



GALLERY WEEKEND KUALA LUMPUR

Pioneering culture-building networks

Guest editor - Shalini Ganendra

UNESCO OBSERVATORY
MULTI-DISCIPLINARY eJOURNAL IN THE ARTS

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 1, 2021

UNESCO OBSERVATORY MULTI DISCIPLINARY eJOURNAL IN THE ARTS

Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur
VOLUME 7: ISSUE 1: 2021

EDITORIAL TEAM

Guest Editor Shalini Ganendra

Editor in Chief Lindy Joubert

Associate Editor Naomi Berman

Designer Greta Costello

Cover Image: Ernesto Pujazon
Totem to "Wiracocha", Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 2007–2008

ISSN 1835 - 2776

UNESCO E-Journal

an Openly Published Journal affiliated with

The UNESCO Observatory at

The University of Melbourne

Edited and published by Lindy Joubert

Founding Director of the UNESCO Observatory

Email: lindyaj@unimelb.edu.au

Endorsed by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education



UNESCO OBSERVATORY
MULTI DISCIPLINARY eJOURNAL IN THE ARTS

Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur
VOLUME 7: ISSUE 1: 2021

**ABOUT THE
e-JOURNAL**

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal promotes multi disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

Editorial

Shalini Amerasinghe Ganendra – Guest Editor

BA, MA Hons (Cambridge.), LL.M.

Cultural Leader, Scholar and Founder of
Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur

BIOGRAPHY



Shalini Ganendra's impact on cultural development has been defined by over two decades of informed cultural engagement. Through programming, research, publication and an overarching commitment to transnational connection, she has furthered recognition of, inter alia, the distinct and longstanding creative practises of Sri Lanka and Malaysia.

Some notable projects include: Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur with its Luminary Programme featuring international and local creatives in dialogue and presentation, pioneering exhibitions of Sri Lankan modern and contemporary art in Kuala Lumpur, London and New York, and research with publication on cultural practices.

Shalini is Sri Lankan born. She was educated in the US and UK, graduating secondary from Phillips Exeter Academy where she is a Harkness Fellow, after which she read law at University of Cambridge, Trinity Hall. She obtained an LL.M. from Columbia University Law School and is a qualified Barrister and New York Attorney. She has been awarded Visiting Fellowships by Oxford and Cambridge Universities to further cultural research.

FOREWORD

Culture celebrating difference. Culture complimenting commerce. Pioneering culture – The Story of Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur

Developing appreciation for and bringing greater accessibility to culture as a whole and visual art in particular, has been the foundation on which Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur (GWKL) has developed, over a meteoric five years, reflecting evolution and invention. Culture complimenting commerce. Culture celebrating difference. Culture as the creative. Starting out as a prayer, a dream, GWKL has steadily and organically grown, embracing free participation and access, presenting a dynamic platform of multi-disciplinary content. GWKL has been a mechanism through which Malaysia can reconnect with its own cultural landscape (both traditional and contemporary). The cultural marquee has introduced valuable local culture to global audiences; facilitated global exchange; and bridged cultures and disciplines to deliver engagement and project development. As such, GWKL has critically become about the culture of encounter.

The term ‘gallery weekend’ is somewhat of an anomaly for this marquee because the duration now spans two weeks. This longer period offers the opportunity for guests to participate in all offerings and for cultural stakeholders to derive more value through programme build-up. GWKL remains an immersive and intense cultural experience.

Our goal has been for the long-term development of cultural appreciation (local and global), coupled with the creation of a sustainable and appreciative cultural ecosystem through which audiences develop a greater appreciation for the creative. Such appreciation fostered through talks and viewings inevitably sprouts economic support. As a platform, GWKL complements art fairs and biennials, taking the best features from all such events, and presenting them over a shorter period of time with mainly free programming. Since 2016, GWKL has been supported by a wide array of cultural

stakeholders and endorsed by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Tourism, Arts & Culture. We have partnered with major local museums including the National Art Gallery and Islamic Art Museum Malaysia, in addition to including more than 30 select project spaces, galleries, collection venues and cultural spaces annually.

