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## LEONARDO THINKS

### **Opinion: Network, Exchange and Dialogue: Media Arts in the Asia Pacific**

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If we are to look for a contemporary edge or a growing buzz in the field of art, science and technology, it may well be found across the Asia Pacific region. Festivals, exhibitions, gallery spaces, media centers and residency programs are increasingly emerging across this geographically and culturally diverse landscape. Driven by a rapidly growing education focus on media arts, increased reach of the Internet and access to resources, capital investment into arts infrastructure, and an active and expanding network of practitioners, writers and curators, the Asia Pacific region is having a noticeable impact upon the highly mobile international media and electronic arts community.

To take a snapshot of this activity one has to look from India, across to China and Japan to Southeast Asia and through the Pacific from the Philippines to Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. This vast panorama reveals an expansive hive of activity, ranging from community-based projects to high-end research centers and sparkling new exhibition spaces.

For many years, Japan has been at the forefront of this push. Japanese institutions have played a significant role in supporting artists and dialogues across art, science and technology. The Canon ArtLab in its prime (1991–2001) had a strong research and development focus, and the well-resourced Nippon Telegraph and Telephone InterCommunication Center (conceived in 1990 and opened in 1997) continues to exhibit the work of Japanese and international practitioners [1]. Importantly, the NTT ICC maintains a significant archive of its projects and publications, as well as a collection of media artworks and video art from the last 30 years.

More recently, spaces such as Sarai: the New Media Initiative [2] (opened 2001 in New Delhi) have shown that much can be achieved with a dynamic vision despite modest resources. Sarai is a space for research, practice and conversation about the contemporary media and urban constellations. The



impact of the intellectual rigor, innovative research and creative thinking manifested by Sarai is reaching far and wide.

Sarai is also conscious of the need to develop collaboration and communication across the region, and in 2003 it hosted an international colloquium in partnership with UNESCO [3] that brought together artists, organizational representatives, educational institutions and independent curators and writers. The strong commitment to networking across the region has in fact contributed to the increasing rise of the Asia Pacific as a force in media arts practice and dialogue.

An important factor of this networking is the acknowledgment of the vastly differing political and economic circumstances across the Asia Pacific countries. Practitioners such as Fatima Lasay of the Philippines [4] recognize that the development of media arts can be very specific to the local context. Lasay works to broker connections across borders and between practitioners, creating environments for cross-cultural discussion and exchange. At the Multimedia Art Asia Pacific symposium in Singapore (October 2004) Lasay introduced Networking and Initiatives for Culture and the Arts (NICA), a newly established art center located in Yangon, Myanmar.

Another development that will create important networking opportunities is the Pacific Rim New Media Summit (PRNMS) [5]. To be staged as a pre-symposium of ISEA (San Jose, August 2006), the summit will focus on new partnerships and projects that address the challenges of information technology. The PRNMS, along with many other initiatives, such as Solar Circuit 2006 (New Zealand), International Biennial for Art and New Media (Korea), Switch Media (Thailand) and Biennale of Electronic Art Perth (Western Australia), is ensuring that the Asia Pacific region is an absolute must on the ever-expanding international media arts calendar.



## Endnotes

[1] NTT InterCommunication Center, <[www.ntticc.or.jp/](http://www.ntticc.or.jp/)>.

[2] Sarai (India), <[www.sarai.net/](http://www.sarai.net/)>.

[3] DigiArts: UNESCO Knowledge Portal, <[http://portal.unesco.org/culture/admin/ev.php?URL\\_ID=1391&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC](http://portal.unesco.org/culture/admin/ev.php?URL_ID=1391&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC)>.

[4] Fatima Lasay, <<http://digitalmedia.upd.edu.ph/digiteer/>>.

[5] For information on the Pacific Rim New Media Summit: <[http://mitpress2.mit.edu/e-journals/Leonardo/isast/events/pacificrim\\_prospectus.html](http://mitpress2.mit.edu/e-journals/Leonardo/isast/events/pacificrim_prospectus.html)>.

Bio: Julianne Pierce is an Australian new media curator, artist and producer and is currently Executive Director of the Australian Network for Art and Technology (Australia's peak network and advocacy body for artists working with science and technology). She is also on the Editorial Advisory Board of LEA (Leonardo Electronic Almanac), is a member of the World Technology Network and is an Advisor on the UNESCO Digital Arts Portal. Her web page <http://www.anat.org.au/> and her email is [julianne@anat.org.au](mailto:julianne@anat.org.au).