

THE LEARNING GALLERY



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The Learning Gallery is dedicated to the engagement and discussion of broader issues through contemporary artworks from the Singapore Art Museum's permanent collection and special commissions.

This edition of the Learning Gallery features selected artworks from the Singapore Art Museum's exhibition, *Once Upon This Island*, which was presented from 7 November 2014 to 19 March 2017. In continuation of Singapore Art Museum's focus on museum-based education, these artworks are specially presented at the Theatrette Project Space at National Gallery Singapore, as the Singapore Art Museum buildings undergo a retrofit.

These artworks navigate ideas of home, community, identity and memory, and raise pertinent and timely questions on what it means to live in contemporary Singapore – an urbanised, ever-changing city-state and island.

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NGUAN

Clockwise from top left:

Untitled, from the series 'Singapore'
2012
Archival pigment print, edition 1/5 + 2 A.P.
100 x 100 cm
Singapore Art Museum collection

Untitled, from the series 'Singapore'
2011
Archival pigment print, edition 1/5 + 2 A.P.
100 x 150 cm
Singapore Art Museum collection

Untitled, from the series 'Singapore'
2013
Archival pigment print, edition 1/5 + 2 A.P.
100 x 100 cm
Singapore Art Museum collection

In these untitled photographs from the series 'Singapore', Nguan expressively captures quiet, everyday scenes on the streets of Singapore, as well as the sense of alienation and solitude that exist in this city (which is arguably also prevalent in all metropolises), by taking intimate and un-posed portraits of strangers while exploring Singapore on foot.

The artist has stated, in relation to the sense of isolation permeating his works, that loneliness is "just a symptom of modern life everywhere – we're living in closer proximity to each other than ever before but feeling further apart." While the themes explored in these works are sombre, the soft tones and tender colour palette of the photographs also convey a sense of nostalgia and warmth, reflecting a discreet observation of Singapore and the Singaporean way of life. Here, a dozen untold stories and personal histories are waiting to unfold.

Nguan was born in Singapore in 1973, and graduated from Northwestern University, USA with a degree in Film Production. His photographs explore big city yearning, ordinary fantasies and emotional globalisation, and he has published two monographs, "Shibuya" (2010) and "How Loneliness Goes" (2013). "How Loneliness Goes" was featured in the group exhibition Ten Million Rooms of Yearning at Para/Site, Hong Kong, and presented as a solo exhibition at the 2015 Singapore M1 Fringe Festival.



Image: Singapore Art Museum

What do you imagine the people in these photographs are thinking about, and what they might be feeling at this precise moment captured by the camera?

VICENTE DELGADO

We Are Family

2014
Mixed media installation
Dimensions variable
Collection of the Artist
Singapore Art Museum commission

Originally from Spain and a resident of Singapore for more than a decade, artist Vicente Delgado was inspired by the ideas of multiculturalism, society and the individual, to create this interactive installation exploring the intricacies of negotiating the multicultural landscape in Singapore.

We Are Family celebrates the diversity of Singapore's cultures by employing vivid colours, textures and shapes in a participatory, intertwining soft sculpture installation. The work, which comprises flexible soft sculpture pieces or building blocks, allows for easy stacking in various permutations. Visitors are invited to interact with the work by using the pieces to configure different shapes and forms. This work also invites younger visitors to explore colours, shapes and forms, and the interactivity encourages teamwork, solidarity and respect for others through play. We Are Family suggests that the soft sculpture pieces are much like the members of a family, or even a societal unit that, when linked together, forge a stronger structure through unity.

Born in Madrid in 1964, Vicente Delgado is an artist and educator with a BA in Graphic Design from Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design, London and a Master's degree in Design Communication from LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore. In his works, humour and irony are vehicles to communicate ideas. He has been based in Singapore for the past 18 years, and has presented his works in the UK, Spain, Japan and Singapore.



Image: Singapore Art Museum

Does the artist's choice of materials affect the way you experience or look at his work?
What if he had simply painted the different pieces on a piece of canvas,
instead of encouraging visitors to interact with his artwork?

