her skills and knowledge of art and art history.

In terms of themes and technique, Kartika realized a body of work which is unique and distinctively her own. She dared to tackle taboo themes for Indonesian society, such as nudity and the women’s stare on males, in an attitude that we could call an “intuitively feminist”

In her personal life, and her extensive travels, she had eight children and two marriages. At the age of 81, she is still actively painting, sculpting and exhibiting, bringing her beautiful, complex, deeply personal, and sometimes shocking artistic vision to life.



About the artist

Kartika Affandi was born on November 27, 1934 in Jakarta. Her educational journey started from Taman Dewasa in Taman Siswa Jakarta, then she studied art at the University of Tagore Shantiniketan India. She also learnt about sculpting at the Polytechnic School of Art London. In 1957, she joined a painting exhibition with other woman painters in Yogyakarta for the first time. In 1980 she went to Vienna, Austria to study at the Academy of Fine Arts majoring in Mechanical Preservation and Restoration of art objects, then she continued studying at ICCROM (International Center of the Preservation and the Restoration of Cultural Property) in Rome Italy. Nowadays, Kartika's paintings and sculptures are also exhibited in Affandi Museum and she has been recently the subject of the documentary "Kartika Affandi: 9 Ways of Seeing".



Amanda Heng (Singapore)

With her signature double-braids Amanda Heng looks a bit like an Asian, silver-haired Pippi Longstocking. And with the Astrid Lindgren's character she definitely shares the irreverence, the imaginative power and the communal ethos which run through her entire oeuvre since the beginning. In her practice she applies those beautiful child-like qualities to articulate serious and pressing social issues, like collective memory, national identity, and gender politics.

One of Singapore's pioneering contemporary artists, Amanda Heng approaches art as a tool for change, and, to that end, produces collaborative, multidisciplinary performances, public art projects and installations.

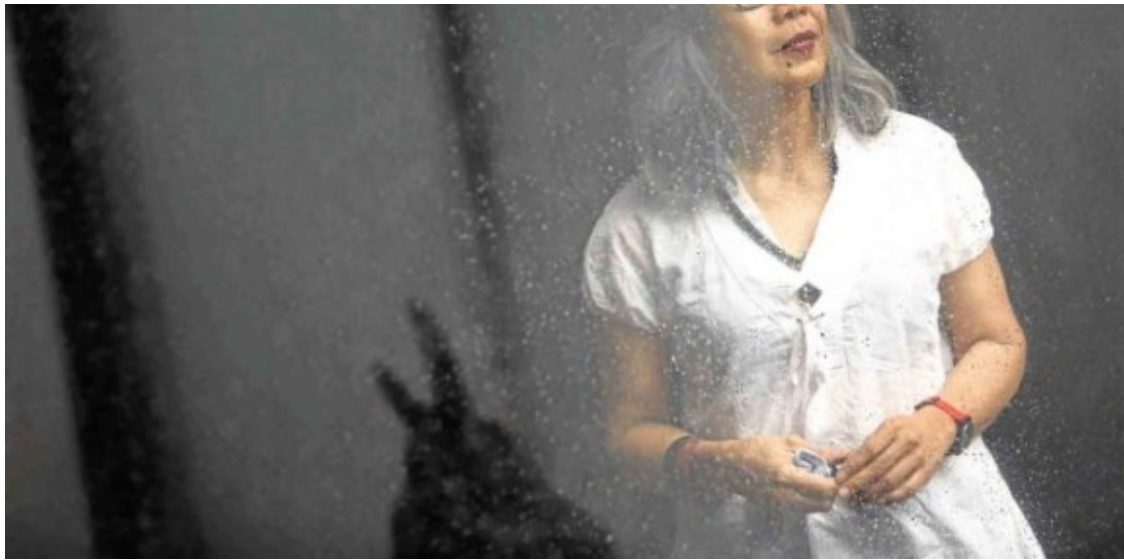
She was one of the founding members in 1988 of the Artists' Village, one of Singapore's first artist-run space and founded the country's first female artist-collective in 1999, called Women in the Arts Collective.

