

Curatorial Rationale  
Theatre Architecture: Hybridity in Southeast Asia

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The curation aims to unearth and illustrate Southeast Asia's intricate interplay between performance architecture and cultural hybridity. The exhibition deeply explores how scenography and theatre architectural design in Malaysia, India, Cambodia, and the Philippines intertwine with and reflect hybrid cultural identities. It utilises a blend of scenography, various spatial practices, and new media to dissect the historical and cultural bonds with architecture. The collections showcase how the theatre space in an architectural context, in its physical form and practical design, becomes a living, breathing embodiment of cultural narratives and artistic expressions. Thus, the exhibition brings to light the significance of preserving post-colonial architecture. It emphasises the need to understand and appreciate these spaces as architectural landmarks and vessels of historical and cultural resonance in the post-colonial era.

## **Introduction**

My study in interior design has consistently emphasised the dynamic interplay between space and buildings. This intersection is not merely a matter of aesthetics; it is deeply reflective of contemporary cultural dynamics. Architecture, serving both as a living and working domain, acts as a mirror to current societal values and norms. It transcends its physical form to become a historical and cultural artefact, capturing the essence of regional cultural identity. The influence on architectural space is multifaceted, deriving from various historical and natural factors. Yet, it is crucial to recognise that the formation of such spaces is inherently tied to political undercurrents. Economic, political, and religious forces play pivotal roles in shaping the spatial aesthetics and functionality of architecture. The collections within our study will delve into architectural designs, particularly focusing on performance spaces. These spaces are crucibles where global and local aesthetics and functionalities converge, synthesising new methodologies and connections. This approach highlights the evolving nature of architecture as it hybridises elements from both global and regional contexts, offering fresh perspectives and interpretations in the realm of interior design.

Architecture is not just a visual experience but an experience of cultural identity through our senses. It is more than a physical structure; it's a dynamic and vibrant space. The intricate weaving of a nation's history, culture, and societal norms into both the external and internal designs of its buildings turns architecture into a living manifestation of culture. Theatre, as a bastion of public space, epitomises this concept. It is not just about providing a seat but ensuring an immersive experience where comfort, sight-lines, acoustics, and

other sensory needs are optimally met.<sup>1</sup> Together, playing a pivotal role in defining the space as a hub of cultural exchange and artistic expression.

This exhibition is deeply inspired by my personal experiences in Macau. The city's character reveals itself in the tranquility of its streets juxtaposed against the luminous allure of its hotels. Venturing beyond the bustling commercial thoroughfares, one discovers

the residential areas where narrow, winding roads ascend in harmony with the terrain. Quintessential Portuguese street signs, with blue lettering set against a white backdrop, mark the entrances to these alleys, hinting at the city's cultural tapestry. Having lived and grown up in Macau, I've been continually intrigued by the architectural manifestations of its hybrid culture. Macau's long history and deep cultural heritage are its most precious assets, making it a unique city in the country with its mix of Chinese and Western cultures. The streets of Macau showcase this blend beautifully—Western architectural styles merge seamlessly with ancient Chinese structures. From the hues of the facades to the intricate details of exterior designs, each element reflects the government's commitment to preserving the historical and cultural landscape.<sup>2</sup> This careful preservation effort highlights the symbolic fusion of Eastern and Western influences that define Macau's unique identity.



[Fig.1] Street View of Old Taipa Village in Macau.  
Photograph

### Hybridity in South Asian Identity: Architecture and Theatre

Architectural expressions, techniques, and decorative contents can reveal a nation's cultural character, thinking pattern, and attitude. Social awareness, economic patterns, social organisation, resources, regimes, and physical factors such as weather and

<sup>1</sup> Landrum, Lisa, and Sam Ridgway. *Theatres of Architectural Imagination*. Taylor & Francis, 2023. p.134

<sup>2</sup> Wai-man Lam. "Promoting Hybridity: The Politics of the New Macau Identity." *The China Quarterly*, no. 203 (2010) p. 658.

materials all influence the architect's size, shape, location, and architectural structure. Cultural patterns are the fundamental factors influencing the way of thinking, behaviour, value concepts, and worldviews among nations. The term hybridity was a critical concept in post-colonialism that originated in biology and was later applied to linguistics and race theory in the nineteenth century.

The engagement with modernism began through the Art Deco movement in the 1920s, and modernity brushes the indigenous of the colonised nations. Post-colonialism assembled the complications of the "West" and the "Others" as architectural hybridity touched the indigenous populations of the colonised countries after World War II.<sup>3</sup> The concept of modernity originated in the West and has subsequently propagated throughout the world. As a result, liberalisation significantly impacts the culture, society and political rise of nation-states. The article "Hybrid Modernities and Tropical Architecture in Southeast Asia", published in 2003 by Chang Jiat Hwee, investigated the balance between modernity and tradition through post-colonial theory and manifested the "national identity" debate in architecture.<sup>4</sup> The article suggests the cross-cultural engagement of European modernism and mainland culture resulted in the dominance of colonisation of the West. The promotion of traditional and contemporary architectural design was proposed from a European perspective to adapt India's decolonising culture and climatic peculiarities, as the elements of the tropics were regarded as the "otherness" and "perceived the tropics with ambivalence."<sup>5</sup> Correspondingly, Chang suggested that the contradictory aspects produce a "collage effect", forming new syncretic architectures where creating "out of the juxtaposition" with two unrelated things.<sup>4</sup> Chang explored the notion of hybridity and hybridisation in the concept of Homi Bhabha as "a form of translation between cultures, and it connotes an open-ended process."<sup>6</sup> Through exploring the perception of Homi Bhabha, hybridity reveals the ambivalence of colonial and Western understandings. The original dominant relationship continued in the form of commercial and marketing systems and organisational, ideological, and intellectual institutions.

As a performing arts building, theatre is often used as a "container" for performing arts. It is a unique cultural symbol of a city, providing residents with space for artistic experience while presenting its extraordinary temperament and style to the outside world.

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<sup>3</sup> Mathur, S. Charles and Ray Eames in India. *Art Journal*, 70:1 (2011), p.35.

