

Media Release

Singapore Biennale 2019 Wraps Its Thought-Provoking and City-Wide Exhibition

The sixth edition goes beyond gallery walls through its wide-ranging programming and digital initiatives



Clockwise: Artist Boedi Widjaja during Artist Insights programme at his artwork, *Black–Hut, Black–Hut*, 2019; Phare, the Battambang Circus, *Phum Style*, 2019 (23 Nov 2019 performance at Far East Plaza); SB2019 Curator Andrea Fam during Art for Families with Kids tour at Hera Buyuktasciyan's *A Study on Endless Archipelagos*, 2017-2019; Laurie Anderson and Hsin-Chien Huang, *La Camera Insabbiata (The Chalkroom)*, 2017; Images courtesy of Singapore Art Museum.

SINGAPORE, 1 APRIL 2020 – The sixth edition of the Singapore Biennale 2019 (SB2019) ran from 22 November 2019 until 22 March 2020, welcoming over 400,000 visitors across 11 venues with more than 26,000 participants taking part in its range of public programmes and art experiences. Art lovers in Singapore and around the world were also invited to explore the Biennale through interactive digital initiatives and online resources, attracting an online audience of more than 90,000. Commissioned by the National Arts Council and organised by Singapore Art Museum (SAM), the international contemporary art exhibition presented 77 artists and collectives

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from Singapore, Southeast Asia and beyond to engage with the conditions of contemporary life and the human endeavour for change. SAM will continue to lead and organise the next edition of the Singapore Biennale in 2022.

A City-Wide Presentation of Artworks and Art Experiences

SB2019 was presented not only in the city's cultural institutions and spaces, but also brought contemporary art directly to the public through performances and works staged in public spaces like Far East Plaza and the Esplanade Tunnel, through chance encounters and participatory experiences beyond traditional gallery walls with seven Coordinates Projects and Biennale public programmes.

Led by Artistic Director Patrick Flores, the team of six Singapore Biennale curators brought together independent and institutional backgrounds from across the region, reflecting a wide spectrum of interests and experiences, while also offering opportunities for invigorating conversations and perspectives. Reaffirming the Biennale as a critical platform for contemporary art in Southeast Asia, SB2019 presented 50 new commissions this edition, as well as works that have rarely been shown in Asia, in diverse mediums including film, installation, sound art, new media and performance.

“SB2019 has been a tremendous opportunity for the curatorial team to present local and international visitors with a diverse range of artworks and projects that span cultures, geographies, and histories. Many of the artworks on view share histories, narratives and memories that offer beauty and delight, as well as moments of deep reflection on poignant social and political issues that underpin our intertwining cultural histories. In today's socio-political landscape, it is more important than ever to consider the transformative potential of art, and we hope that the Biennale offered visitors opportunities to consider how we might make steps of thoughtful change towards a collective future,” comments SB2019 Artistic Director **Patrick**

Flores.

“SAM has always been committed to presenting contemporary art through the lens of Southeast Asia. This edition of the Singapore Biennale has provided a platform for artists in the region to engage with global dialogues about art as agency in our societies today. Although the past few months have been challenging for the global community, we are encouraged by the interest and attendance from the public who have visited the exhibition and participated in our events. We look forward to continuing the examination of the role of art and artists explored by Patrick Flores and his curatorial team in ‘Every Step in the Right Direction’, through the next edition of the Singapore Biennale,” adds **Eugene Tan**, Director of Singapore Art Museum.

SB2019 Programming Attracted Diverse Audiences

Throughout the exhibition run, SB2019 presented a **wide range of programmes for visitors of all ages and backgrounds** that welcomed more than 26,000 participants. In addition to daily multi-lingual guided tours at National Gallery Singapore and Gillman Barracks, SB2019 offered free admission for Merdeka and Pioneer Generation card holders, a series of accessibility programmes, as well as specialised activities designed for children and seniors.

Some of the best-attended SB2019 public programmes included **Kopi, Teh and Contemporary Art** – multi-lingual tours led by senior volunteers in English, Mandarin, Hokkien, and Malay; **themed curator tours** that highlighted shared themes and ideas among artists and artworks; a sold-out series of **Art & Wellness programmes** including yin yoga, gong baths, and guided meditations within art spaces to encourage new ways of experiencing art; the **Art and Poetry Spoken Word Trail** where poets responded to and read their poetry aloud at select Biennale works; and **Artist-Run Programmes**, such as *Singapore Really Really Free Market* and *Ghost Story Campfire Night IV: The Love Edition* by SB2019 artists Post-Museum.