The GWKL Luminary Programme, consisting of public talks (panel and individual) presented by a diverse range of creative talent, has been the anchor feature of GWKL and has defined the gravitas of the marquee. Over these five years, we have hosted more than 30 Luminaries from over 12 countries, including curators, museum directors, auction experts, artists, journalists and collectors. Twenty-two luminaries, a major foundation participant, one moderator and one observer are represented in this publication.

Their form of contribution, whether through essay, interview or presentation format, provides a vibrant glimpse of the diversity of topics, experience and outlooks presented over the past five years– covering art practise, craft, curation, museology, markets, architecture, design, collecting and more. I thank each of these amazing personalities for their valuable insights; editorial assistant, Yung Lo, for adeptly ordering and coordinating these submissions; and Lindy Joubert, Director of the UNESCO Observatory, for quality endorsement of GWKL.

When GWKL launched in 2016, the Art Newspaper wrote “The next Berlin? Kuala Lumpur launches gallery weekend. Dealers and museums join forces to put the Malaysian capital on the art map.” In fact, GWKL has gone beyond being just another “gallery weekend”. Rather, the connectivity that the marquee offers has enriched many thus far with the promise of growing returns through increased awareness and appreciation. In 2020, the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic propelled us to innovate and deliver what turned out to be one of the most successful Luminary Features virtually, where everyone had a front-row seat. The high attendance was a testament to a growing realisation that culture can be the pivot to recovery. “GWKL continues to pioneer culture-building bridges and networks. It applauds creativity and provides a platform for dynamic discussions that continue long after the event itself closes. Likewise, this UNESCO Observatory ‘Arts in Asia’ publication extends this culture of connectivity for greater reach and duration. GWKL continues to pioneer culture. We hope you enjoy the read.

An interview with Christine Boehler

Deputy Managing Director and Director of Programme Culture,
ERSTE Foundation, Vienna

AUTHOR

Yung Lo, BA (Hons), University of Cambridge

BIOGRAPHY

Christine Boehler is a visionary curator, coach, writer and producer from Austria. Boehler has been the head of the Department of Cross-Disciplinary Strategies and Assistant Professor at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, having been a lecturer and key developer of the programme since 2017.

Having studied Comparative Literature and Romance Studies in Vienna and Madrid,



Boehler went onto become the Director of Reading and Exhibition Programme at Literaturhaus Wien in Vienna, the leading centre for contemporary Austrian literature, where she developed and implemented the programme. As founder and chairwoman of Literatur + Medien she curated various international festivals and developed Lichtzeile, an LED line in public space, publishing over 150 writers from 1993 to 2016.

Boehler has been one of the main developers of ERSTE Foundation, the founding director of the culture programme of ERSTE Foundation and former CEO of *Kontakt*. The Art Collection of Erste Group and ERSTE Foundation. She has initiated and realised internationally acclaimed funding systems for arts and culture, exhibition and publication projects, developing lasting partnerships, art awards, residencies and university programmes.

These include being the former Director of Development at Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21), where she developed international museum projects, and having lectured at the University of Innsbruck.

Her past research assignment for the Federal Ministry of Sciences and Transport with a focus on “Cultural Studies” is associated with the publication of her book *Literatur im Netz. Projekte, Hintergründe, Strukturen und Verlage im Internet*, Triton, Vienna, 2001. In 2017, Boehler participated in the Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur (GWKL) Luminary Future, “Curatorial Conversations”, at the National Art Gallery of Malaysia; she shared insights on the development process and delivery of curatorial projects.

I only got to know Kuala Lumpur and experienced the city as very diverse, in the architectural interplay of old and new, also reflected in the culture [...] In times of a volatile art market, galleries and artists should take their chance to represent their specific art confidently.

- Christine Boehler

We interviewed Christine Boehler three years after her participation in GWKL 2017, where she gave us her insights as a curator, coach, writer and producer on the art and cultural scene.

