

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

MADE IN ASEAN

Who is Southeast Asia made of?

We must beg this question of *who* instead of *what*, because decades after Southeast Asian countries' colonial histories the search for a shared identity persists. In 1967 the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was founded as a means of establishing mutual cooperation within the region and since then, it has grown from five post-war countries to ten independent member states. *One Vision, One Identity, One Community*; the ASEAN motto implies seeing, recognising, and belonging.

Fifteen participants from different ASEAN countries — Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam — and the UK engaged in participatory photography to reflect on what it means to be Southeast Asian and an ASEAN member citizen in today's world. The main challenge was to reflect on the various ways we might see, recognise, and belong to 'ASEAN-ness' using images of everyday life, nostalgia, and places — almost stripping the grand narrative of geopolitics down to what we can imagine with our very eyes and, by extension, what can be observed by our cameraphones.

The view of a nameless street from one's window, intertwining clotheslines stretched out from the kitchen back door, a cupboard overflowing with chopsticks, spoons, pots and pans, a handful of souvenirs and trinkets tucked away for several years, and memories of travel adventures and childhood games.

The similarities are uncanny yet familiar to our imaginative eyes; the differences only reveal themselves when we speak of them.

While we remain indoors for still an uncertain period of time, we invite you to visit Southeast Asia by imagining with us. Choose any country, any destination, any place. Only, you will need more than your own eyes and senses to explore. This is why we are offering you ours.

MADE IN ASEAN transforms our collective act of imagining into image-making. As the regional integration project *ASEAN Vision 2020* was envisioned to launch this year, our curatorial project offers the public an alternative means of reflecting on the ASEAN's identity-building efforts in the last fifty years.

Who makes the ASEAN? Who makes of the ASEAN? What do we make of the ASEAN?

We can only imagine, for now.

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