<sup>4</sup> Mathur. Charles and Ray Eames in India. p.36.

<sup>5</sup> Jiat Hwee Chang. Hybrid modernities and tropical architecture in Southeast Asia. *The DOCOMOMO Journal* (2003) pp. 76.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.7.

Performances within the building have influenced the theatre design as they are both the scene for dialogue and social exchange. Many Southeast Asia theatres formed an intersection of tradition and modernity. With the boost of urban hybrid theatre in the early twentieth century, theatres in Southeast Asia have played an essential role in preserving the culture's identity and self-determination of their country.<sup>7</sup> However, the colonialism influenced by World War II and the Cold War brought cultural diversity, which changed the forms of traditional theatre, causing the theatre in "[a] danger of marginalisation within their own cultures by rapid social change."<sup>8</sup> Performances previously performing to the public in the outdoor were transited to an indoor environment which took place in a "semi-permanent structures"<sup>9</sup> Though traditional theatre has been subside, government have began to promote and protect the national heritage. Conventional music, dancing, and narrative performances are being incorporated as sources in contemporary theatre. Unlike traditional theatre with its refined style and rules, the hybrid theatre offered novelty and divested the idea of preservation. As a form of hybrid theatre, commercial theatre used Western stage technology as well as stories from movies and books to create a sense of appetite for novelty. After World War II, television led to theatre demolition, and theatres were seen as old-fashioned.<sup>10</sup> New theatres were integrated into multifunctional areas that included other facilities such as galleries, museums, shopping malls, etc. The independence of the colonised nation led to a new government that braced traditional theatre as a critique of contemporary theatre as they were perceived as foreign values.<sup>11</sup> Postmodern theatre resulted from globalisation, which rejected the patriotism in modern theatre and the moral aspect in traditional theatre. Likewise, postcolonial theatre investigates the historical roots of the colonial period. It showcases the tension of political and cultural elements to bring "awareness about the causes and effects behind the current forms of exploitation."<sup>12</sup>

### **Postcolonial Architecture: National Identity and Heritage Preservation**

Manish Chalana and Ashima Krishna's book, *Heritage Conservation in Post-colonial India: Approaches and Challenges*, disclosed the political effect that has resulted in the destruction of India's contemporary heritage. The Hall of Nations is a piece of architecture in India that represents the significance of post-colonial history and commemorates the

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<sup>7</sup> Catherine Diamond, *Communities of Imagination : Contemporary Southeast Asian Theatres*. (Univ Of Hawai'i Press, 2016), p.1–2.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine, *Communities of Imagination : Contemporary Southeast Asian Theatres*. p.4.

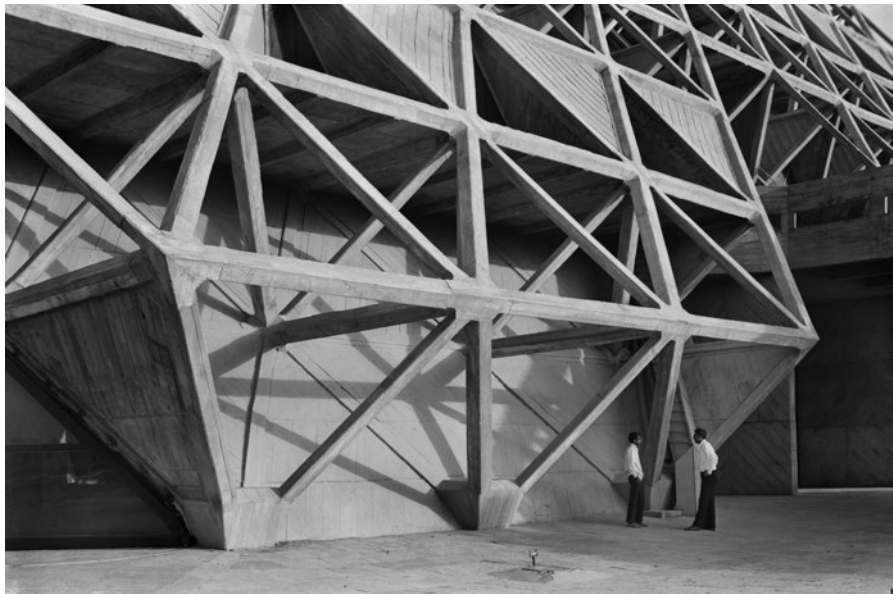
<sup>9</sup> Catherine Diamond, *Communities of Imagination : Contemporary Southeast Asian Theatres*. (Univ Of Hawai'i Press, 2016), p.6.

<sup>10</sup> Catherine Diamond, *Communities of Imagination : Contemporary Southeast Asian Theatres*. pp.8

<sup>11</sup> Catherine Diamond, *Communities of Imagination : Contemporary Southeast Asian Theatres*. pp.13

<sup>12</sup> Catherine Diamond, *Communities of Imagination : Contemporary Southeast Asian Theatres*. pp.13

25th year of India's independence in 1972. The Hall of Nations, designed by the architect Raj Rewal and structural engineer Mahendra Raj, was erected for the International Trade Fair at the Pragati Maidan Convention Centre. The exhibition hall was the world's first and largest architectural structure constructed by space frame structure-reinforced concrete.<sup>13</sup> After considering and investigating several alternatives, the design adopted the traditional



[Fig.2] Iconic Hall of Nations building in New Delhi, India. Photograph

Indian Jaali, which inspired it. Simultaneously, Rewal's Paris study laid the groundwork for lattice structures and triangular geometry. The pyramid with a double-layered space frame became the ceiling and walls of the display. Rewal considered steel, precast concrete, and in-situ concrete in terms of materiality. On the other hand, Steel trusses were replaced by in-situ concrete due to their limited and high-cost application. Furthermore, Rewal designed the structure with India's weather in mind since the concrete allowed the ceiling and walls to form one seamless surface of sun-breakers. The system mirrored India's intermediate technology and demonstrated the country's growth in its 25th year of independence, both locally and globally. However, dismantling the architecture in 2017 indicates the denial of its cultural significance.<sup>14</sup> The building was considered as not old enough nor unique enough: the Ancient Monuments, Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (AMASR Act) maintains that only buildings over a hundred years old are exempt from conservation laws in India.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, the demolition was planned for a 'world-class, iconic, state of the art' Integrated Exhibition and Convention Centre at Pragati Maidan.<sup>16</sup> As the book expresses, 'the flurry of activity in its last days... highlights the inadequate protection for modern heritage...[and] reveals the philosophical underpinnings of how a building's 'age' weighs heavily in these decisions,' the demolition reveals the existing divisions of Indian modern architecture built by famous foreign architects and indigenous