Amanda Heng has a multidisciplinary practice, working collaboratively in contemporary art exhibitions, performance, forums, workshops and art interventions. She was one of the first to introduce feminist discourses into the Singapore art scene and she has been consistently raising awareness of women's rights and gender equality.

About the artist

Amanda Heng Liang Ngim was born in 1951 in Singapore. Heng graduated from Lasalle in 1988 with a diploma in printmaking. Her works have been exhibited in Cleveland Performance Art Festival USA (1997), the 3rd Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in Brisbane, Australia (1999), the 1st Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, Japan (1999), the 7th Havana Biennial in Cuba (2000), Werkleitz Biennale in Germany (2000), Performance Art Festival in Spain (2001) and Channel N at Kyoto Art Center (2001). Her other art activities include co-directing theatre production "Bernard's Story" written by Dana Lam (2001), performed in theatre production "A Woman On the Tree in the Hill" directed by Ivan Heng (2001), which was presented at the Singapore International Performing Art Festival. She has also organised and participated in various exhibitions, public forums, workshops, research projects and art events such as, The Space, fringe event of 1992 International Art Fest in Singapore, Women and Their Arts (1990), The 1st Asian film Appreciation Workshop (1994), Memories of Senses (1994), Women About Women (1997), The Friday Event (2000) and Open Ends (2001). Amanda was involved in the founding of Artists' Village, the first artists-run space in Singapore, in 1988, and WITA (Women in The Arts), the first artists-run women collective in Singapore in 1999, which is currently establishing the archives of women in the Arts in Singapore.





Lani Maestro (Philippines)

It's not by chance that the Filipino-born, Canada-based artist Lani Maestro was called to represent the Philippines at the Venice Biennale, together with artist Manuel Ocampo, in 2017. She is indeed an example of the cosmopolitan, well-rounded artist, who tackles art on both the artistic and theoretical level, unveiling all its complexities.

Lani Maestro tested many different alleys in her art practice, from installation and sculpture, to incorporating writing and book works, drawing, video, photography, sound and film in multimedia works. Because of her delicate and striking vision, her style has been defined as “poetic minimalism”.

Lani began working professionally as an artist in the late seventies and carried her practice with her when she immigrated to Canada in 1982. From 1990-94 Maestro was co-founder/co-publisher and designer of HARBOUR Magazine of Art and Everyday Life, a journal of artworks and writings by artists, writers and theorists.



Installation view of Maestro's work at Philippines Pavilion. Photo: Paolo Luca. Courtesy of the Philippine Arts in Venice Biennale Project

About the artist

Lani Maestro was born in the Manila in 1957. She settled in Canada in 1983 and pursued an MFA at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax in 1989. In that period, Maestro's work was included in the Segunda Bienal de la Habana in Cuba (1985) where it received the Bienal Prize. Since then, Maestro has received increasing international recognition for her work and she has exhibited widely across the world. Last year, Maestro mounted two exhibitions in Canada, "l'oubli de l'air", in collaboration with American composer Malcolm Goldstein at the Darling Foundry in Montreal, and "her rain" at the Centre A, Vancouver International Centre for Contemporary Asian Art co-organized by Plug in Institute of Contemporary Art... Maestro has participated the Biennals of Canada (1998), Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (2009), Busan, Korea (2004), Shanghai, China (2000), Sydney, Australia (1998), Istanbul, Turkey (1997), Havana, Cuba (1986/1994) where she received the Biennale prize. In 2017 she represented the Philippines at the Venice Biennale with artist Manuel Ocampo. Lani Maestro lives and works in Canada, France and Manila.



Han Sai Por (Singapore)

A gentle, shy personality, Han Sai Por prefers to let her (often) huge sculptures and site-

specific installations to speak for her, putting the spotlight on the element the artist feels more connected to: nature.