This Edition's Highlights

Marking the first time that a Singaporean artist has won this award, the **12th Benesse Prize** was awarded to **Amanda Heng**'s commission *Every Step Counts* (2019). For SB2019, Heng invited the public to walk with her in a multi-disciplinary project that encouraged reflections and perspectives particularly around the limits of the aging body. Presented by Benesse Holdings, Inc (Benesse) in collaboration with Singapore Art Museum (SAM), the Benesse Prize has been an official award of the Singapore Biennale since 2016, recognising artists who demonstrate an experimental and critical spirit around the theme of 'Benesse' (Well-Being).

Expanding on themes inspired by its title, the Biennale also hosted a much-anticipated **Singapore Biennale Symposium: 'Right Here, Right Now: Constellating Worlds in the Contemporary'** on 7 March 2020 that brought together international critical voices to explore how contemporary art might encourage positive change and thoughtful resistance. Symposium essays and recordings from the panel discussions have been [posted online](#) to enable the global art community to access these materials and continue the conversation ignited by the session.

In response to the evolving global situation, a **360° virtual gallery** of select SB2019 works was introduced in March 2020 to enable viewers to engage with interactive photos of installations across the different sites. These images will be on view on [Singapore Biennale and SAM's Facebook page](#) beyond the Biennale's closing date. The Singapore Biennale Symposium and Biennale Finale activities were also live-streamed to accommodate local and international audiences who may have been unable to travel to the venues. In the next few months, audiences can look forward to a richer online experience of SB2019 on the Google Arts & Culture online platform, where interactive **360°** views of all SB2019 works across the 11 venues will be made available.

“Singapore Biennale has made contemporary art more accessible to a wide range of audiences through its inclusive programming and innovative digital initiatives. The resilience of the arts scene is vital to sustain us as a community during such a time, and we are heartened to see the Biennale pushing on to explore alternative ways to provide audiences access to arts and cultural experiences when Covid-19 measures made it difficult to present all programmes in the formats planned,” adds Rosa Daniel, Chief Executive Officer of the National Arts Council, Singapore.

Commissioned by the National Arts Council and organised by SAM, Singapore Biennale 2019: *Every Step in the Right Direction* was on view from **22 November 2019 until 22 March 2020**. Visit singaporebiennale.org for more information.

The complete press kit and images can be downloaded from:

[https://suttonpr.egnyte.com/fl/8N9d9I9HNt/SB2019_Press_Kit_\(Sharing\)](https://suttonpr.egnyte.com/fl/8N9d9I9HNt/SB2019_Press_Kit_(Sharing))

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Editor Notes:

About the Singapore Biennale

The Singapore Biennale was established in 2006 as the country's pre-eminent platform for international dialogue in contemporary art. It presents and reflects the vigour of artistic practices in Singapore and the region within a global context, and fosters productive collaborations and deep engagement with artists, arts organisations, and the international arts community.

The Singapore Biennale cultivates public engagement with contemporary art through a four-month exhibition, and its accompanying public engagement and education programmes that include artist and curator talks and tours, school visits and workshops, and community days. It complements achievements in other areas of arts and culture, collectively enhancing Singapore's international profile as a vibrant city in which to live, work and play.

The 2006 and 2008 editions of the Biennale were organised by the National Arts Council. The NAC commissioned the Singapore Art Museum to organise the 2011, 2013, 2016, and 2019 editions.

About the Singapore Art Museum

Singapore Art Museum 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 currently closed for a major building redevelopment, with museum programming continuing at partner venues until the buildings re-open.

SAM is the organiser of the Singapore Biennale in 2011, 2013, 2016 and 2019. SAM was incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee on 13 November 2013, operating under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. To find out more, visit www.singaporeartmuseum.sg

About the National Arts Council

The National Arts Council champions the arts in Singapore. By nurturing creative excellence and supporting broad audience engagement, our diverse and distinctive arts inspire our people, connect communities and profile Singapore internationally. We preserve our rich, cultural traditions while we cultivate accomplished artists and vibrant companies for the future. Our support for the arts is comprehensive – from grants and partnerships to industry facilitation and arts housing. The Council welcomes greater private and corporate giving to and through the arts so that together we can make the arts an integral part of everyone's lives. For more information on the Council's mission and plans, visit www.nac.gov.sg.