JING QUEK

Singapore Idols – Aunties & Uncles

2006
Digital Inkjet with Ultrachrome K3, edition 5/5 + 1 A.P.
121.9 x 165.7 cm
Collection of the Artist

Singapore Idols – Army Boys

2006
Digital Inkjet with Ultrachrome K3, edition 5/5 + 1 A.P.
121.9 x 172.1 cm
Collection of the Artist

Singapore Idols – Maids

2009
Digital Inkjet with Ultrachrome K3, edition 5/5 + 1 A.P.
121.9 x 195 cm
Collection of the Artist

The Singapore Idols series of photographs celebrates the Everyman and common, everyday situations and environments in Singapore. In these works, photographer Jing Quek attempts to capture the spirit of the people who make up the 'face' and landscape of Singapore, presenting stylised collective portraits of distinctive communities in a way that challenges the viewer's perceptions or preconceived notions of these communities.

Singapore Idols – Army Boys presents a large group of National Servicemen posing in an outdoor training area in full military gear: camouflage uniforms, face paint and weaponry. They are seen striking confident poses in a highly stylised manner reminiscent of celebrities in magazines, and are captured in a closely arranged composition, perhaps signalling their close-knit bond and emphasising their solidarity with one another. Similarly, in Singapore Idols – Maids, a group of domestic workers gaze directly, perhaps even challengingly, at the camera (and by extension, the viewer), while enacting a performance of various domestic tasks in the living room of a large house. In Singapore Idols - Aunties & Uncles, a group of senior citizens is also captured posing confidently at the void deck of a Housing Development Board block, intimating their strength and sense of connection with one another.

Through the title of his series and these images which are styled like celebrity portraits, Jing Quek signals the values he ascribes to the oft-overlooked individuals featured in his work, in his attempt to address (and subvert) constructions of identity, stereotypes and communities, particularly within Singapore.

Jing Quek was born in Singapore in 1983 and graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Photography from the School of Visual Arts, USA. He has exhibited in Singapore as well as New York, and is known for his brightly-coloured photography which depicts its subjects with great humour and joie de vivre (or "Joy of Living"). Jing Quek's work explores the Singaporean identity and local urban cityscape, documenting the people and places that make this country unique.



Image: Singapore Art Museum

What do you think are the things that identify or define who you are as an individual? Are these traits tied to a specific group you belong to?

JASON WEE

Self-Portrait (No More Tears, Mr. Lee)

2009

Plastic shampoo bottle caps

380 x 324 x 30 cm

Singapore Art Museum collection

Self-Portrait (No More Tears, Mr. Lee) is made out of 8,000 plastic shampoo bottle caps placed individually on an angled pedestal. Using a combination of opened and closed bottle caps placed in a grid formation, the portrait of a person is created when the bottle caps are lit and viewed from a certain angle.

Alluding to a historical and emotional moment in Singapore's history of independence, the choice of material used to create this installation is a tongue-in-cheek reference to a well-known shampoo tagline. Artist Jason Wee reinvents the genre of portraiture here by deconstructing the subject into its individual parts, making each bottle cap function as a pixel forming a larger image. The part-by-part construction of the image of the person represented questions how biographies and histories of historical figures are multi-faceted and pieced together. This installation is also introspective and self-reflexive in that Jason Wee sees himself represented in this portrait as well, in the way that a person might identify himself or herself with an influential father figure.

Jason Wee was born in Singapore in 1978 and graduated from the Parsons School of Design, New York with a Masters in Fine Arts in Photography. He was awarded the Shell-NAC award in 2004 and has exhibited in several solo as well as group exhibitions in museums such as the Chelsea Art Museum in New York and the Singapore Art Museum. Jason Wee currently lives and works in Singapore and New York.



Image: Singapore Art Museum

What do you consider important moments or events in Singapore's history?
If you were an artist, how would you represent them?

What material or medium would you use to make your own self-portrait?

DAWN NG

HDB Corridor

2012
Archival inkjet print collage, edition 3/3
160 x 120 cm
Singapore Art Museum collection

Mamashop

2012
Archival inkjet print collage, edition 3/3
120 x 160 cm
Singapore Art Museum collection

The two works are part of a series of hand-crafted, large scale photo collages by artist Dawn Ng that presents a cheeky look at present-day Singapore, highlighting its unique characteristics and traits: common obsessions, insecurities and ambitions seen through the composition of text set against familiar, everyday landscapes.