Q: What are the key features for quality curatorial practice and the development of good exhibitions?

Christine Boehler: My curatorial practise consists of seeing, hearing and processing. Only then an idea takes shape, or action begins, usually accompanied by a flow of contradictory developments. For me, the different stages of a project, be it an exhibition or something else, have a lot to do with mutual respect. Also, with humour and fun and with different opinions.

Q: You have wide experience working with an array of cultural stakeholders. What have been some of the best run and attended projects you have organised and why?

CB: The festivals on literature and media were hits with the public. The exhibition Gender Check <https://www.mumok.at/en/events/gender-check> was one of my most important projects after that. What they both have in common is that we took completely new approaches to the presentation and mediation of a topic, were not hesitant to overcome geographical or technical hurdles, and examined a subject from many different perspectives.

Figure 1: Christine Boehler surveying the books and archives at HOM Art Trans, an independent art space with a gallery and studio facilities in Ampang, Malaysia, on her tour there during GWKL 2017. Photo by Shalini Ganendra Advisory.



Q: How important are artist residency programmes and academic art degrees for an artist's practice and branding, and why?

CB: Residency programmes and art schools bring people together, in the best case from different fields of knowledge, disciplines, geographies, cultures and languages. Residencies usually also provide financial benefits and thus the peace to think.

Q: What are the key characteristics that an artist should develop to effectively promote and achieve success?

CB: Persistence, humour, curiosity, courage, as well as writing and negotiation skills.

Q: How important are commercial galleries in the art eco-system and how should they ideally operate?

CB: Galleries are very important. They should enable their artists to work, support research and be constant and fair partners over time.

Q: As an academic and teacher, what qualities do you most appreciate in the classroom from your students and for you as a teacher?

CB: Curiosity and courage. Listening and implementing, asking questions and doubting. Trust and humour.

Q: Your visit to Malaysia for GWKL 2017 was your first. What were your impressions of the city, culture, engagements and audiences?

CB: I only got to know Kuala Lumpur and experienced the city as very diverse, in the architectural interplay of old and new, also reflected in the culture. The town needs bold traffic planning, as a booming metropolis- Kuala Lumpur is drowning in car traffic.

In times of a volatile art market, galleries and artists should take their chance to represent their specific art confidently. Especially some of the collections I remember as very important.

Figure 2: GWKL 2017
Luminary Pulse speakers'
tour of
Galeri Chandan's group
exhibition Platform 3
'Thrownness'. Photo by
Shalini Ganendra Advisory.



Q: With the overwhelming number of biennials, art fairs and events, how important are art platforms as vehicles for global engagement and what elements should they possess to be distinctive?

CB: If the definition of an art platform is to bring people together, to get them talking and to support artistic work and the related business, then art platforms are essential! Such institutions, mostly small and precariously oriented, contribute incredibly to an intellectual and diverse society. Biennials set significant gestures every two years. But art also requires a permanent dialogue, and that can provide an art platform.

Q: Do you integrate the multi-discipline into your teaching practice and if so, how so?

CB: We are a multi-disciplinary team and continuously strive to understand and communicate with each other across borders. This engagement is what we expect from the students as well.

My teaching applies for cross-disciplinary work in the CDC Lab, which is a participatory lecture format in which students contribute, develop and use topics and approaches largely independently. To this end, several courses from different subject groups of the study programme cooperate with the CDC Lab in the joint supervision of content, research, problem solving and practical implementation.

Figure 3: On the tour of Galeri Chandan's group exhibition Platform 3 'Thrownness' during GWKL 2017. Photo by Shalini Ganendra Advisory.



Figure 4: Christine Boehler (third from right) sitting down with fellow GWKL 2017 Luminary Pulse speakers and GWKL founder, Shalini Ganendra (middle) during their tour of Galeri TAKSU's group exhibition Reflections. Photo by Shalini Ganendra Advisory.

