

AN INVITATION

# WE'RE IN THIS, TOGETHER

A JOINT EXHIBITION BY:  
GRACE SAMBOH  
BILL NGUYỄN

A JOINT EXHIBITION BY:  
JULIA SARISETIATI  
VICKY ĐỖ

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**Vicky Đỗ** (b. 1990) graduated from Texas Tech University, going on to complete an MFA in Creative Media at City University of Hong Kong. She has worked in Hong Kong as a researcher and an independent artist. She is a member of Floating Projects and Archive of the People Collective, Hong Kong. Her work focuses on the displacement of people, urban planning and archival practices. She now also works in Saigon as a curator at Chaosdowntown/Cháo, a small independent art space in the downtown neighborhood of the city.

**Julia Sarisetiati** (Sari) (b. 1981) is a part of ruangrupa (e. 2000, in Jakarta), an artist collective that now co-runs Gudskul—an informal educational platform for art practitioners. She herself studied photography and, as an artist, has participated in exhibitions at the Litmus Project, Seoul (2011); Element Art Space, Singapore (2012); Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta (2013); Jakarta Biennale, Indonesia (2013); Sapporo AIR, Japan (2014); National Gallery of Indonesia (2015); Howl Space, Taiwan (2015); Hacking Urban Reality Series, Copenhagen (2016); 11th Gwangju Biennale, Korea (2016); Mizuma Gallery, Singapore (2017). In 2017, she became a curator for the media art festival OK.Video, where she exhibited works on the theme of “pangan” (food), developing ideas into laboratory-based research projects to demonstrate and explore economic and social sustainability. Currently, as a curator, she is working towards “RETURNS: Migration Narratives in Southeast and East Asia” with the Goethe Institute.

**The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre** (**‘The Factory’**) is the first purpose-built space for contemporary art in Vietnam, established April 2016. As an independent private initiative, it creates and hosts interdisciplinary activities in order to introduce and expand knowledge of contemporary art and cultural trends, both past and present, in Vietnam. As a social enterprise, The Factory also offers a publicly accessible reading room of art-educational resource; workshop and co-working space; replete with café, bar and restaurant. All profit from the sale of art and business on-site supports the running costs of its Arts Centre. [www.factoryartscentre.com](http://www.factoryartscentre.com)

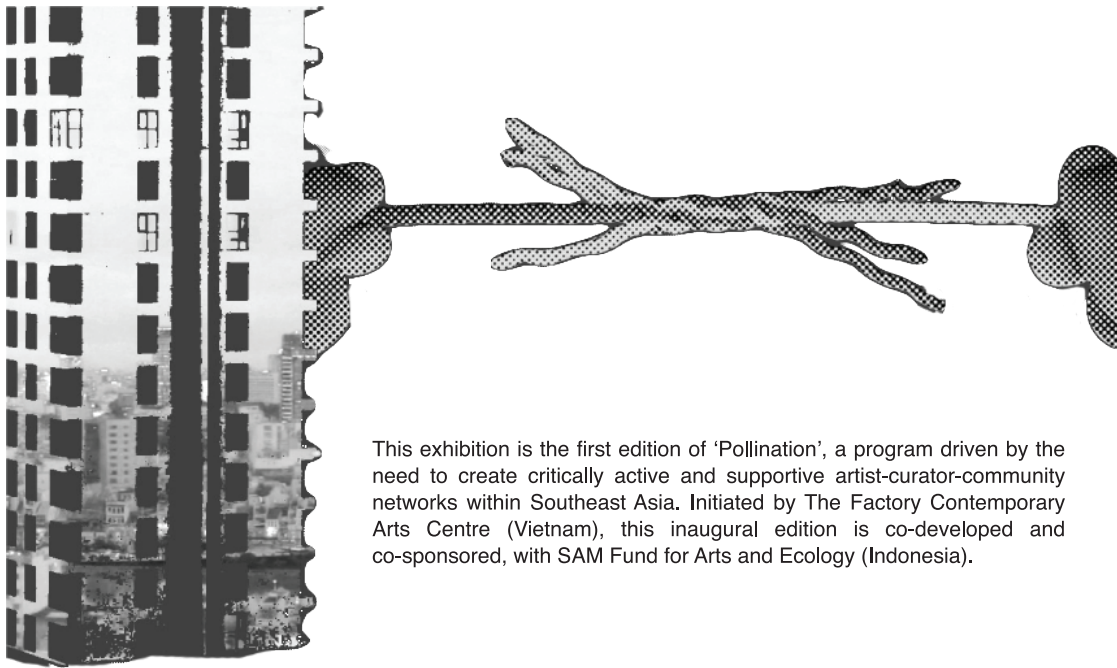
**Sidharta Aboejono Martoredjo (SAM) Fund for Art and Ecology** connects art and ecology restoration through critical creativity, and is managed by Rujak Center for Urban Studies. Rujak Center for Urban Studies (RCUS) is a think-act-tank founded in 2010 in Jakarta to assist the necessary transition process into an ecological age. RCUS wishes to work together with communities to generate innovative knowledge and practices to form sustainable cities and regions.

