

FEATURES

## TRIP REPORT: MA ARTS PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE STUDENTS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING AT THE S'ART URBAN ARTS FESTIVAL IN CAMBODIA



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Earlier this summer, a cohort of students and graduands from the [MA Arts Pedagogy and Practice programme](#) had the chance to give back and use their postgraduate research findings and pedagogy skills to enhance teaching in the arts in Battambang, Cambodia.

This is the fifth year that students from LASALLE have collaborated with [Phare Ponleu Selpak](#), a non-profit arts school that works with disadvantaged children and youth in Battambang. Phare's mission is to use the power of the arts as a tool for human development and social change. Founded in a refugee camp after the Khmer Rouge nearly wiped out traditional Cambodian arts, Phare Ponleu Selpak empowers the country's next generation of artists to preserve their cultural past while mapping out a new future for the arts in Cambodia.

The partnership began back in 2019 under then-Programme Leader Dr Edmund Chow. After a brief exploratory trip, he took his first cohort of postgraduate students to Battambang to give pedagogical training to Phare's art and music teachers as many of them had never received a formal education in arts pedagogy.

"We were impressed that our LASALLE students had learned so much from how Phare's teachers taught various traditional art forms," said Dr Chow. "We ended up sharing best practices with each other."



Dr Chow (front row, third from right) during the first study trip to Phare in 2019.

This year's trip was a significant one as it not only marked the resumption of LASALLE's partnership with Phare after a brief pandemic-induced hiatus, but was also timed to coincide with Phare's biennial [S'Art Urban Arts Festival](#). The festival's mission to encourage self-

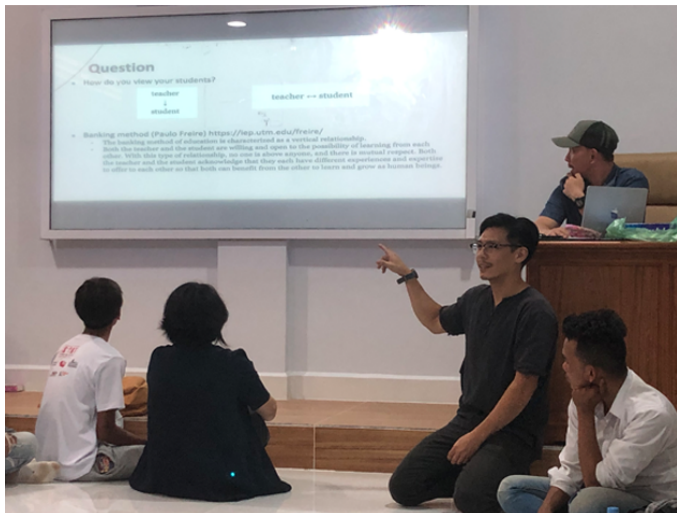


expression and community connections amongst the local population through a celebration of the urban arts such as murals, hip-hop, breakdancing and more fit perfectly with the aims of the study trip.

“The 2023 trip was aligned with the S’Art Urban Arts Festival so that our students could participate in community arts,” said Dr Chow. “That was something missing in the formal curriculum at the postgraduate level. On the previous trip, we had only made classroom observations and passively participated in some activities. But this year we decided to plunge directly into community arts, which is great!”

Four LASALLE students and graduands conducted their workshops in locations throughout the city of Battambang during the six-day S’Art Festival:

- Terence Lau hosted a session on pedagogical facilitation. Teachers from Phare’s Performing Arts School and Visual and Applied Arts School learned a number of pedagogical strategies for teaching the arts to their students at Phare Ponleu Selpak and to other participants at the festival.



(Left) Terence Lau and teachers from Phare. (Right) Pixie Tan walking students through the art of the zine.

- [Pixie Tan](#) presented on zine design. Students collected visual and sensory memories of the festival and then documented those memories into foldable booklets through drawing, painting, design and creative writing. The zines will help carry forward the art forms learned at the S’Art Festival into the day-to-day lives of the participants.
- [Mumtaz Maricar](#) conducted a workshop on blind automatic drawing which is about accessing trance states as a source of inspiration for visual artists. The workshop drew upon methodologies from [Mumtaz’s LASALLE thesis](#) completed just a month prior. Some of the graffiti and mural artists from the festival attended and found the techniques beneficial to

their practice.



(Left) Participants in Mumtaz Maricar’s automatic workshop entering a trance state for automatic drawing. (Right) Yeo Hui Qi going through colour blending with her workshop participants.

- [Yeo Hui Qi](#) presented on augmented reality art. Her workshop merged classical arts (such as colour blending with oil pastels) with modern technology so that students could see their artistic creations come to life on a smartphone screen. The workshop was aimed at younger students and taught them that art doesn’t have to just be analog and static, but it can also be digital, interactive and even fun.

Current LASALLE student Terence Lau found the trip to be an inspiration. “It was a very humbling and awe-inspiring experience seeing how much Phare Ponleu Selpak does for the children and everyone chipping in to help,” said Terence. “So many of their alumni are doing well and coming back to give back to the community in Battambang. It really shows how important an arts education is.”

During her workshop, graduand Mumtaz Maricar played a variety of binaural beats and asked participants to draw with their eyes closed. Students were hesitant at first but eventually opened up and drew with passion. “The energy and enthusiasm of the students from Phare made the trip truly memorable,” she said. “I really loved how open and willing everyone was to try new things and share their experiences with all of us. The atmosphere was charged with a creative energy every day and it was really special to see all of Battambang come together and be part of the street art festival.”

LASALLE students and graduands also had the opportunity to attend talks and sessions at the festival by UNESCO experts and by artists from around Cambodia and across Asia. In addition, they had the chance to connect with local artists in the community.

“One of my most special memories was when the Cambodian artist, [Khchao Touch](#) invited us to her studio,” said Mumtaz. “We shared our life and spiritual experiences as fellow artists and women, connecting and learning a lot from one another. She then took my fellow colleague Hui Qi and myself on a bike ride in a converted ice cream vendor freezer to a space she was setting up, and it was an utterly magical and unforgettable ride.”

Graduand Yeo Hui Qi was likewise moved by the visit to Khchao Touch’s studio. “We managed to understand more of Khchao Touch’s artworks and vision,” she said. “My takeaways are that we have to always make time for ourselves and love ourselves by providing a space to do things that we love.”

It was these sorts of exchanges and connections that Dr Chow wanted the MA Arts Pedagogy and Practice students to have during the trip.

“As an applied theatre practitioner, I wanted my students to consider the possibilities of extending their practice beyond the walls of a school to a larger community,” said Edmund. “This opportunity came at the right time.”

Current LASALLE student Pixie Tan found that the spirit of the trip could be summed up in community. “It was a privilege to be part of the S’Art Festival and see how creativity comes alive in the city,” she said. “Phare’s creative collaboration with regional NGOs and artists also helped me expand my understanding of the impact and possibilities of the arts and arts education.”



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Cert No.: EDU-1-1002

Validity: 01/10/2019 - 30/09/2023

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Registration No.: 199202950W Validity: 25/03/2023 - 24/03/2027

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