



Decolonising Curating and the Museum in Southeast Asia series

Jointly organised by the Southeast Asian Art Academic Programme, SOAS University of London, and the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore

The politics of Greater India and Indonesian collections in museums of 'Asian Art'

Marieke Bloembergen and Mathilde Mechling

Thursday, 11 November 2021

11am London; 7pm Singapore, via Zoom

To register, scan the QR code or click on the link:
<https://bit.ly/374lhjZ>



Since the nineteenth century, today's South and Southeast Asia have become part of scholarly and popular thinking that defines the region as a single, superior, Hindu-Buddhist civilisation with its source in India. This *double* lecture addresses the continuing legacies of this imagined Greater India via academia, museums, and popular culture worldwide. In museums of so-called 'Asian Art' in the West, well-choreographed exhibitions strategically use light and space to emphasise the spiritual power and inner beauty of Hindu and Buddhist statues, evoking ideas of Greater India. In this way, they obfuscate the violence underlying how objects were collected, researched and interpreted, and they depict Southeast Asia – and thus, central in this talk, today's Muslim-majority Indonesia – as the passive recipient of a superior Indian civilisation. In contrast, the National Museum of Indonesia in Jakarta, for instance, tells the history of Indonesia. Bloembergen, a historian, and Mechling, an art historian, will explore from their respective perspectives and research the impact of the Greater India phenomenon on ancient Hindu and Buddhist objects from Indonesia, reflecting on how to decolonise the museum, but also on what it is then that actually needs to be being decolonised.

Speakers



Historian Marieke Bloembergen is a senior researcher at the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV), and professor in Archival and Postcolonial Studies at Leiden University. Her most recent monograph, co-authored with Martijn Eickhoff, is *The politics of heritage in Indonesia. A cultural history* (Cambridge: 2020). In her lecture she dwells on her current book project-in-progress, entitled '*Indonesia and the politics of Greater India: a moral geography, 1880s-1990s*'.



Mathilde Mechling received her PhD in 2020 from University Sorbonne Nouvelle and Leiden University. Her thesis, which she is currently adapting into a book publication, focused on Hindu and Buddhist bronze statuary from the Indonesian Archipelago, critically engaging with the legacies of colonial scholarship and developing an interdisciplinary methodology to study the bronzes.

Discussant



Panggah Ardiyansyah is a PhD candidate of History of Art and Archaeology at SOAS University of London. His main interest is on the afterlives and knowledge production of Hindu-Buddhist materials in Indonesia, and he recently co-edited *Returning Southeast Asia's Past: Objects, Museums, and Restitution* (with Louise Tythacott, 2021).

Image: The Indonesian section in the Museum of Asian Art in Paris, Musée Guimet. Photograph by Marieke Bloembergen

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