‘We’re in this, together’ is inspired by the Indonesian word “kita” – not easily translatable to English, but at times, it means “us” or “we”. Similarly, in the Vietnamese language there exists “chúng ta”. As inclusive words, both of them identify the speaker and listener(s) as part of the same group, reflecting a way of understanding that takes into consideration not only ourselves and others as individuals, but also the relationship in-between. This relationship acknowledges the commonalities (that bind us together); the differences (that break up that togetherness); and the need to continue to move forward/upward/away from that point of separation.

So, who is this “we” that is being referred? The participating artists, curators and organizing bodies? Our communities - in and outside the arts? Or the countries we represent? What are the entanglements we have to face when taking on the task of speaking, of ourselves and of others? What are our strategies in maneuvering and dealing with such problems? How can “we” also include you - our guest?

What does “this” mean? The space and context in which the exhibition takes place? Our respective areas of interest; the subject matters expressed through our work; or the crossroad (of similarities and differences) where we agree to meet and/or depart? Is the arrival of compromise and agreement, and the departure of debate and disagreement, our final desired outcome? How about the journey in-between, that of negotiation and possibility, of staying open and being imaginative? If “this” is here, how about what’s out there in real life, away from the space of the exhibition?

With vastly different backgrounds and experiences, how can we ever be “together”, really? And what are we doing “together”? Are we stuck together, or moving somewhere together? Reassuring (“We’re in this together - so it’s going to be OK!”) as well as speculative (“But how?”), the title of this exhibition acts not as



This exhibition is the first edition of ‘Pollination’, a program driven by the need to create critically active and supportive artist-curator-community networks within Southeast Asia. Initiated by The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre (Vietnam), this inaugural edition is co-developed and co-sponsored, with SAM Fund for Arts and Ecology (Indonesia).

**Bill Nguyễn** (b. 1988) is an artist-curator interested in researching and developing an alternative, locally-driven method and platform for curation in Vietnam. Currently Curatorial Assistant at The Factory, Bill is also the co-founder and co-curator of Manzi (Hanoi) and previously guest curator of Nhà Sàn Collective (Hanoi). Select recent projects include: ‘0395A.ĐC: A solo exhibition by Ly Hoàng Ly’, The Factory, Ho Chi Minh City (2017), ‘Skylines With Flying People 3’, Nhà Sàn Collective, Hanoi (2016); ‘Into Thin Air’, Manzi, Hanoi (2016). He is an alumnus of the 8th Berlin Biennial Young Curators Workshop, and the CuratorsLAB initiated by the Goethe Institut South East Asia.

**Grace Samboh** (b. 1984) is a curator living in between Yogyakarta and Medan, Indonesia. She questions (a little bit) too many things all at the same time and believes that every person needs at least three copies of themselves. In 2017, together with The Japan Foundation Asia Center, Mori Art Museum, and the National Art Center Tokyo, she curated “SUNSHOWER – Contemporary art from Southeast Asia 1980s to now”. Her recent curatorial projects are: A group show at Mizuma Gallery, Singapore, “Carte Blanche: Anxiety” (2017); A travelling museum that re-started a conversation on Indonesia’s recent democracy “Museum Tanpa Tanda Jasa (The Unsung Museum)” (2016-2018); A multiple way of exchange(s) “Banyak-banyak” (Many-many) within a platform of Gertrude Contemporary Art Space (Melbourne, 2014-2015) called The Independence Project; A year of artistic research “Tahun Tanah 2015” (The Earth Year) with Jatiwangi art Factory (Majalengka, West Java). With Hyphen, her partners in curiosity, she is unraveling data, fact and stories about Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia (Indonesia New Art Movement, 1975-1989). With Yogyakarta Biennale Foundation, she is taking care of the programing part of the “Equator Symposium” (2012-2022).

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a statement nor confirmation. We see this as an opportunity to reflect on our work, methodologies, roles and responsibilities; to further explore the possibilities of not having to arrive at a concluded point of meeting and agreement (in the form of an exhibition); and to continuously be in a state of productive imagination, discussion and inclusion, not just amongst ourselves, but most importantly, with you.

