



PRESS RELEASE

Contested Modernities. Postcolonial Architecture in Southeast Asia Discourse programme, exhibition, ARCH+ issue

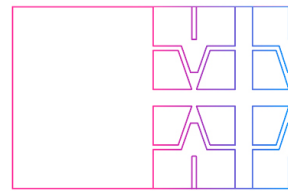
The Present of Modernity Online Symposium Friday, 11 June 2021, 2 – 5 pm CEST (CET+1/UTC+2)

Upon gaining independence in the mid-20th century, many cities in Southeast Asia changed dramatically in terms of their physical appearance. The task of becoming an independent nation was accompanied by the desire for a symbolic new beginning in architecture and urban planning. International modernism not only offered an aesthetic programme that reflected expectations of progress and prosperity, but also served as a means of emancipation from the colonial powers. Local modernities were created, based on an understanding of cultural specifics and the climatic requirements of building in tropical regions.

Today, however, the built legacy of this transformational period is increasingly under threat. Rapid urbanization and the accompanying rise in property values, reassessments of local architectural histories that are often politically motivated, and demands to adapt old buildings to new uses are causing ever more iconic structures to be razed or disfigured through careless modifications. And such developments are not limited to Southeast Asia. In Germany as well, architecture from the 1950s to 1970s is increasingly falling victim to demolition for very similar reasons.

Nevertheless, there are precedents of the preservation and adaptive use of modernist architecture around the world. The symposium will discuss examples such as the Getty Institute's Keeping it Modern programme, the model project at Haus der Statistik in Berlin, new approaches in Singapore to evaluating buildings beyond mere aesthetics, and the renovation of the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium in Jakarta.

Lectures and videos produced for *Contested Modernities* will explore how the path from the past to the future can succeed and what considerations can be helpful in this process.



Contributions:

Keeping It Modern

Antoine Wilmering, Senior Program Officer, Getty Foundation, Los Angeles

The House of Statistics: From demolition plan to future project

Frauke Gerstenberg, raumlaborberlin, and **Manfred Kühne**, Senate Department for Urban Development and Housing Berlin

Gelora Bung Karno: From a heritage sports complex to a modern public park

A video presentation by **d-associates**, Jakarta

Stop Architectural Deforestation

A video presentation by **Ho Weng Hin**, Studio Lapis, Department of Architecture, School of Design and Environment, National University of Singapore

Q & A

Moderation:

Nikhil Joshi, Architect, activist, Department of Architecture, National University of Singapore

The online symposium will take place via Zoom and will be held in English. Participation is free of charge. There will also be a live stream on the ARCH+ Facebook page. More information and registration: www.seam-encounters.net/programme/present-of-modernity/

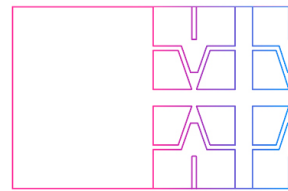
About *Contested Modernities. Postcolonial Architecture in Southeast Asia*

Postcolonial architectural modernism in Southeast Asia is increasingly becoming a topic of discussion in light of rapid urbanization and ongoing processes of decolonization in the region. In Germany and Europe, however, this architecture and the debate surrounding it are barely known. *Contested Modernities* now brings this Southeast Asian discourse to Berlin with an exhibition, online events, and a publication, revealing surprisingly similar discussions that are currently being held about the architectural heritage of modernism.

Contested Modernities transfers current positions on Southeast Asian modernism into an international dialogue and opens up new perspectives on the history, meaning, and future of modernism – in the region and beyond.

This project is part of the long-term programme *Encounters with Southeast Asian Modernism* and is based on a multi-year exchange between the Berlin curatorial team and scholars, architects, artists, and curators from the region. In 2019, intensive explorations of postcolonial architecture in each city were made possible by research, exhibitions, and events taking place in Phnom Penh, Jakarta, Yangon, and Singapore. The findings gathered through the collaborative experience, together with the knowledge developed thanks to transdisciplinary exchange, form the starting point for this year's programme in Berlin.

Contested Modernities is an initiative by the curators Sally Below, Moritz Henning, Christian Hiller, and Eduard Kögel.



Contested Modernities

Postcolonial
Architecture in
Southeast Asia

Since April 2021, a public online discourse programme will convene key players from Southeast Asia and Berlin, as well as international experts – from the fields of architecture, art, science, and administration – to jointly reflect on common topics and possible courses of action.

In autumn 2021, an exhibition at Haus der Statistik (House of Statistics) in Berlin will present contributions from Jakarta, Phnom Penh, Singapore, and Yangon that examine narratives of postcolonial modernism and approaches to its built heritage in works spanning architecture, art, and academic research. Further contributions take a critical look at the implementation of development aid and socialist solidarity projects in Southeast Asia by former East and West Germany, showing their contrasting policies in this region during the Cold War.

