





On the Line

New perspectives on craft in Southeast Asia

In December 2016 six art and design students from the Royal College of Art travelled from London to Southeast Asia.

There they teamed up with six local researchers to explore the lives and craft practices of women in villages in Vietnam, Thailand and Myanmar, and the markets for their work.

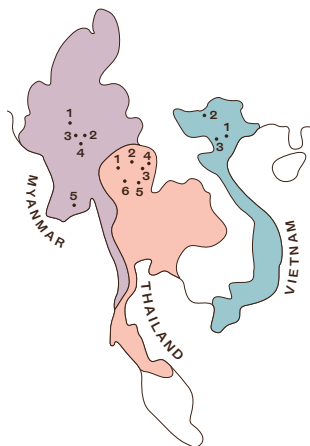
Their itineraries were planned by local partners in each country. The aim was to talk with the communities to document the current challenges and opportunities for development in their working lives.

This exhibition shows their findings in three interlinked areas: Craftsmanship, Community and Commerce.

The works shown have been collected on location by the twelve researchers alongside a specially commissioned film which captures key observations.

The title of the exhibition deliberately conveys an urgency of purpose. The cultures of Southeast Asia have been founded on exquisite craftsmanship for centuries, but globalisation demands adaptation. This can be fostered not only from within the communities but with participation from collaborators in the region and beyond.

Researchers and places visited



Myanmar

1. Mandalay / Amarapura
2. Taunggyi
3. Nyaung Shwe
4. Inle
5. Yangon



Sam Carvosso ←
MA Sculpture, RCA
Based in London, UK

Tin Maung Htoo / Mo Lwin →
Social enterprise expert
Based in Yangon, Myanmar



Sandra Sordini ←
MA Visual Communication, RCA
Based in London, UK

Ja Htoi Pan →
Anthropologist
Based in Myitkyina, Myanmar

Thailand

1. Chiang Mai
2. Phayao
3. Nan, Nan Province
4. Pua, Nan Province
5. Phrae
6. Lampang



Magali An Berthon
PhD History of Design, RCA
Based in London, UK



Peewara Jitsukumongkol ←
Social enterprise expert
Based in Bangkok, Thailand

Pathitta Nirunpornputta ↑
PhD Textiles, RCA
Based in London, UK

Methaporn Singhanan →
Historian and Textiles Curator, Bank of Thailand Museum, Northern Region Office
Based in Chiang Mai, Thailand

Vietnam

1. Hanoi
2. Sapa, Lao Cai
3. Mai Chau, Hoa Binh



Tenaya Steed ←
MA Visual Communication, RCA
Based in London, UK

Grace Crannis →
MA Information Experience Design, RCA



Based in London, UK

Nguyen Thi Thanh Huyen ←
Cultural researcher
Based in Hanoi, Vietnam

Thao Vu →
Textile artist and fashion designer
Based in Hanoi, Vietnam

Craftsmanship

**“The level of skill
and artistry is
incredibly high”**

Grace Crannis

MA Information Experience Design, RCA

The creation of Southeast Asian fabric and garments is undertaken by women in groups. In some villages, all the skilled processes, from growing seeds to finished dyed cloth, are practised in a time-consuming cycle. In others, a particular process or technique is the key to their livelihood. The exhibition demonstrates the traditions of hand making, stages of production and aesthetics of design in Vietnam, Myanmar and Thailand, through raw materials, craft objects and documentary photography.



Photo: Magali An Barthou

Tung (flags) inside a temple. Patterns are symbolic and specific to ethnic groups throughout Southeast Asia. Thailand, December 2016



Photo: Nic Shonfield

Community

**“Now I’ve actually been
to a lot of communities,
I begin to see a much
bigger picture”**

Peewara Jitsukummongkol
Social enterprise expert, Thailand

Communities come together through shared heritage, values and beliefs, family life and work. Sustainable futures are also shaped by environment and education. The exhibition reflects on these aspects and on the intricate groupings of Southeast Asian peoples via their artefacts, photographs and the dialogue between the researchers and communities about their lives and hopes.

Craftswomen from the White Thai, an ethnic minority group in Mai Chau,
boiling natural dye materials. Vietnam, December 2016

“It’s so difficult, because traditional means conservative”

Thao Vu

Textile artist and fashion designer, Vietnam

Southeast Asia is a region which is developing traditional products in competition with imported mass-produced goods. Questions of quality, new technologies, marketing outlets and innovative design are being addressed by networks of craftspeople, entrepreneurs, educational and philanthropic agencies. Examples in the exhibition include factory print fabrics imitating traditional woven designs and mass-produced alternatives to craft textiles, reflecting on the pressures and opportunities for the sector.



Photo: Sandra Sordini

Computer embroidery in Amarapura, a major centre of textile production in Myanmar.
Myanmar, December 2016

Manifesto

The practice of craft is global and contemporary. Everywhere it is undergoing assessment and development as part of social, cultural, educational and economic agendas.

At the end of their project, the 12 researchers set out 12 actions:

_____ Sustain the expression of human diversity and well-being through craft practice and cultural understanding

_____ Hear the voice of Southeast Asian ethnic minorities regarding regional socio-economic agendas

_____ Learn from local understanding of the environment to think about sustainability of natural resources and health and safety practices

_____ Establish women's equality with men in terms of workload and rates of pay

_____ Increase provision of education at all levels to enhance the potential of young people

_____ Elevate the status of craft by sustaining cultural heritage through museums and developing new methods of interpretation

_____ Coordinate international government and philanthropic initiatives in order to consistently improve community production

_____ Match craft skills with new product designs evolved within the communities in a way that is culturally sensitive

_____ Enable young urban entrepreneurs to engage with and value rural production

_____ Teach entrepreneurship, communication skills and technological knowhow in order to connect rural to urban, regional to global communities

_____ Foster fine craftsmanship in traditional products, interior design and innovative applications through global markets

_____ Develop research and practice collaborations amongst regional and international partners

**“Craft doesn’t mean going
back to pre-industrial
ways of life, it opens up
new possibilities for
a post-industrial age”**

Sandra Sordini
MA Visual Communication, RCA

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4 May – 17 June 2017

The Aram Gallery

110 Drury Lane

Covent Garden

London WC2B 5SG

Commissioner

British Council

Exhibition curator

Martina Margetts, Royal College of Art

Exhibition and graphic design

Mentsen

Exhibition partner

The Aram Gallery

Project partners

Royal College of Art, United Kingdom

Knowledge and Technology Centre for

Northern Thai Textile (Fai Gaem Mai)

at Chiang Mai University, Thailand

Department of Small Scale Industries

(SSID) at the Ministry of Agriculture,

Livestock and Irrigation, Myanmar

Vietnam Rural Industries Development

and Research Institute (VIRI), Vietnam

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Phyu Ei Thein and London Craft Week

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