

## ASEAN Manifesto

Curated by Kristian Jeff Agustin & Martin Vidanes (Philippines),  
Yen Ooi (UK & Malaysia), and Amy Matthewson (Canada & UK)

Five 'founding fathers' from five Southeast Asian countries adopted the 'Bangkok Declaration' on 8 August 1967. The momentous document marked the founding of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Since then, the international organisation has grown to ten member countries — namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam — forming a developing region that is now home to more than 600 million Southeast Asians. For a population so diverse and diasporic, what does it mean to live by a declaration penned and signed by a handful of individuals?

Through a mix of photography, prose poetry, and spoken word, Agustin, Matthewson, Ooi, and Vidanes re-adopt the ASEAN Declaration into today's sociopolitical climate to challenge what is archaic and historic about 'Southeast Asia' as both an identity and a geopolitical bloc. Dubbed 'ASEAN Manifesto', the collaborative performance piece serves as a culmination of several months of paracuratorial experiments curated by Agustin and several other co-curators since 2020 (*MADE in ASEAN* online exhibition).

Thus, this new manifesto aims to push the boundaries of intergovernmental statutes and the so-called Habermasian public sphere in the context of regionalism discourses. Can the ASEAN be a participatory process? What does community and identity building entail when it is replete with public participation? And ultimately, is the nature of our so-called 'ASEAN-ness' participatory enough or entirely imposed by institutions? With the Covid-19 pandemic serving as a backdrop, the curators imagined an ASEAN landscape that is more than the sum of its parts: more than its shared colonial past and the exotic gaze of the West, more than its postcolonial transition to non-interfering nations, and more than its tourism-driven economies and tech-savvy societies. These strands all lead to the contemporary understanding of what might the much touted ASEAN identity mean to its constituents, as well as their individual and collective participation in region-building.

*ASEAN Manifesto* launched on Sunday, 8 August 2021, to mark the occasion of ASEAN Day.