



SOUTHEAST ASIA

**QUEER
ARTIVIST
MANIFESTO**

I. TO EXIST IS TO RESIST AND IS TO TRANSFORM

Our existence is not new. Our existence on these lands spans generations. Our existence and traditions are rooted to these lands, surpassing the colonizers–colonizers whose beliefs have greatly perverted the queer body and our right to life and right to love. Our joy is greater than the social and systemic discrimination and stigma we face on a daily basis.

Our art serves to illuminate injustice, stir empathy, and provoke reflection. And yet, even as artists, writers, entertainers, musicians, filmmakers, designers, and cultural workers shape the region’s cultural landscape and fuel its creative economy, our labor is consistently undervalued.

We fuel stories, movements, industries, and communities. We build platforms for dialogue and belonging, and we create work that fuels tourism, innovation, and cultural exchange. Yet our contributions are often erased, treated as expendable, or taken for granted–within systems that profit from our creativity while denying our safety, dignity, and full participation.

II. THE PRECARIETY OF QUEER LIVES

1. CRIMINALIZATION AND VIOLENCE

In Brunei, Malaysia, Myanmar, and parts of Indonesia, our identities remain punishable by imprisonment, caning, or even death under morality laws. This criminalization forces our artists underground, makes collaboration risky, and tears at our mental well-being.

2. CENSORSHIP AND CONTENT RESTRICTIONS

Across ASEAN, queer themes in film, literature, exhibitions, broadcasting, education, and public events are restricted or outright banned. Many of us must self-censor. Many of us must use pseudonyms. Many of us cannot safely screen our films, publish our books, or mount our performances in our own homelands.

This is not “cultural protection,” this is suppression!

3. ECONOMIC EXCLUSION AND UNSAFE WORK

The creative economy is one of ASEAN’s fastest-growing sectors—contributing up to 7.3% of GDP, employing millions, and shaping the region’s identity. Yet queer creatives face: discriminatory hiring, denial of grants, unequal access to finance, unsafe workplaces, precarity in freelance ecosystems, lack of social protection, and reduced opportunities, especially outside major cities. Research shows that queer exclusion entails economic costs, and that inclusive contexts foster economic productivity.

Our exclusion is not only unjust, it is economically irrational!

4. LOSS OF CREATIVE SPACES

Cinema closures, venue restrictions, police raids, permit refusals, and safety threats mean many queer art spaces are forced into the shadows. In a region that champions the “creative economy,” the most imaginative among us are pushed out of the very spaces ASEAN promises to develop.

5. POLICY SILENCE

ASEAN’s guiding documents on the creative economy call for social inclusion, but never explicitly include SOGIESC. This silence enables governments to erase us from cultural planning, funding mechanisms, public discourse, and formal recognition. To be nameless in policy is to be unprotected in practice.

III. A CALL TO ACTION

We aspire for inclusive and sustainable development. We are demanding the minimum conditions required for safety, creativity, dignity, and economic participation.

1. PROTECT OUR RIGHT TO EXIST AND CREATE

- **Decriminalize LGBTQIA+ identities and relationships;**
- **Enact comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation across employment, education, public service, healthcare, and housing; and**
- **Recognize diverse gender identities and provide accessible pathways for legal gender affirmation.**

2. END CENSORSHIP OF QUEER EXPRESSION

- **Reform national censorship boards and broadcasting laws;**
- **Protect artistic freedom in alignment with international human rights standards; and**
- **Ensure fair permitting for exhibitions, performances, festivals, and film screenings.**

3. CREATE SUSTAINABLE PATHWAYS FOR QUEER CREATIVES

We need ASEAN to:

- **Ensure dedicated funding for queer art and cultural work;**
- **Provide accessible grants and inclusive lending mechanisms;**
- **Support queer artist residencies, fellowships, and exchange programs; and**
- **Promote community-led art spaces and safe cultural hubs.**

We do not want to merely survive—we want to thrive in spaces where we feel safe and secure. These are our rights as human beings on this planet!

4. EMBED SOGIESC INCLUSION INTO ASEAN FRAMEWORKS

ASEAN must:

- **Explicitly recognize LGBTQIA+ communities within cultural, creative-economy, human rights, and social development frameworks;**
- **Support cross-border platforms like and regional queer arts initiatives;**
- **Fund research and inclusive policy development; and**
- **Ensure our participation in cultural governance councils and advisory bodies—for our voices to be heard, not merely to be token figures of diversity.**

Nothing about us without us.

5. INVEST IN EDUCATION AND CULTURAL LITERACY

Support artists, teachers, scholars, and cultural workers who build inclusive futures by:

- **Teach local histories of gender diversity;**
- **Develop queer-inclusive curricula;**
- **Train young creatives; and**
- **Integrate activism into civic education.**

When young people see themselves reflected in culture, they grow with pride and not shame.

SEAblings

I

So, how can I tell you?

How can I tell you that our existence matters?

Our existence matters in the spaces we carve out with our chosen family. In the spaces where we dance, where we laugh and cry, where we create, where we love.

Our existence matters in the schools, offices, and public spaces that we help build.

Our existence matters in the rooms where policies are crafted—our existence a twinkle in their minds.

We have always been here, shaping culture, shaping society, shaping possibility.

Yet our freedoms remain fragmented and fragile.

**When our bodies are criminalized,
we turn to film, poetry, dance, performance, and music to remember who we are.**

**When classrooms silence us,
we write children's books that teach love.**

**When we are repressed by censorship,
we sculpt underground networks, archives, and creative enclaves that keep our stories alive.**

Art is not merely expression—it is participation in life.

It is how communities develop empathy; how societies shift norms; how political imagination is expanded.

Art is how we teach histories erased by colonization.

Art is how we heal from violence when institutions fail us.

**Where queer art thrives,
societies become more democratic, compassionate, and imaginative.**

**Where queer people are free to create,
economies grow through innovation that only cultural diversity can
spark.**

To nurture art is to nurture the soul of a people.

II

**We imagine a Southeast Asia where
Our films are screened without fear,
Our poems are taught in classrooms without controversy,
Our drag performers take the stage without religious and police threats,
Our artists can create without fear of arrest,
Our queer children see themselves in books, cartoons, and cultural
programs,
Our elders are honored as teachers of gender-diverse traditions.
Our families—chosen and biological—live without fear.**

**We imagine a Southeast Asia where our home celebrates us not as
anomalies, but as contributors to culture, the economy, and democracy.
We imagine a Southeast Asia where queerness is not tolerated at the
margins, but recognized as integral to the cultural fabric of our nations.**