



## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Contested Modernities. Postcolonial Architecture in Southeast Asia exhibition from 10 September to 24 October 2021 at Haus der Statistik, Berlin**

3 September 2021

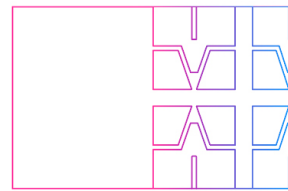
On September 10, the exhibition *Contested Modernities. Postcolonial Architecture in Southeast Asia* will open at the Haus der Statistik, House A.

We would like to invite you to the press tour on September 10 at 5 pm and thank you for your interest. We would also be happy to send you a selection of images in high resolution.

#### **About the exhibition**

With the attainment of independence in the mid-20th century, the appearance of many cities in Southeast Asia changed. Hand in hand with the task of constituting a nation went 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. With their knowledge of climatic building requirements in tropical regions and cultural specifics, local modernisms were created that shaped the image of the cities for years to come.

Today, rapid urbanisation processes, often politically motivated reassessments of local architectural history, and new usage requirements place the architectural legacy of this era of new beginnings under threat of demolition or destruction through excessive conversions. Against this backdrop, the significance of postcolonial architecture in the region is increasingly thematized. This is accompanied by critiques of the widespread interpretation of modernism as an originally Western movement.



In Germany, the buildings of Southeast Asian modernism and the discussions about their preservation are barely known. *Contested Modernities* brings the Southeast Asian discourse to Berlin, where astonishingly similar discussions are currently being held about the architectural heritage of modernism.

*Contested Modernities* is part of the long-term programme *Encounters with Southeast Asian Modernism*, which launched in 2019 with exhibitions and events in Phnom Penh, Jakarta, Yangon, and Singapore. Five curatorial teams in the respective cities dealt in different ways with the significance of local architectural modernism. The exhibition brings together these contributions in Berlin. Documentary projects, interviews and artistic research works provide an exemplary insight into the debates as they are being conducted in the respective cities.

These contributions are supplemented by a look at the role of the two German states in the modernisation process of Southeast Asia during the Cold War. The exhibition section *Poelzig's Legacy and the Prefab in the Tropics: German Influences in Southeast Asia* aims to take a novel look at planning and building activities with the participation of the Federal Republic of Germany and the GDR in some countries in Southeast Asia from the 1950s to the 1970s. In addition to the planning and building projects, it also deals with architectural education, which was influenced by figures such as Julius Posener.

Haus der Statistik (House of Statistics) as an exhibition venue establishes a direct link to the theme of the exhibition. Built as an administrative building in the centre of the city, it stood empty after German reunification and was scheduled for demolition. Thanks to civic engagement and an open-minded administration, this fate was averted. After its renovation, Haus der Statistik will serve as a model project combining cultural, social, and educational projects, affordable housing, and administrative uses in this special location.

In conjunction with the topics addressed by the contributions from Southeast Asia, *Contested Modernities* aims to open up a shared thought process that negotiates new perspectives on the perception and treatment of architectural modernism, both here and there.

## Exhibition contributions

### ***Folding Concrete 2.0***

Curated by / *kuratiert von*: Pen Sereypagna and Vuth Lyno  
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

### ***Housing Modernities***

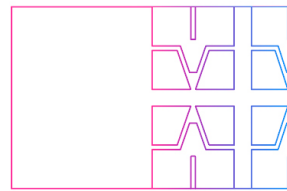
Curated by / *kuratiert von*: Ho Puay-Peng with Nikhil Joshi and Johannes Widodo  
Singapore

### ***Occupying Modernism***

Curated by / *kuratiert von*: Avianti Armand and Setiadi Sopandi with Rifandi Septiawan Nugroho  
Jakarta, Indonesia

### ***Poelzig's Legacy and the Prefab in the Tropics: German influences in Southeast Asia***

Curated by / *kuratiert von*: Sally Below, Moritz Henning, Christian Hiller, Eduard Kögel  
Berlin, Germany



***Synthesis of Myanmar Modernity***

Curated by / *kuratiert von*: Pwint (+), Win Thant Win Shwin  
Yangon, Myanmar

***Visualization of the national history: From, by, and for whom? (2)***

Curated by Grace Samboh, Hyphen –, and GUDSKUL, Yogyakarta/Jakarta, Indonesia

*Contested Modernities* is an initiative of the artistic directors Sally Below, Moritz Henning, Christian Hiller, Eduard Kögel.

**Exhibition venue**

Haus der Statistik  
(House of Statistics)  
Haus A  
Karl-Marx-Allee 1  
10178 Berlin

**Opening hours**

Tuesday – Friday 1 pm – 7 pm  
Saturday – Sunday 11 am – 6 pm

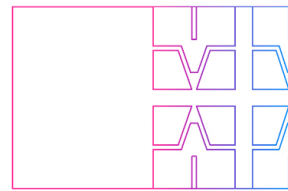
**Guided tours**

Guided tours of the exhibition with the artistic directors take place on tuesdays, saturdays and sundays. Registration is required. The dates can be found at: <https://www.seam-encounters.net/programme/contested-modernities-exhibition/>

**For further information and registration for the press tour please contact:**

sbca  
Prinzenstraße 84.2  
10969 Berlin  
030 695 370 80  
mail@seam-encounters.net

[www.seam-encounters.net](http://www.seam-encounters.net)



## The further online discourse programme

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.

### The Future of Modernity

#### Online symposium

**Friday, 17 September 2021, 2 – 5 pm CEST (CET+1 / UCT+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 falling victim to demolition for very similar reasons.

It is therefore necessary to exchange views, examine successes, discuss strategies, and to determine what added value is created for society if buildings from this period are preserved. What concepts are being discussed in Germany today, and how do they correspond to strategies being implemented in Southeast Asia? How can contemporary usage concepts for modernist buildings be developed? What kinds of arguments could help secure a future for these buildings?

#### Contributions:

Oliver Elser, curator, Deutsches Architekturmuseum DAM (german architecture museum), Frankfurt, initiator of the research project #SOSBrutalism

Moe Moe Lwin, architect, director of Yangon Heritage Trust, Yangon, Myanmar

Shayari de Silva, architect, curator Art & Archival Collections, Geoffrey Bawa Trust, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Christoph Rauhut, State Conservator and Director of the Berlin State Monument Authority, Germany

Johannes Widodo, Associate Professor, Department of Architecture, National University of Singapore / modern Asian Architecture Network, modern ASEAN architecture

#### Moderation:

Shirley Surya, curator for Design and Architecture, M+, museum for visual culture, Hongkong

**ARCH+ 243: Contested Modernities. Postcolonial Architecture in Southeast Asia  
April 2021**

As part of the project, an issue of ARCH+, Germany's leading discursive journal for architecture and urbanism, was also published in April 2021. An English edition will be published on the occasion of the exhibition opening.

Contested Modernities is funded by the German Capital Cultural Fund (HKF) and the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community.



Bundesministerium  
des Innern, für Bau  
und Heimat

**Partners and sponsors**

Berlin Senate Department for Urban Development and Housing  
The Governing Mayor of Berlin, Senate Chancellery  
Goethe Institute Jakarta  
Goethe Institute Myanmar  
Goethe Institute Singapore  
Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany Singapore  
Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Berlin  
National University of Singapore, Department of Architecture  
Embassy of the Republic of Singapore in Berlin  
ARCH+  
stadtkultur international ev  
House of Statistics Berlin