Within the framework of the programme, ARCH+, Germany's leading discursive journal for architecture and urbanism, dedicated an issue on the topic, published in April 2021.

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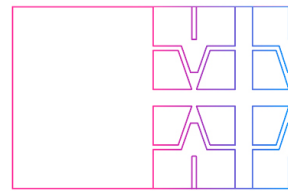
This project is funded by the Hauptstadtkulturfonds (Capital Cultural Fund) of Berlin and the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (BMI)



Federal Ministry
of the Interior, Building
and Community

Partners and sponsors

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National University of Singapore, Department of Architecture
ARCH+
stadtkultur international ev
House of Statistics Berlin



The follow-up programme in autumn 2021

The Future of Modernity

Online Symposium

September 2021 – Date will be announced in time

What concepts are being discussed in Germany today, and how do they correspond to strategies being implemented in Southeast Asia? While initial experiences and successes are being made in preserving modernist buildings in both regions, these cannot be taken for granted. It is therefore important to exchange views, examine successes, discuss strategies, and determine what added value is created for society if they are preserved. What is the future of architectural modernism? What kinds of arguments – reflecting contemporary aspirations, local use, and ecological approaches – could help to secure a future for these buildings?

(Un-)learning Modernism

Online Symposium

October 2021 – Date will be announced in time

Today, networks in art, architecture, and culture are working in Southeast Asia to challenge common narratives about and responses to modernism. The spectrum ranges from traditional academic research to artistic actions, research-based and outreach-oriented cultural work, and concrete initiatives for the preservation of buildings.

There is also the issue of decolonization to be addressed, given that architectural curricula at Southeast Asian universities have often been adopted from Western institutions. What kinds of educational formats are needed to enable new and critical perspectives? What are the political, social, and cultural hurdles that must be overcome? How can transnational, cross-disciplinary knowledge transfer be strengthened in the future?

Exhibition

Haus der Statistik (House of Statistics) Berlin, autumn 2021 – Date will be announced

The exhibition looks at postcolonial architecture and urban planning in the participating countries and how they are seen today in light of contemporary urban practices and questions about the future. Exemplary buildings and established narratives on Southeast Asian modernism, dating back to the period after independence, will be critically examined, also in the context of current international discourses on architecture, urban planning, and building culture. Not only will the history of modernism's impact be addressed, in terms of its various influences and local manifestations in Southeast Asia, but also the region's historic connections with East and West Germany.

By interweaving postcolonial architecture, contemporary perspectives, and highly topical urban issues, the exhibition will advance the discourse on alternative uses for modernist structures and concepts able to withstand the challenges in urban development today.

The contributions from Phnom Penh, Jakarta, Yangon, and Singapore build on four exhibitions curated in those cities by the Southeast Asian project partners in 2019 as part of *Encounters with Southeast Asian Modernism*. They will question, expand, and complement existing narratives on modernism and illustrate expert and civic engagement in the preservation of built heritage in Southeast Asia.

A new contribution developed by the Berlin curators focuses for the first time on a seldom-addressed topic: bilateral relations between Southeast Asia and the East and West Germany from the 1950s to the 1970s. This project reveals the different connections and transfers to the region from the formerly separate German countries.

The exhibition venue, Haus der Statistik (House of Statistics), establishes a direct link to themes addressed by the exhibition. Not only does it embody a model approach for the reuse of late-modernist architecture in Berlin, but also a vision of solidarity and community for the city of tomorrow. It sets the stage for a dialogue, which will foster new insights into the history, meaning, and future of modernity at the intersection of globalization and local specificities.

Contributions

Folding Concrete 2.0 / Phnom Penh: curated by Pen Sereypagna and Vuth Lyno

Visualization of National History: From, by, and for Whom? / Jakarta: curated by Grace Samboh, Hyphen -, and ruangrupa/Gudskul

Housing Modernities / Singapore: curated by Ho Puay-Peng with Nikhil Joshi, Johannes Widodo

Occupying Modernism / Jakarta: curated by Avianti Armand, Setiadi Sopandi, co-curator Rifandi Septiawan Nugroho

Poelzig's Legacy and the Prefab in the Tropics: German Influences and Projects in Southeast Asia curated by Sally Below, Moritz Henning, Christian Hiller, Eduard Kögel

Synthesis of Myanmar Modernity / Yangon: curated by Pwint and Win Thant Win Shwin

Publication of ARCH+ issue *Contested Modernities* April 2021

Within the framework of *Contested Modernities*, an issue of ARCH+ on Southeast Asian modernism has been published in April 2021. Using examples from Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, and Singapore, this ARCH+ issue focuses on how the process of nation building was carried out in architecture and urban planning in the course of decolonization. Many of these buildings, which illustrate the young nations' aspirations of emancipation and are regarded as important examples of tropical modernism, are severely threatened by rapid urbanization. The authors of this issue advocate a critical reappraisal of these architectures, as well as their preservation and adaptive reuse.