<sup>13</sup> Mehta, Vandini, Rohit Raj Mehndiratta, and Ariel Huber. "Hall of Nations and Halls of Industries, New Delhi, 1972." In *The Structure – Works of Mahendra Raj*, pp. 159

<sup>14</sup> Chalana, M. and Krishna, A. eds., 2020. *Heritage Conservation in Postcolonial India: Approaches and Challenges*. Routledge. pp.129

<sup>15</sup> Chalana and Krishna, *Heritage Conservation in Postcolonial India*, pp.128

<sup>16</sup> Mehta, Vandini, Mehndiratta, and Huber. "Hall of Nations and Halls of Industries", pp.154



architects [across] India.<sup>17</sup> The Halls of Nations was one of the Indian legacies of post-colonial architecture that showcased a blend of European and Indian cultures; however, the government's Pragati Maidan reconstruction plan demolished the rich past's identity and replaced it with a more 'international' design.

### **Contemporary Exhibition in Performing Design and Architecture**

The New York Museum of Modern Art focused on the legacy of Modernism in architectural productions in four South Asian countries: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The exhibition, *The Project of Independence: Architecture of Decolonisation in South Asia, 1947-1985*, has 200+ artefacts of photographs, models, and drawings that examine the role of modern architecture after the liberation from Britain.<sup>18</sup> The exhibition spotlights how architects and engineers embodied political and social aspirations and new national identities in post-independence South Asian countries, who utilised limited and even barren resources to build new cities, such as utilising exposed raw concrete as a material for the public buildings as a sense of forward-looking autonomy. Post-colonial structures in South Asia today are often denigrated as relics of poverty. Still, they embody the beautiful results and ambitious dreams of designers who combined Modernism with local traditions.

Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space (PQ), established in 1967, is the world's largest scenography and performance design event every four years.<sup>19</sup> The Performance space exhibition served as a platform to showcase different theatres as places of imagination and storytelling. In addition, the 11-day festival offers a platform for a diverse knowledge of theatres and performance spaces worldwide through scenic art, costume, lighting and sound design, performance space architecture, etc.

*“scenography is presented and experienced at PQ has coincided with an appreciation that scenography is not confined to theatre stages and does not merely respond to a play text, but that it can arise from urban, everyday spaces, engage with political realities and provide a means of exploring individual and social identities.”<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>17</sup> Chalana and Krishna, *Heritage Conservation in Postcolonial India*, pp.128

<sup>18</sup> Suleman Anaya, "PIN-up | MOMA'S DEEP DIVE in the ARCHITECTURE of POST-COLONIAL NATION BUILDING," PIN-UP | MOMA'S DEEP DIVE IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF POST-COLONIAL NATION BUILDING, n.d., <https://www.pinupmagazine.org/articles/moma-the-project-of-independence>.

<sup>19</sup> "Call for Submissions: Our Theatre of the World Performance Space Architecture Exhibition" 29 Mar 2018. ArchDaily. Accessed 1 Dec 2023.

<sup>20</sup> Jane Collins and Andrew Nisbet, *Theatre and Performance Design* (Routledge, 2012).

This year's PQ, primarily hosted at Holešovice Market, showcases over 300 artworks from more than 100 countries.<sup>21</sup> The venue's distinctive, isolated halls distinctly separate the two main exhibitions: the Exhibition of Countries and Regions, and the Student Exhibition. The 2023 PQ, themed 'RARE,' offers artists and designers a platform to display their interpretations of global theatre in a post-pandemic world.<sup>22</sup> These exhibitions are not only visually engaging but also interactive, inviting visitor participation. Particularly noteworthy is the Student Exhibition, uniquely situated in an open-air section of the market. The first exhibition, *Market On Wheel*, shows PQ's varied displacement of artworks. This exhibition cleverly utilises the concept of Prague's prevalent car usage, repurposing electric utility vehicles to install models of the old slaughterhouses of Holešovice Market.<sup>23</sup> This approach not only showcases the art but also promotes the event in an innovative manner. Another exhibit drawing significant attention is *HUNGARY/ WINTERREISE. BOX*, inspired by the Schubert-Müller's 'Winterreise' performance at the Örkény, this installation allows audiences to delve into the protagonist's perspective. Featuring a video installation within a box where the performer enacts the role, it powerfully conveys the protagonist's sense of isolation in a doorless room, symbolising profound loneliness. Each exhibition at PQ 2023, from the conceptual 'Market On Wheel' to the emotionally resonant 'Winterreise Box,' offers unique insights into the world of post-pandemic theatre, emphasising both artistic innovation and thematic depth.



[Fig.3] The Project of Independence Architectures of Decolonisation in South Asia, 1947–1985. Photograph



[Fig.4] HUNGARY /WINTERREISE.BOX. Photograph

<sup>21</sup> Jane Collins and Andrew Nisbet, *Theatre and Performance Design*

<sup>22</sup> "PQ - Prague Quadrennial," pq.cz <<https://pq.cz/pq-2023-info/location-of-pq-2023/>> [accessed 1 December, 2023]

<sup>23</sup> "PQ - Prague Quadrennial," pq.cz [accessed 1 December, 2023]

Through analysing and examining the book "Exhibition Design: An Introduction" by Philip Hughes, Hughes suggests that the exhibition becomes an experiment - an exploration and experimentation with infinite possibilities for change. This idea grows from the collection itself as a work of art. In the book, Hughes emphasises the importance of narrative in exhibition design in which consideration on how your architecture exhibition can tell a story about the evolution, impact, or cultural significance of particular architectural styles or movements. Young visitors pay "less attention to traditional advertising and marketing, and increasingly inhabit a parallel digital community."<sup>24</sup> Institutions are seeking new developments for dialogue and virtual habits; moreover, interaction is becoming more prominent. However, the digital exhibition has not replaced physical experiences and encourages visitors to visit the "real" exhibitions.

