

Attention:  
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## **Application for Travel Grant 2013**

### **The Eighth International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS)**

**24-27 June 2013**

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#### **Proposal**

##### **I- Introduction**

Since 1998, the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) has been a significant international gathering for Asian Studies in the humanities and social sciences, taking place every two years in different cities all over the world. The past seven conventions were in Leiden, Berlin, Singapore, Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur, Daejeon and Honolulu. ICAS is one of the best opportunities for academic researchers worldwide coming together to share, discuss and debate diverse topics about Asian history, politics, and culture in an interdisciplinary context.

From 24 to 27 June 2013, with 350 panels of participants from 56 countries and 600 higher institutions represented at the conference in Macau, ICAS promises to be the most vibrant academic event in Asia and about Asia itself.

##### **II- The Panel 'Parallel and Perpendicular Art Worlds: Independent Art Spaces and Alternative Art Histories in Post-Doi Moi Vietnam'**

***Background:*** In the 14 years of ICAS, many intriguing themes have come up in discussion about Vietnamese history ("Tours of Vietnam: War, Travel Guides, and Memory" by Scott Laderman), politics ("Where is Credit Due? Legal Institutions, Connections, and the Efficiency of Bank Lending in Vietnam" by Markus D. Taussig), social changes ("Youth and the State in Contemporary Vietnam" by Phuong An Nguyen), gender studies ("Power and Passion: Heterosexual Masculinities in Vietnam" by Helle Rydström) or anthropology ("Vietnam's Familiar Strangers - Narratives of Home, Homeland and Belonging Among Second Generation Viet Kieu in Saigon" by Priscilla Koh). However, one of the most important factors in the humanities field – Vietnamese art and art history – has hardly ever been touched until a panel was selected this time. At the upcoming eighth ICAS, for the first time, an intense survey on Vietnamese contemporary art will be explored by a panel of academics, including art historians, and cultural practitioners representing curation, archiving and exhibition organizing. The panel will deliver an overview on Vietnamese contemporary art, the phase of experimental practices and avant-garde movements.

***Abstract:*** 'In the past two- plus decades since the implementation of the 'Doi Moi' economic reforms in Vietnam known as Doi Moi, artists have tried to sever their ties with break free from State state-run cultural organizations and government- managed artistic institutions. In the 1990s, a number of independent, artist-run exhibition spaces were created to promote the spirit of artistic experimentation outside of the "official" art world. Among these spaces, one could also count international cultural organizations such as the Goethe Institut or the French Cultural Center. One experimental space includes Salon Natasha that was founded in 1983, before Doi Moi, but because it was housed in an artist's studio and place of residence, it is was and is often overlooked as an exhibition space. In examining more closely the rise and sometimes fall of independent art spaces in Vietnam, one discerns the complex variety of artistic interventions within the socio-political movements of the country. At times, independent art spaces have been instrumental in fostering creativity and experimentation when the sState failed to nurture the development and evolution of modern and contemporary art. At other times, independent art spaces have been the only spaces for artistic creation. Today, artists still need spaces to work, interact with other artists and exhibit freely. The pressures of the ""global" " art world give little opportunity for "local" artists to be visible to the international art community. The four papers on the panel will engage in discussions related to the idea and relativity of the term "independence" and "alternative" in the arts as well debate the role that they have played in recent Vietnamese art history in challenging official state discourse.' (Nora A. Taylor)

**Panel Members:**

Convener: Prof. Dr. Nora Annesley Taylor, School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Discussant: Janet Chan, Asia Art Archive

Presenters: Assoc. Prof. Natalia Kraevskaia, Institute for Oriental Cultures, Russian State University for the Humanities

Zoe Butt, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales

Arlette Quynh-Anh Tran, Freie Universitaet Berlin

**III- Travel Grant Applicant: Arlette Quynh-Anh Tran**

***Background:*** From September 2010 to May 2011 I was working as researcher and archivist on the project *Digitizing the Archival Materials of Blue Space Contemporary Arts Centre* for Asia Art Archive. The project included chronologically systematizing, selecting, digitalizing, sorting and translating the archives of the Blue Space Gallery from its establishment in 1996 up to 2010, as well as conducting interviews with Mrs. Tran Thi Huynh Nga – the founder – for an oral history narrative. Since then, I've been assisting Asia Art Archive to complete the archive, so that digital archives of two of Vietnam's first alternative art spaces – Salon Natasha in Hanoi and Blue Space gallery in Ho Chi Minh City – will be launched at Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong in June 2013. After working intensively and closely with Blue Space's founder in years, I have learned much about the beginning phase of contemporary art in HCMC in the period from the late 1990s to the early 2000s. The paper at presented ICAS will be my

analysis and evaluation of Blue Space's role in the early history of contemporary Vietnamese art, then to the broader review of contemporary art development by artist-initiated programs and spaces in Southern Vietnam, which will be continued in depth by the presentation of Zoe Butt, Director of San Art, an independent art space in HCMC.

**Abstract: The Independent Art Space as Initiator of Experimentation and Dialogue**

'With the beginning of the 'market economy' in 1986, Vietnamese social structure changed dramatically in the 1990s as a consequence of its inchoate capitalist system and international exchange. It brought updated information from the outside world and led to the yearning for reformation in the cultural field, especially in the arts. In Ho Chi Minh City, it was not until 1996 with the opening of Blue Space Gallery – the first contemporary art space in southern Vietnam – that local artists had the opportunity to experiment with various forms of art rather than just the classical painting taught at fine arts universities. Founded by Tran Thi Huynh Nga, Blue Space Gallery functions as an alternative art space for young experimental practitioners. Many of the first generations of contemporary artists in Vietnam exhibited at Blue Space their non-traditional works, unconventional paintings, installations, performances, video arts and sound arts. Blue Space also provided a dialogue between local and overseas Vietnamese artists when the latter started to return to the country. This paper will focus on the open platform established at Blue Space and its followers in Ho Chi Minh City, where the local art context has emerged from the need for study new art forms to a dynamic scene of experimental art practice.'

**Objectives:** Since ICAS does not offer any financial compensation to its participants, Arts Network Asia's support will facilitate my productive contribution to the panel discussion at ICAS, which for the first time demonstrates the history of Vietnamese contemporary art in a comprehensive and interdisciplinary academic context centered around Asia. We hope to foster the knowledge of how Vietnamese art can be seen beyond exoticism and tourism, and rather as a form of radical and innovative progress.

During the period, Asia Art Archive will also organize the launch of Vietnamese art archive, including researches of Blue Space and Salon Natasha – the first two alternative spaces for contemporary arts. The panel members will spend one day in Hong Kong for the event. Detailed venue, date and time will be confirmed later.