## Why an invitation?

Exhibition spaces can be spaces for grey matters to evolve; for differing, alternative points of view to be engaged; and for us to veer away from the responsibilities of having to represent certainty, or invent solutions to real-life problems. Rather, these spaces allow the unknown, and the imaginations of the in-between, to take hold. They also have inhabitants – such as artists, curators, audiences, and stakeholders - who occupy them regularly or for sudden yet prolonged periods of time. This temporal aspect (for an exhibition is rarely finite) is an important one, for it is during this moment when real-time and real-space is suspended, we - the organizers and the guests - take the opportunity to meet and imagine together. Here at this junction, debate, friction, and even failure - in other words, undesired disturbances - also occur. How do we deal with such issues? This is where the imaginative part comes in.

To make an exhibition together is to design a particular experience of meetings and junctions; an experience that may sharpen our intuitions, and that may let our imaginations be brought back and become useful in the pragmatic, anxious reality that we all must live. To work collaboratively is an act based on trust, initially shared by a number of inhabitants, but eventually will take on a life of its own, opening up, inviting others to participate. And so, we humbly extend our invitation to you, to wander and wonder, to explore and expand, to imagine - with us - the shapes of things to come and the journeys that lie ahead.

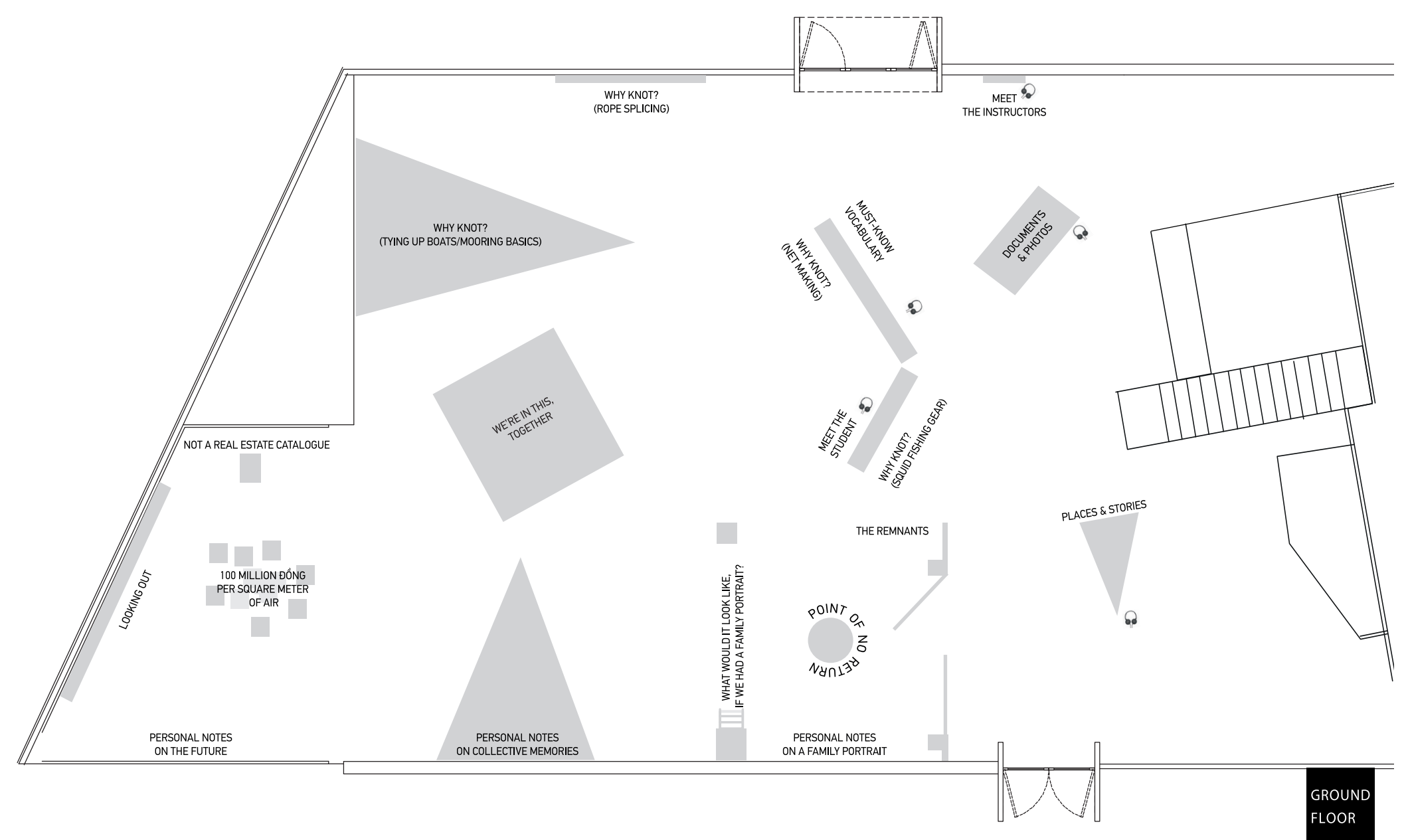
What is this exhibition about?