### **Exhibition Site**

The upcoming exhibition is set to unfold at The Godown Art Centre in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Originally serving as a warehouse and cabaret dance hall, this venue has been transformed into a captivating art space. A modern extension by Singaporean firm Linghao Architects has introduced two distinct areas: The Main Hall and a semi-open-air structure.<sup>25</sup> The Main Hall, once a traditional 'Gudang' (warehouse), retains its original red-brick walls from its heritage past, now juxtaposed with a contemporary, silver metal-panelled facade. The semi-open-air section, in contrast, welcomes natural breezes, creating an airy and inviting atmosphere. The Godown Art Centre has already established itself as a vibrant venue for installation art and video exhibitions. It has also become a favored spot for artists from Malaysia and Singapore to conduct workshops and host pop-up markets.<sup>26</sup> The highlight of the venue, 'Theatre Architecture: Hybridity in Southeast Asia,' will be strategically divided into three distinct sections, each dedicated to India, the Philippines, and Cambodia. This exhibition, through immersive video and sound installations, invites audiences to interact and engage with the diverse cultures of Southeast Asia. It promises a multi-sensory experience, appealing to sight, touch, and hearing, thus offering a comprehensive and engaging journey through the region's architectural innovations.

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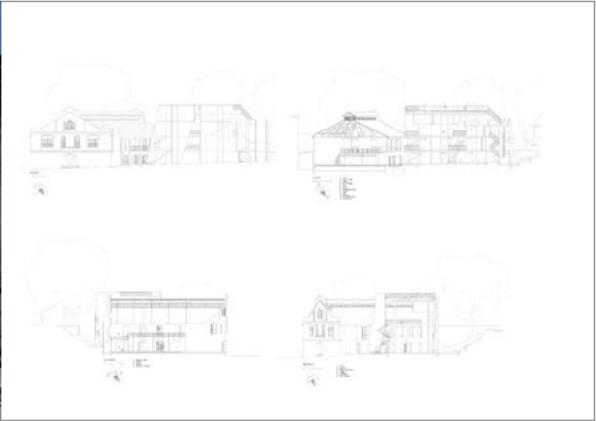
<sup>24</sup> Philip Hughes, *Exhibition Design* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2015), pp. 18.

<sup>25</sup> "The Godown KL | Art Centre | Kuala Lumpur," The Godown KL, n.d., <<https://www.thegodown.com.my/>> [accessed 13 December, 2023]

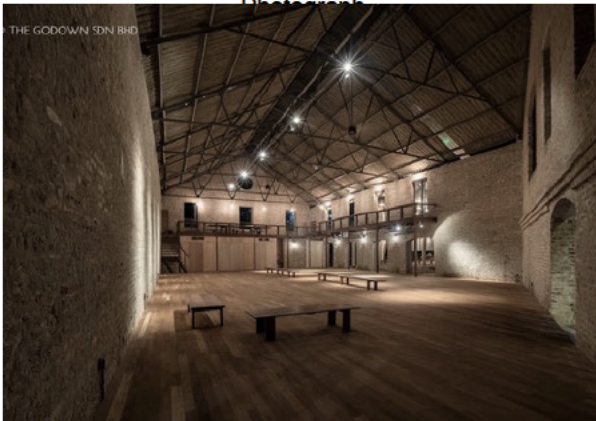
<sup>26</sup> "The Godown KL | Art Centre | Kuala Lumpur," The Godown KL, n.d. [accessed 13 December, 2023]



[Fig.5] Front View of Main Hall and AiR Building.



[Fig.6] Main Hall and AiR Building. Elevation Plan



[Fig.7] Main Hall. Photograph



[Fig.8] Second Floor of the AiR Building. Photograph

## Multiculture in Malaysia

The exhibition begins in the main hall, narrating Malaysia's journey into hybridity during the postcolonial period. Profoundly shaped by political forces, Malaysian theatre actively delves into cultural and identity themes. Despite its significant role, it often remains on the periphery of media and public attention. The nation's rich tapestry of cultures, comprising Malays (67.4%), Chinese (24.6%), Indians (7.3%), and other indigenous or Eurasian groups (0.7%), is mirrored in its theatre.<sup>27</sup> This sector showcases a blend of modern and traditional plays in Malay, Chinese, and English, highlighting local stories and performed at notable venues such as Istana Budaya, Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (KLPAAC), and Damansara Performing Arts Centre.<sup>28</sup>

The first exhibit is the National Theatre of Kuala Lumpur, Istana Budaya, constructed between 1995 and 1999 by the renowned Malaysian architect Muhammad Kamar Ya'akub before Malaysia's 1963 independence. Its design, resembling a traditional Malay house and symbolically shaped like a betel leaf, often used in Malaysian weddings and celebrations, reflects deep cultural roots. The building's layout, akin to a Malacca house, includes the lobby and foyer ('serambi'), the 'Rumah Ibu' (translating to 'house mother'), and the 'Rumah Dapur' (the kitchen or workspace), which doubles as a stage and rehearsal area.<sup>29</sup> The main stage, set in this space, showcases performances and workshops; moreover, theatre-like spaces that highlights the theatre's role in local culture.

