

Mesa sa Kwarto

Curated by Kristian Jeff Agustin (Philippines)

If ideas are made in the mind, where do they materialise? In any advanced society, the corporeal act of drawing, inscribing, sculpting, and even tasting often takes place on a stable surface, such as a *desk*. Before machinery became as handy as mobile devices, pinning down ideas required a physical substrate upon which ideas are held or pressed against. The desk serves many a purpose in today's 'work-driven' society.

In 2020, numerous workers have been deprived of access to their desk jobs as mass lockdowns shuttered workplaces not only in Asia but also the rest of the world because of Covid-19. Virtual meetings conducted over videoconferencing apps, therefore, made quite the difference — had this pandemic happened decades prior, the physical and social challenges would prove even harder.

Whilst many industries have swiftly realised various workarounds using online connectivity and virtual spaces, the arts sector (especially in Southeast Asia) has yet to circumvent many physical restrictions. Regardless of the global pandemic, however, creative practitioners have long been experimenting to offer new solutions.

Mesa sa Kwarto is a para-curatorial experiment that is designed to expand the now ubiquitous Zoom *gallery view* into a makeshift exhibition space. Here, the desk (*mesa*) in the room (*kwarto*) balances between the material and virtual, execution and concept, offline and online, work and life. The effect is a home-made rendering of augmented reality.

An almost 'retrospective' exhibition, the display of objects is culled from an intimate curatorial collection — with the curator's bedroom serving as both an archive and a repository of artworks, clothes, journals, letters, and souvenirs which have accumulated through the years. The life-size inventory is distilled on a desk, where the objects are weighed, wielded, and written.

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For the *MADE IN ASEAN* online exhibition, curator Kristian Jeff Agustin presents a catalogue of Southeast Asian artefacts and products manufactured in ASEAN countries. As if pre-empting future museums, curators and collectors, these objects are altogether presented as a depiction of the material culture of the 'ASEAN civilisation'. After all, located in the region are some of the most vulnerable nations in the world in the face of pandemics, rising oceans, and world wars.