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Venka Purushothaman is Provost at LASALLE College of the Arts Singapore. A respected art writer, academic and champion of arts and culture amongst youth, Venka is highly regarded for his research and insights into the cultural and creative industries in Asia and arts higher education. He continues to be invited internationally to lecture in this area at eminent universities and colleges.

He has researched and written extensively on visual arts with an interest in contemporary art and his latest book *The Art of Sukumar Bose* was published by Institute of Southeast Asian

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As an authority on Singapore Arts and arts higher education, Mr Purushothaman is a member of many arts and cultural committees in Singapore. He is a member of the Association of International Art Critics, France and Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts in United Kingdom.

Reading Maritime Cultures: Visuality and Critique of Ports in Art

The complex arena of maritime cultures has often been framed and remains within geo-political interpellations. Be it commerce or seafaring piracy, peripheral sites of anchorage and authorship, bordering on socio-cultural locations, provide rich narratives of identity formation. For example, while islands, such as Singapore and Hong Kong, remain ports of commerce, they are but negotiation sites for socio-cultural identities and transmigrational practices over the centuries; they do not represent the idyllic but rather a microcosmic world-making in the mirror of the great continents. But the agency of cultures cannot be read merely through the lens of geo-political determinism or through the narratives of discovery or maritime cultural representations. There are complex anthropocenic conditions of ownership, war, pillage, conservatory concerns, and natural calamities. Against this backdrop remains old 18th and 19th centuries concepts of discovery and adventure, variably captured in literature and film, where the maritime practice demonstrates test human fortitude and a philosophical exposition of the human condition. Though at times maritime cities may express constitutive qualities that are similar to each other, the emerging contemporary location is a heterotopic space; and, while key and integral to 21st century world-making, it is a site of geo-political determinism. This backdrop provides this paper an entry point to look at ways in which artists have attempted to study, engage and use maritime cultures and their associated inflections of island-making, container-landing and economic exchange in their artist practices. Artists, who, inherently have an agency of discovering and excavating histories, provide an oft missed opportunity to understand maritime cultures.



ALLAN SEKULA, Hamburg Landfall, 2009. Courtesy the Estate of Allan Sekula.