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Why These Collectors Are Building a Platform for Southeast Asian Women Artists in London

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Portrait of Krystina Lyon and Mark Budden. Courtesy of Krystina Lyon and Mark Budden.



Albert Irvin, clockwise from top right: *Summer*, 1997; *Abstract*, 1997; *Concordia III*, 1997. Courtesy of Krystina Lyon and Mark Budden.

After 23 years based in Singapore, Krystina Lyon and her husband Mark Budden are returning to London, but they plan to take the cultural influences of Southeast Asia with them.

Over the past three decades, the couple has amassed around 200 works of art that trace both the arc of Southeast Asia's contemporary scene and their personal journey as collectors.

In their collection are works by Charles Lim Yi Yong, who represented Singapore at the Venice Biennale in 2015; Maria Madeira, who gave a voice to Timor-Leste in its inaugural Venice Biennale pavilion in 2024; the British abstract expressionist Albert Irvin; and the British Balinese artist Sinta Tantra.

For their next chapter in London, the couple plans to focus their collection on Southeast Asian women artists. "The women artists in my collections are articulating histories, untold stories, and struggles that are important to understanding Southeast Asia now," said Lyon.

Tentatively named the Nassim Road Collection – after the street in Singapore where they lived – the couple hopes it will become a platform for deeper research into the history of contemporary art in the region.

"It would be nice to make it a place of encounter where students, scholars, and visitors can engage with the collection," Lyon added. "Where dialogues around gender, history, and contemporary art in Southeast Asia can continue."

From decoration to devotion



Installation view, above table: Kee Levi, *Stamps* (Series of 21), 1995 and *K & M Kissing*, 1997 (on left side of table); Komkrit Thepthian, *God of Luck*, 2018 (sculpture on the right); Sinta Tantra, *Constellations of Being (Coral)*, 2022 (small sculpture on the left); and Patricia Piccinini, *Ruby Examination*, 2022 (hand blown glass on table). Courtesy of Krystina Lyon and Mark Budden.

Like many collectors, Krystina Lyon and her husband first began buying art as a way to decorate their home, with early purchases including a set of screenprints from Kee Levi.

When the couple relocated to Singapore in the early 2000s, their business grew, and so did their collection. Paintings, artifacts, collectible Danish furniture: The range widened, and Lyon found herself with more time to devote to her own passion.



Installation view, clockwise from top left: Melissa Tan, *Kalisto*, 2021 and *Amenouzume*, 2023; Suzann Victor, *Unequal Innocence*, 2020; Ian Woo, *Crown (1)* and *Snap series*, 2021. Courtesy of Krystina Lyon and Mark Budden.



Installation view, from top left: Nor Tijan Firdaus, *After Seated Malay Girl by Redza Piyadasa*, 2021 and *After Lai Foong Mai, Samsui Worker*, 2021. Above bookshelf, clockwise from left: Leonard Aguinaldo, *Add to Cart*, 2021 and *Usap-usapan*, 2021; Lim Soo Ngee, *Pigeon and Girl*, 2022; and Leonard Aguinaldo, *Usap-usapan*, 2021. Courtesy of Krystina Lyon and Mark Budden.

It delved into the diversity of art practice, exploring everything from the legacy of major political events such as the Indian Partition to the perception of womanhood and family.

The show had a profound emotional effect. “My husband and I always remember walking into that exhibition and seeing Tayeba Begum Lipi’s bed made of razor blades and Sopheap Pich’s *Morning Glory* (2011), woven from rattan.”

“These works were no longer about national narratives; they were questioning, reshaping, and telling their own stories,” she said.

Nearly a decade later, in her living room, sit two glass-encased works by Lipi: a pair of palm-sized baby shoes — *Lost* (2019) — and a set of stiletto heels — *Her Stilettos 1 (Day)* (2019) — both cut from the glint of razor blades.

For the works, Lipi draws on her roots in Bangladesh, where access to healthcare is limited. The razor blade is a tool used to sever an umbilical cord, and Lipi turns that brutal necessity into a metaphor for the struggles faced by women in her home country.

A collection with an academic catalyst



Installation view of Tayeba Begum Lipi, *Her Stilettos 1 (Day)*, 2019. Courtesy of Krystina Lyon and Mark Budden.

What ultimately steered Lyon toward collecting women artists with intention was her enrollment in a joint MA program in Asian art histories.

“When I began researching women’s art collectives in Southeast Asia, I started to see patterns, urgencies, and resonances I hadn’t noticed before,” Lyon said. “I realized I had to marshal my resources to build a collection with real depth and coherence.”

One of the first works Lyon acquired by a Southeast Asian women artist was *Ad Infinitum* (2019) in 2021 by Melbourne-based Indonesian artist Octora Chan. Chan is known for interrogating how ethnographic portraits of Indonesian women produced during the colonial era continue to shape perceptions of gender in the region today. In *Ad Infinitum*, she restaged a photograph of a Legong dancer. Legong, a classical Balinese court dance, has long been performed by women. Yet under colonial rule, dancers were often stripped of their individuality and treated as objects of exotic curiosity.

“I was immediately intrigued by the layered narrative in the work,” Lyon said. “I was familiar with parts of Dutch colonial history in the East Indies, but this was the first time I encountered a young contemporary artist critiquing that period in a way that also engaged with current sociopolitical issues.”

In 2024, Lyon purchased another work by Chan, *Recoup 1920: wuorv egnoj* (2023), the artist’s first foray into tapestry.

Here, Chan restages herself as the subject of an ethnographic portrait of Balinese women shown from a three-quarter back view. Golden threads glint in her earrings and hair ornaments, set against the muted tones of merino wool, imbuing the work with elegance and softness.

“This is probably what they would have liked to show the colonizers — not everything, just their backs,” Lyon said. “It’s as if she’s giving them their agency back.”

A collection of dialogue



Installation view, clockwise from top left: Sinta Tantra, *Bird of Paradise (Day)*, 2023; Wing Chan, *Urban-fitti No 003*, 2013; Gary Ross Pastrana, *Palimpsest*, 2017-2012; Takashi Murakami, *This Merciless World*, 2019. Courtesy of Krystina Lyon and Mark Budden.

For Lyon, collecting has always been about “dialogue rather than possession.”

“It reflects what I have learned from living here [in Singapore] for over three decades,” she said.

Her commitment extends beyond acquiring works, as she revealed plans to lend several pieces to museum exhibitions next year in both London and Boston. But the culmination of her research and collecting philosophy will arrive next year with the publication of her book, *You Are Seen: Women’s Contemporary Art Practices in Southeast Asia*.

The volume, set to coincide with the Art SG art fair in January, spotlights 35 women artists from nine ASEAN countries. Drawing from her personal collection and spanning both emerging and established voices, the book served a crucial purpose for her. “The aim is not to speak for these artists, but to amplify the resonance of their work,” she said. “I hope to continue this journey through speaking, writing, and sharing the collection so that others can encounter them, too.” ■