## Exhibition Artefacts: India

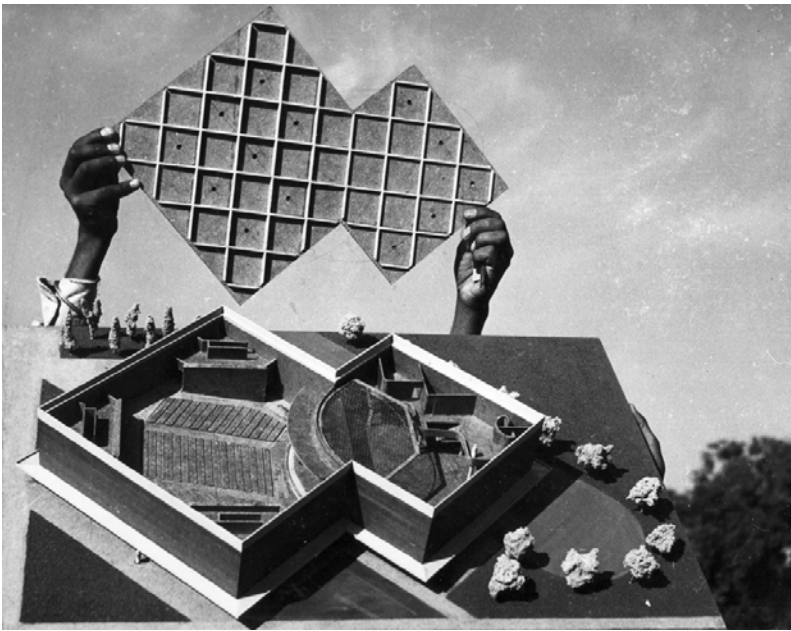
The journey within the exhibit seamlessly leads to the AiR (Artist-in-Residence) building. Visitors traverse a garden area, elegantly serving as a transitional bridge from the main hall to the AiR building. Not only serve as a physical movement, the passage symbolically connects Malaysia to other nations and ushers visitors into the gallery showcasing Indian artefacts. This section delves into the historical impact of hybridity on architectural styles during India's post-colonial period, particularly from the 1950s to the 1970s. A large number of cinemas were built in both the urban and rural areas of South India. Inspired by this vision, young Indian architects studied the work of the other great modern masters of Europe and America – producing new archetypes for an industrialising society and using the mythic overlays of rationality and functionalism to generate imaginative new forms. The

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<sup>27</sup> 27 Charlene Rajendran and C.J.W.-L. Wee, "The Theatre of Krishen Jit: The Politics of Staging Difference in Multicultural Malaysia," *TDR/The Drama Review* 51, no. 2 (2007): p. 12

<sup>28</sup> Charlene Rajendran and C.J.W.-L. Wee, "The Theatre of Krishen Jit" p. 14

<sup>29</sup> Charlene Rajendran and C.J.W.-L. Wee, "The Theatre of Krishen Jit" p. 15



[Fig.9] Prakash, Aditya. Tagore Theatre. Chandigarh, 1961

second architecture being displayed in first floor will be the Tagore Theatre. Tagore Theatre, located in Chandigarh's Sector 18, was designed by architect Aditya Prakash. Aditya Prakash was part of the Chandigarh Capital Project team led by Le Corbusier and was also the principal of the Chandigarh College of Architecture.<sup>30</sup> The theatre was constructed in 1961 to celebrate Rabindranath

Tagore's birth Centenary and was given the vision for a new beginning of "experiment, explorations, [and] expressions as India's first modern city."<sup>31</sup> Through Tagore Theatre and Jawahar Kala Kendra, the exhibition will display how postcolonial modernism has significantly influenced the absence of India's national identity and how its cultural heritage is reformed through the hybridity of modernism and tradition.

The buildings deliver an unconventional mix of local building styles and Western influences. The theatre was based on a Le Corbusier-inspired "lexicon of cubism", evident in the exterior of the architecture with a blank, brick-walled, cuboidal structure.<sup>32</sup> The building's brick exterior had almost no windows, except those located along the first level below a canopy that wrapped the theatre.<sup>33</sup> The architecture resulted in satisfactory sound distribution and reverberation times. The theatre has a 600-seat theatre comprised of two square-shaped volumes, turned on their axis to overlap at their corners.<sup>34</sup> The interior design of the theatre, including the original yellow and red tapestries and the processional routes entering the theatre, reflects traditional Indian aesthetics. The earthen pitchers, embedded in bituminised mud plaster, form a partition in the rear corner of the theatre, serving as resonant absorbers for low-frequency sound absorption. In addition, the roof is

<sup>30</sup> Ritu Bhatt. "Indianizing Indian Architecture: A Postmodern Tradition." *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 13, no. 1, 2001, pp. 43

<sup>31</sup> Ritu Bhatt. "Indianizing Indian Architecture: A Postmodern Tradition." pp. 43

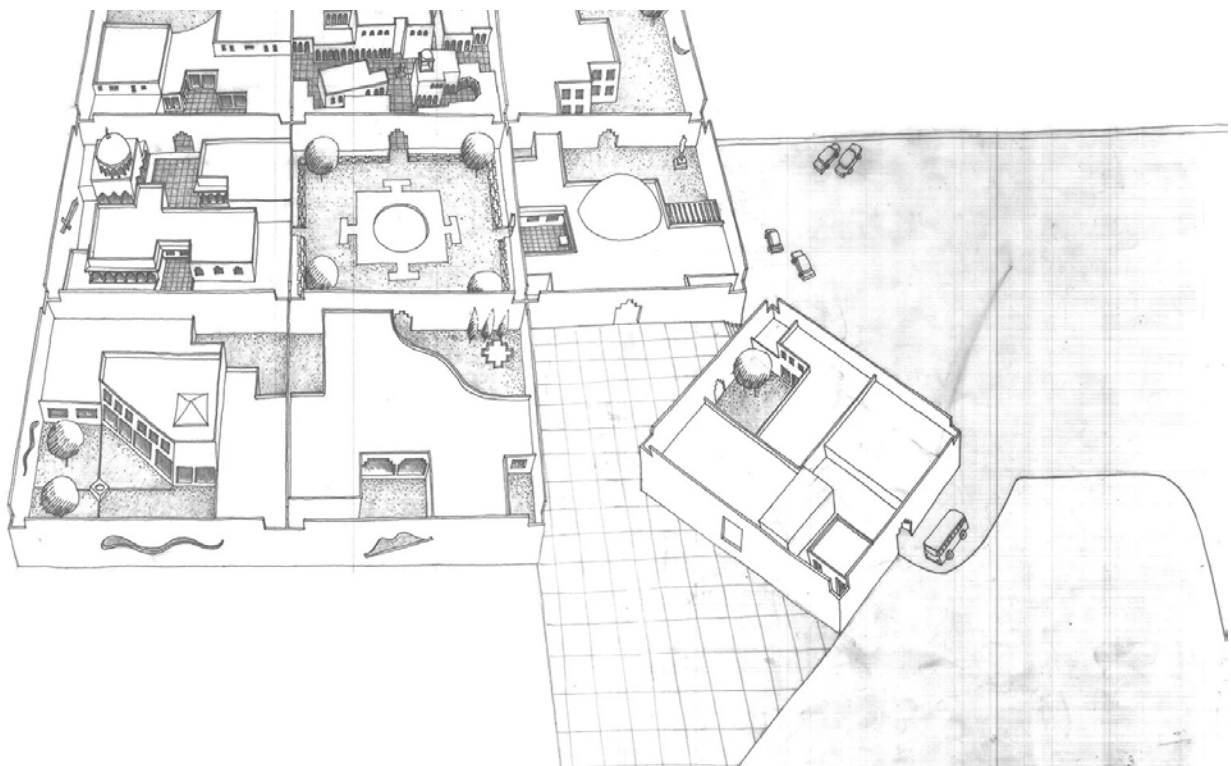
<sup>32</sup> Ritu Bhatt. "Indianizing Indian Architecture: A Postmodern Tradition." pp. 45