‘We’re in this, together’ attempts to unravel how Julia Sarisetiati (Sari) and Vicky Đỗ locate and immerse themselves into their surroundings - be it place, site, community, people, or policy. As both individual practitioners and members of grass-root artist collectives (Sari with the Jakarta-based *ruangrupa* and Vicky with the Saigon-born *Chaosdowntown*), the participating artists show care and attention to their respective locales - within as well as outside of their immediate art communities. Rethinking how artists can be both subjects and objects, Sari and Vicky reflect on their practice as authors (as well as being authored by the environments in which they choose to traverse) by assessing particular situations and their conditions, with a mutual hope of questioning and transcending geographical and social limits, expectations and stereotypes.

Sari’s project began when she was working abroad in Korea, where she met fellow Indonesians. Considered low-skilled in the context of the Indonesian workforce, inadequate and ill-equipped for promotion, these migrant workers in fact stand at the crossroads of change, between their previous way of structuring their identity, life and community; and a new one which they have yet to decide and design. Having worked with this community (between Korea and Indonesia) since 2011 on various art projects, Sari continues to question, how do we prepare ourselves during times of uncertainties, learn from each other and share our strategies? How do we unlearn? Through such mediums as prints, video installation and archival materials, Sari unpacks these issues, while also building various kinds of relationships with these migrant workers - be it the ones who are about to leave Indonesia, those already working abroad, or those soon returning home. Within this bond, they together try to navigate living situations, working conditions, and the role of government in their lives.

Meanwhile, Vicky’s project begins with the neighborhood she resides - District 4 – one of the twenty-four districts that make up Saigon, Vietnam’s largest city. Notoriously known for its history of violent crime and social maladies, District 4 was once neglected and itself deemed a malady of the city, sheltering the underbelly of society. It has now become a hotspot for property development, undergoing vast-scale structural change. A juxtaposition of a gloomy past and a seemingly illuminating present, mixed with extreme poverty and extreme wealth, District 4 embodies an urban reality commonly found in various Asian megacities, where issues of social inequality, segregation and displacement are becoming more pronounced than ever before. In this constant social flux, how does one create their place of contentment to find their “home”? Inspired by the characteristics and inhabitants of District 4, Vicky employs the language of photography, video art, installation, and story-telling, blurring the representational boundaries between personal and collective memories, fact and fiction. Digging variously as both a part-taker and an observer, an insider and an outcast, she questions what it means to feel a belonging towards a location and community; how a “home” can be a place for both the one and the many.

This inaugural edition of ‘Pollination’ will also have excerpt showcase in Jogjakarta throughout January and February 2019, with thanks to Galerie Lorong and Cemeti Art House for their support.



What is Pollination?

In Southeast Asia we possess a dynamic independent landscape of artistic initiatives, the majority of contemporary art activity occurring outside of state-sponsored cultural institutions. Also within our region, the role and understanding of ‘curatorial’ work is varied and often misrepresented (e.g. most state institutions are yet to employ curatorial staff and there are only few tertiary programs that offer any study of curatorial practice). Since the late 1990s, curatorial practices and exhibition-making in the region have mostly developed outside traditional institutional museum frameworks.

‘Pollination’ is thus a program that attempts to provide organizational collaborative platforms with which emerging curators of the region can continue to network and contribute. Initiated by The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, this program is envisaged as a long-term collaborative exercise between different institutions/community groups across Southeast Asia, with the aim of offering emerging curatorial and artistic talent the chance to work with other like-minded entities in their region. As one of the first private/non-governmental initiatives of its kind in Southeast Asia, ‘Pollination’ aims to develop and nurture the skills and relationships between artists and curators interested in working (and questioning) institutional structures of display in this region.

Each year, ‘Pollination’ invites an additional institution/community group to appoint a senior curatorial advisor. They in turn select an emerging curator who follows on to select an emerging artist. Dependent on location of funds, space and time, each year an edition is realized between two cities, comprised of travel,

research, production and exhibition grants in the realization of a joint project (which is open-ended in form). Regardless of project involvement, regular meetings online are arranged to mutually discuss forward projects and possible initiatives. In 2019, we welcome ILHAM from Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) as our third organizational partner for the next edition of ‘Pollination’, and Rahel Joseph as our curatorial advisor for Malaysia.

Current members:

Organizations: The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, SAM Fund for Art and Ecology  
Curatorial Advisors: Zoe Butt, Agung Hujatnikajennong, Rahel Joseph  
Participant curators: Bill Nguyễn, Grace Samboh  
Participant artists: Vicky Đỗ, Julia Sarisetiati (Sari)

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