Born in Singapore during the Japanese occupation, Han Sai Por was one of six children from a modest family, living in Changi in a house made of cardboard boxes and coconut leaves. Nonetheless, Han had a happy childhood, and went to a nearby beach to make figurine animals out of sand. This experience helped her to appreciate nature and instilled in her a sense of adventure and exploration. At ten years of age, Han was introduced to Michelangelo's sculptures through a book given to her by her mother.

Travelling internationally to deepen her education in fine arts and landscape architecture, she has for three decades channelled both passions into a body of work that makes significant comments about the changing landscape. Although it is the environment at large to which Han's works generally refers, her commitment is towards the Singaporean ecosystem. Through her life-long work, earning her the Cultural Medallion for artistic achievement, she keeps on highlighting the importance of preservation of flora, fauna and heritage.



About the artist

Han Sai Por was born in 1943 in Singapore. A graduate of the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA), East Ham College of Art, Wolverhampton College of Art (now the School of Art and Design of the University of Wolverhampton) and Lincoln University, New Zealand, she worked as a teacher and later as a part-time lecturer at NAFA, the LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts, and the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, before becoming a full-time artist in 1997. She has participated in numerous international exhibitions and projects around the world, and her works can be found in many international institutions, public space and private collections from Singapore, Malaysia, India, China, Japan, New Zealand, Australia and United Kingdom to the United States. Such as Singapore National Art Gallery and Art Museum, China National Museum in Beijing, Austral parliament, Chancery of Permanent Mission of Singapore office to the United Nations, Washington DC, Singapore Embassy and Istana and etc. 2005, Han works won top award in India, 2006, won "Outstanding City Sculpture award" in China, 2015, won "The Leonardo Award for Sculpture" at



Dolorosa Sinaga (Indonesia)

Shamanic in her looks, as well as in the tormented figures of her statues, Dolorosa Sinaga's work stems from a deep concern for the welfare of all people. Many of her pieces have strong socio-political themes, mainly revolving around the situation of women in the patriarchal Indonesian society. However, the personal element in her work is also very strong, as she considers all her sculptures as bearing her soul.

A student at the St. Martin's School of Art, London, in her techniques she has always been very open-minded and experimental. Over the years she has moved from her traditional use of bronze and copper to the employment of new technologies and the use of fibreglass materials for her sculptures.

A commitment to the themes dear to her heart has always been part of Dolorosa's ethos, one she wants to transmit to her students at the Indonesian Institute of Art (IKJ), where she has been teaching since 1983: "If you have knowledge to share, then you must make like a river and share it with others," she says. "By keeping the knowledge to yourself, you will be left without a legacy".



About the artist

Dolorosa Sinaga was born in Sumatra, in 1952. 1977: Graduated from Jakarta Institute of the Arts, Faculty of Fine Art. In 1980 – 199 she Completed Post Graduate Program at St. Martin's School of Art, London, United Kingdom in 1983. Short Course "The Finest Method of Bronze Casting Process" in Berkeley, USA. Short Course on Sand Casting Processes at Fine Art Department, Sonoma State University, USA. Short Course on Life Casting Processes at San Francisco Art Institute, USA. Apprenticeship on Colour Bronze Patination Processes at Piero's Art Foundry, Berkeley. International Summer Workshop on Marble Sculpture in Kornarija-Lubliana, Yugoslavia. Internship on Sculpture model of styrofoam at Ringling School of Art, Sarasota, Florida USA. Short Course on Arts Management organised by Jakarta Art Council.

Dolorosa Sinaga is a visual artist. Several works by the artist have been sold at auction, including 'Symphony' sold at Christie's Hong Kong 'Asian 20th Century Art (Day Sale)' in 2016 for \$8,852. There have been many articles about Dolorosa Sinaga, including 'Jiwa / Jakarta Biennale 2017' written by Margarida Mendes for Flash Art (International Edition) in 2017.

Naima Morelli is an art writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written for ArtsHub, Art Monthly Australia, Art to Part of Culture and Escape Magazine, among others, and she is the author of "Arte Contemporanea in Indonesia, un'introduzione" a book focused on the development of contemporary art in Indonesia. As a curator, her practice revolves around creating meaningful connections between Asia, Europe and Australia.

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