<sup>33</sup> Ritu Bhatt. "Indianizing Indian Architecture: A Postmodern Tradition." pp. 46

<sup>34</sup> Susan N. Johnson-Roehr. "Centering the *Chārbāgh*: The Mughal Garden as Design Module for the Jaipur City Plan." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 72, no. 1, 2013, pp. 35

composed of a concrete slab supported over a trussed framework as it is exposed in the interior for better sound diffusion. However, the interior had been redesigned while only the exterior was kept.

Jawahar Kala Kendra (JKK) would be the third artefact displayed in the same exhibition room. Jawahar Kala Kendra is an art centre in Jaipur designed by Charles Correa. Charles Correa was an Indian-born architect. His experiences and education in the West influenced him by the Western orientation that was regarded worldwide and as a universal design. JKK was created to form a flexible space to hold galleries, theatres, and archives centred on the myth of ancient Hindu-Vedic and Jaipur's city planning in 1728.<sup>35</sup> The original city plan of Jaipur was drawn up by the Maharaja, a scholar, mathematician, and astronomer, Jai Singh the Second, which featured nine squares, leaving the central square vacant. Inspired by the Vedic times, which were characterised by the world of non-manifest buildings generated by magic diagrams called *vastu-purusha-mandalas*, JKK mimics the plan of Jaipur by designing nine squares representing nine planets.<sup>36</sup>



[Fig.10] Jawahar Kala Kendra | Charles Correa Associates. Floor Plan

<sup>35</sup> Susan N. Johnson-Roehr. 'Centering the *Chārbāgh*: The Mughal Garden as Design Module for the Jaipur City Plan.' p. 29

<sup>36</sup> Susan N. Johnson-Roehr. 'Centering the *Chārbāgh*: The Mughal Garden as Design Module for the Jaipur City Plan.' p. 30

Correa's work exemplifies a blend of local and modern architectural elements, as he emphasises existing vernacular resources and considers climate as a crucial driver during the design process. The centre's design features innovative architectural elements, such as "open-to-sky" spaces and humane scale, characteristic of Correa's approach to blending indoor and outdoor spaces in a modern context.<sup>37</sup> The fusion of modern European typology with South Asian traditional traditions in modern dwellings resulted in an 'international' design: Charles Correa's considerable experimentation and principles created in his format encouraged conventional and contemporary thought; moreover, it produced social structures that idealised equality open space for everybody, empowering migrant labourers who had previously been impoverished.

### **Exhibition Artefacts: Cambodia**

The second floor of the AiR building showcases Cambodian architecture, a testament to the nation's rich heritage. Cambodian architecture, deeply influenced by Indian cosmological concepts and a preference for regular and classical forms, reflects the country's rich architectural heritage. This heritage is not limited to the grandeur of Angkor or traditional timber temples but also extends to modern buildings from the 1950s and 60s, known as the New Khmer Architecture.<sup>38</sup> This style marked a new architectural identity for Cambodia in the early postcolonial era. Following Cambodia's independence from France in 1953, the country's architectural landscape underwent significant changes. Under King Norodom Sihanouk and his political party, "Sangkum Reastr Niyum," a cultural renaissance in local arts and literature occurred.<sup>39</sup> This period saw the construction of new housing complexes, cultural and art centres, industrial plants, and transportation infrastructures across the nation. These architectural developments mirrored the modern Khmer society, where modernist philosophies, prevalent in international design post-World War II, dominated. However, the modern buildings constructed during this period predominantly showcased the Art Deco style.<sup>40</sup> The late 1950s to the end of the 1960s witnessed the emergence of 'New Khmer Architecture,' a style infusing a nostalgic recall of traditional Cambodian elements. Characterised using concrete materials, this architectural form included visual and structural references to historic Cambodian architecture, such as

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<sup>37</sup> Susan N. Johnson-Roehr. 'Centering the *Chārbaḡh*: The Mughal Garden as Design Module for the Jaipur City Plan.' p. 30

<sup>38</sup> Pen Sereypagna, "New Khmer Architecture: Modern Architecture Movement in Cambodia between 1953 and 1970," *Docomomo Journal* < <https://doi.org/10.52200/57.A.UHKJCPEU> > [accessed 8 January, 2024].

<sup>39</sup> Pen Sereypagna, "New Khmer Architecture: Modern Architecture Movement in Cambodia between 1953 and 1970" [accessed 8 January, 2024].

<sup>40</sup> Pen Sereypagna, "New Khmer Architecture: Modern Architecture Movement in Cambodia between 1953 and 1970" [accessed 8 January, 2024].