HDB Corridor refers to the common walkway that residents living in Housing Development Board (HDB) flats share across a floor. Singapore's public housing programme has been both the pride of the nation's achievements as well as a point of contention for Singaporeans, with about 80% of the population residing in HDB flats. While HDB flats continue to be built to meet the demands and needs of a growing population, limited land space necessitates creating taller flats that reach ever higher. The increasing demand for flats has also pushed up housing prices in recent years.

The advice to "faster apply for your pie in the sky" is distinctively Singaporean, both in the vernacular used, as well as in the sense of urgency conveyed. The call to action plays up the Singaporean trait of 'kiasuism', or the 'fear of losing out'. Juxtaposed against a seemingly serene residence in the background, this work is a tongue-in-cheek commentary on modern-day urban development, and the needs and aspirations of a fast-changing country and its people.

Mamashop is a colloquial reference to the provision shops that serve the needs of residents living in local housing estates, and which are gradually being replaced by convenience store chains. Selling a wide range of items from perishables to household goods, the provision shop is a convenient, one-stop location for residents, forming an integral part of their daily routine.

"Everything you ever wanted is right here" inscribed across the entrance to a provision shop serves as an invitation to enter and explore the shop, but also reminds viewers that sometimes, one need not look too far for what they might need. It suggests that the grass is not always greener on the other side, and encourages one to appreciate the value of what is in front of them. However, the bold text may also act as a counter-question, challenging the viewer to query if all they ever wanted is truly located right where they are.



Image courtesy of the artist

What other insecurities or anxieties do you think Singaporeans might have?
Are they unique to Singapore, or common across other nationalities and cultures?

Dawn Ng was born in Singapore in 1982, and graduated from The Slade School of Fine Art, London and Georgetown University, Washington where she acquired skills in drawing, painting, photography as well as writing. She has a background in advertising, and held her first solo collage exhibition titled Singapore Cuts in 2009. Her works have also been presented at the Singapore Art Show (2009), Blackout (2009), and at A Curious Teepee (2011).

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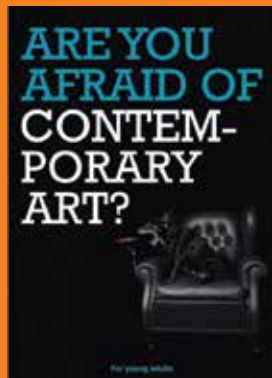


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Indonesia's Papermoon Puppet Theatre performing Prani: the breath at SAM at 8Q, as part of Imaginarium: Over the Ocean, Under the Sea in 2016.

The current trends in contemporary art have gravitated towards Asia, making this an exciting and opportune time for organisations and individuals to forge long-term funding partnerships with the Singapore Art Museum (SAM). As a partner, your contribution will go towards supporting exhibitions, as well as education and community engagement programmes.

Depending on the amount donated, eligible donors will be acknowledged for their contributions through exhibition-related publicity and advertising, as well as nominated for the annual national Patron of the Arts Award. In addition, all cash donations are eligible for 2.5 times tax deduction, subject to terms and conditions stipulated by IRAS, or as per the year.

For more information, please email give@singaporeartmuseum.sg

About Singapore Art Museum

Singapore Art Museum (SAM) is a contemporary art museum which focuses on art-making and art-thinking in Singapore, Southeast Asia and Asia, encompassing a worldwide perspective on contemporary art practice. SAM advocates and makes accessible interdisciplinary contemporary art through research-led and evolving curatorial practice.

Since it opened in January 1996, SAM has built up one of the most important collections of contemporary art from the region. It seeks to seed and nourish a stimulating and creative space in Singapore through exhibitions and public programmes, and to deepen every visitor's experience. These include outreach and education, research and publications, as well as cross-disciplinary residencies and exchanges.

SAM occupies two buildings: the old St Joseph's Institution on Bras Basah Road, built in 1855 and now a National Monument; and SAM at 8Q, a conservation building across the road on Queen Street that was the old Catholic High School. The museum buildings are closing in phases for a major revamp, so museum programming will continue to take place at partner venues such as the National Gallery of Singapore.

SAM was the venue organiser of the Singapore Biennale in 2011, 2013 and 2016. SAM will continue to organise the next two editions in 2019 and 2022. SAM was incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee on 13 November 2013, operating under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth.

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Dawn Ng, HDB Corridor, 2012. Singapore Art Museum collection