

## Keynote Speaker 2

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# A SILENT REVOLUTION

*Some Reflections on Art and Cultural Subversion  
in the New Century in Southeast Asia*

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With the collapse of art into mass culture, recent academic debates have tried to recover the critical efficacy of art via the broader concept of aesthetics. Spurred by the thinking of French philosophers such as Adam Badiou and Jacques Ranciere, there-theorization of aesthetics has revived hope in the revolutionary potential of art. Among other things it has given rise to globally oriented discourses on art and the creation of a democratic future. Yet a sophisticated return to a universalism of thought and action can be detected in these recent analytical procedures. The arising question here is whether the universality of human emancipation has only to be understood in teleological, singular, or transcendental terms?

Using recent developments of the urban art scene in Malaysia and to an extent Indonesia, this paper evaluates current debates on the political immediacy of aesthetics. It suggests that an older Walter Benjaminian framework that treats aesthetics as instantaneously an embodied process of political-historical interpretation and materialist pedagogy that enables political awakening by making intelligible past and present may provide us with more useful means to understand art, artists, and the quiet rise of an alternative public sphere in Southeast Asia.

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