[Fig.11] Vann Molyvann, Chaktomuk Conference Hall, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, View from the front of the Hall along the Preah Sisowath Quay. Photograph

the elevation of buildings on stilts and adaptations to the tropical climate. The architecture included the utilisation of natural airflow and sunlight, along with the sparing use of ornamentation inspired by Angkorean temple decorations.<sup>41</sup>

The fourth architecture, Chaktomuk Theatre, also known as 'La Salle de Conference Chaktomuk,' is a distinguished work of Cambodian architect Vann Molyvann from the 1960s.<sup>42</sup> This structure is a prominent example of the New Khmer Architecture movement, which skillfully blends traditional Khmer elements with modern architectural principles. This movement, mirroring the Western modernist trend, emphasised functionalism and minimalism, moving away from extravagant ornamentations.<sup>43</sup> In the Chaktomuk Theatre, clean geometric shapes and lines are harmoniously combined with reinterpretations of traditional Cambodian architectural elements like

building silhouettes, motifs, and bach. The theatre's unique fan-shaped structure, visible in its façade, is a hallmark of New Khmer Architecture.<sup>44</sup> This design not only reflects the aesthetic of the palm tree, an essential cultural symbol in Cambodia but also incorporates traditional Khmer architectural features such as pointy roof spires and triangular pediments.<sup>45</sup> The ground-level semi-open space further illustrates a blend of traditional and modern design. While rooted in tradition, the theatre utilises modern building materials and technologies. This fusion allows the Chaktomuk Theatre to fulfil contemporary needs while connecting deeply to Cambodian heritage. Another significant work of Vann Molyvann is the National Theatre, which was completed in 1968.<sup>46</sup> This structure also

<sup>41</sup> "The Movement," The Vann Molyvann Project <<https://www.vannmolyvannproject.org/the-movement>> [accessed 4 January, 2024].

<sup>42</sup> Pen Sereypagna, "New Khmer Architecture: Modern Architecture Movement in Cambodia between 1953 and 1970" [accessed 8 January, 2024].

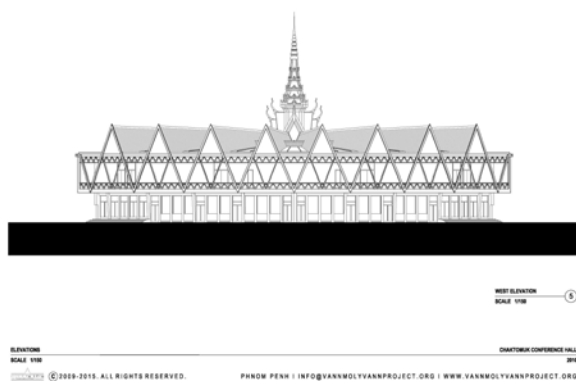
<sup>43</sup> New Khmer Architecture <<https://www.kambujaya.com/insights/new-khmer-architecture>> [accessed 8 January, 2024].

<sup>44</sup> "The Movement," The Vann Molyvann Project.

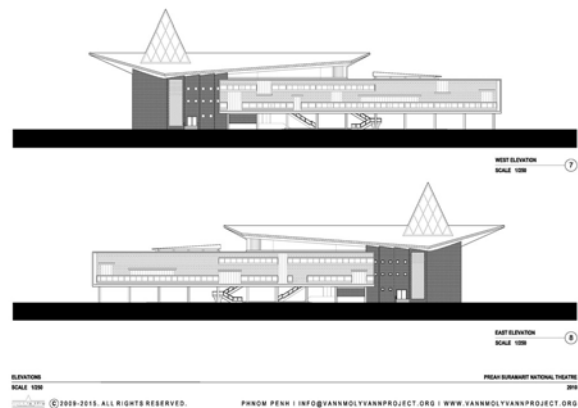
<sup>45</sup> New Khmer Architecture [accessed 8 January, 2024].

<sup>46</sup> New Khmer Architecture [accessed 8 January, 2024].

exemplifies New Khmer Architecture, echoing the design philosophy of the Chaktomuk Theatre. The National Theatre's hexagonal auditorium was ingeniously designed to ensure audience proximity to the stage, a crucial feature considering the subtle movements characteristic of Khmer ballet. These architectural styles symbolize a new, modern, and independent Cambodia.



[Fig.12] Chaktomuk Conference Hall. Elevation Drawing



[Fig.13] Preah Suramarit National Theatre. Elevation Drawing

### **Exhibition Artefacts: Philippines**

The third floor of the AiR building hosts the last collections of the exhibition that showcases the Philippines' architectural evolution. Urban planning in the Philippines during the first half of the twentieth century was a significant hallmark of the American colonial period. The renowned architect Daniel Burnham, famed for his designs of Washington DC, Chicago, and San Francisco, was commissioned in 1905 to redesign Manila, the capital city.<sup>47</sup> Burnham's influence paved the way for William Parsons, the chief consulting architect of the Philippine Bureau of Public Works, who was instrumental in constructing numerous new architectural structures across the country.<sup>48</sup> Parsons' designs were deeply rooted in the Spanish-Philippine tradition, yet they uniquely incorporated elements of the Greco-Roman model.<sup>49</sup> This innovative blend led to the creation of a distinctive architectural style that amalgamated Spanish and Oriental motifs with modern 'industrial' elements, thereby forging an architecture that was both novel and suitably adapted to the tropical climate of

<sup>47</sup> Edson Cabalfin, 'Vernacularization in Philippine Modern Architecture (Part 1)' BluPrint

<sup>48</sup> Thomas S. Hines, 'The Imperial Façade: Daniel H. Burnham and American Architectural Planning in the Philippines,' in *Pacific Historical Review* 41, no. 1 (1972), pp. 33–53

<sup>49</sup> Thomas S. Hines, 'The Imperial Façade' p. 36

the Philippines.<sup>50</sup> The architectural legacy of this period was characterised by its diversity and adaptability. Drawing inspiration from Spanish examples and the elegant simplicity inherent in the rural Philippine vernacular, the American-influenced buildings established during this time continued to serve as architectural benchmarks in the Philippines, both before and after World War II. These structures not only reflected the colonial influences of the time but also set a precedent for future architectural designs in the region.

After gaining independence from the United States in 1946, the Philippines established the National Centennial Commission (NCC), a symbol of burgeoning nationalism.<sup>51</sup> This commission, alongside the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) in Manila, played pivotal roles in cultivating a national identity enriched by arts and culture. The CCP, in particular, stood out as a beacon of this movement. Notably, the CCP's architecture reflects the Philippines' post-independence identity. Designed by the esteemed Filipino architect Leandro V. Locsin, the CCP was envisioned as a cultural hub, symbolising the emerging national consciousness and fostering 'friendly ties between the Philippines and the United States'.<sup>52</sup> However, financial disagreements over the project led to alterations in the original plans, which initially included the U.S. Cultural Center. Under the patronage of Imelda Romualdez Marcos, the First Lady of the Philippines, the CCP aimed to showcase Filipino artistic heritage, providing a versatile venue for various art forms, from visual and literary to performance arts. Yet, the substantial expenditure on its construction sparked



[Fig.14] Front View of Tanghalang Pambansa, Photograph

<sup>50</sup> Thomas S. Hines, 'The Imperial Façade' p. 37

<sup>51</sup> Ana P. Labrador, 'The Project of Nationalism: Celebrating the Centenary in Philippines Contemporary Art,' *Humanities Research 2* (2009)

<sup>52</sup> Christi-Anne Castro, 'Consolidating a National Present: The Cultural Center of the Philippines', in *Musical Renderings of the Philippine Nation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.105–36

controversy, particularly against the backdrop of the Philippines' economic slowdown in the 1960s.<sup>53</sup>

The Tanghalang Pambansa, a cornerstone of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), opened on September 8, 1969.<sup>54</sup> Its inauguration, marked with a traditional blessing to ward off evil spirits, signified a new era in Filipino cultural expression. Embodying brutalist architecture prominent in the mid-20th century, the centre's design seamlessly integrates traditional Filipino motifs and materials, reflecting a deep respect for the country's heritage.<sup>55</sup> Designed for versatility, the complex accommodates a wide array of cultural performances, ranging from traditional Filipino plays and dances to Western-style theatre and concerts.<sup>56</sup> This architectural marvel not only represents the nation's artistic ambitions but also blends the richness of Filipino heritage with a progressive vision for the arts. One of the centre's most distinctive features is its open-air theatre, ingeniously leveraging the Philippines' tropical climate to forge a unique performance space.<sup>57</sup> This venue epitomises the harmony between architecture, performance, and the natural environment, facilitated by strategic design elements that enhance the interaction between performers, audiences, and their surroundings. The centre's design philosophy extends to its use of light and form, drawing from both vernacular and Spanish styles.<sup>58</sup> Notably, the floating volume of the Tanghalang Pambansa is enlightened by indigenous multipurpose dwellings, particularly their distinctive roofing.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, the roof form of the National Arts Center in Laguna takes cues from Cordilleran architecture, especially the steep-roofed Ifugao fale, a one-room house prevalent in the Mountain Provinces.<sup>60</sup> This fusion of indigenous, vernacular architecture with modern design principles underscores the centre's role as a contemporary reinterpretation of the region's rich architectural legacy.

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<sup>53</sup> Castro, 'Consolidating a National Present: The Cultural Center of the Philippines', p.105–36

<sup>54</sup> Castro, 'Consolidating a National Present: The Cultural Center of the Philippines', p.105–36

<sup>55</sup> Castro, 'Consolidating a National Present: The Cultural Center of the Philippines', p.105–36

<sup>56</sup> Edson Cabalfin, 'Vernacularization in Philippine Modern Architecture (Part 1)'

<sup>57</sup> Edson Cabalfin, 'Vernacularization in Philippine Modern Architecture (Part 1)'

<sup>58</sup> Edson Cabalfin, 'Vernacularization in Philippine Modern Architecture (Part 1)'

<sup>59</sup> Gavin Shatkin, 'Colonial Capital, Modernist Capital, Global Capital: The Changing Political Symbolism of Urban Space in Metro Manila, the Philippines,' *Pacific Affairs* 78, no. 4 (2005), pp. 577–600

<sup>60</sup> Gavin Shatkin, 'Colonial Capital, Modernist Capital, Global Capital', p. 584



[Fig.15] National Arts Center in Laguna. *National. Arts Center*. Photograph

## Conclusion

The exhibition delves into how postcolonial modernism in India, Cambodia, and the Philippines catalysed a fusion of European and Indian cultures. Although the end of WWII marked the political cessation of imperialist rule in these colonies, the remnants of dominance persisted in economic, ideological, and intellectual domains. The advent of globalisation further diminished regional disparities, aided by the Internet's facilitation of cultural exchanges. This exhibit showcases architectural hybridity as a form of resistance against colonisation. It presents modernist architecture from the non-Western world as a distinct entity, diverging from Western norms in production, symbolism, and disciplinary essence. As noted in Homi Bhabha's theory, hybridity often leads to mimicry and ambivalence, creating hybrid identities that both reflect and challenge cultural norms. Bhabha critiques the concept of cultural 'purity,' suggesting a liminal 'in-between' space where identity is continuously negotiated.<sup>61</sup>

In this context, hybrid architecture is not just a postcolonial product; it's a testament to the ongoing integration and adaptation of diverse cultures. It epitomises the unipolarity of global civilisation while injecting new vitality into it. The exhibition prompts reflection on the importance of leveraging cultural strengths in architecture, encouraging a continuity that both preserves and innovates traditional heritage. The hybridity architecture highlighted in the exhibition showed the rebellion against colonisation through the modernist architecture developed in the non-Western world as something different from the West in every aspect of production, symbolism and disciplinary core.

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<sup>61</sup> Antony Easthope. "HOMI BHABHA, HYBRIDITY AND IDENTITY, OR DERRIDA VERSUS LACAN." *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)* 4, no. 1/2 (1998) p.145

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