

artasiapacific



Almanac 2016

NEWS CULTURAL CURRENCY FIVE PLUS ONE
COUNTRY REPORTS FESTIVALS EXHIBITIONS BOOKS

6 5 > AU \$34
EU €22
HK \$195
KR ₩43000
SG \$35
CA \$25
GB £16
JP ¥3000
NZ \$37
US \$25



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Afghanistan Armenia Australia Azerbaijan
Bahrain Bangladesh Bhutan Brunei Cambodia
China East Timor Georgia Hong Kong
India Indonesia Iran Iraq Israel Japan Jordan
Kazakhstan North Korea South Korea Kuwait
Kyrgyzstan Laos Lebanon Macau Malaysia
Maldives Mongolia Myanmar Nepal New Zealand
Oman Pakistan Palestine Papua New Guinea
Philippines Qatar Saudi Arabia Singapore Sri Lanka
Syria Taiwan Tajikistan Thailand Turkey Turkmenistan
United Arab Emirates Uzbekistan Vietnam Yemen

VOLUME XI

SINGAPORE



Official Country Name
REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE

Languages
MANDARIN, ENGLISH, MALAY, TAMIL

Population
5,674,472

Median Age
33.8

GDP Per Capita
US \$82,800

Source: CIA World Factbook

Total Value of Art Exported
(UN Comtrade Database 2014)
US \$304,461,717

Arts Funding
(Arts and Heritage)
US \$211,555,660

Art Programs
(University Level)
3

Student Enrollment
544

Source: Ministry of Finance, National Arts Council

Museums Exhibiting Contemporary Art
14

Contemporary Art Galleries
(Commercial)
47

Contemporary Art Spaces
(Nonprofit)
24

Art Foundations
(NGO + Private)
10

Source: National Arts Council

The Southeast Asian island-state celebrated several milestones in 2015—

most prominently, its golden jubilee, commemorating Singapore's five decades of independence from Malaysia with a slew of events year round. Festivities included an extravagant National Day parade on August 9, numerous exhibitions on Singaporean history and art, and a showcase of local culture and cuisine that traveled to New York and London. The country also suffered the loss of its founding father, former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, who passed away in March. Lee loomed large in the Singapore narrative: playing a pivotal role in the rocky lead-up to independence, and its dramatic transition from a former British trading outpost to a first-world economy. Tens of thousands of Singaporeans responded with a show of public grief, lining the streets despite torrential downpours to pay respect to their former leader. At a moment when the country is undergoing rapid demographic, social and physical changes, Lee's death symbolized the loss of a link to the past.

At the same time, however, popular sentiment on these fronts translated into a wider-than-anticipated margin of victory for the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) in the General Elections in September. The PAP won a resounding 70 percent of the vote, dealing a blow to the nascent opposition. The new cabinet, postelection, saw Grace Fu at the helm of the **Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY)**; Fu took over from the former minister, Lawrence Wong. MCCY is the parent ministry of the **National Heritage Board** and the **National Arts Council (NAC)**, two agencies that continue to play instrumental roles in the Singapore arts scene. The NAC also witnessed changes in leadership, with Low Eng Teong—formerly of the Ministry of Education—now heading its visual arts sector. The NAC returned Singapore to the

56th Venice Biennale this year, after a hiatus in 2013. It also signed a 20-year lease on a space in the Sale d'Armi building at the historic Arsenale complex, thus securing a quasi-permanent home for the Singapore Pavilion. For the 2015 edition of the Biennale, Charles Lim presented "Sea State" (5/9–11/22), a series of photographs, videos and installations foregrounding maritime issues and iconography. The focal point of the presentation was a towering buoy encrusted with rust and barnacles, which made for a powerful sculptural statement.

In 2013, MCCY formed the **Visual Arts Cluster**, which includes the eagerly awaited **National Gallery Singapore (NGS)** that opened its doors on November 24. Housed in the former Supreme Court and City Hall buildings, with a combined floor space of almost 64,000 square meters, the gigantic new museum boasts "the world's largest public display of modern Southeast Asian art." Highlights of the permanent exhibitions include paintings by iconic 19th-century Southeast Asian masters such as Raden Saleh of Indonesia, and Filipinos Juan Luna and Felix Resurrección Hidalgo. Also on view are Russian-born German artist Walter Spies, a longtime resident of Bali, and Malaysian painter Zulkifli Mohd Dahalan; their respective artworks have been rarely displayed in the public realm. A little closer to home, an entire wing of the museum is dedicated to the art of Singapore, where seminal artworks of the postwar era, having hitherto made only sporadic appearances in temporary exhibitions, are at last accessible. Works by Chua Mia Tee, for example, will hopefully refocus much-needed attention on the Social Realist movement, an area where scholarly consideration has tended to languish in the shadow of the Nanyang School artists, such as Georgette Chen.

Another Visual Arts Cluster member is the **Singapore Art Museum (SAM)**, which welcomed the arrival of its new CEO, Leng Tshua, in July. Under the stewardship of its director, Susie Lingham, the museum enjoyed a bumper crop of exhibitions in 2015. Its permanent collection show, "After Utopia" (5/1–10/18), which examined the



JIMMY ONG, *Rampogan Macan*, 2014, charcoal on paper, 128 x 313 cm. Courtesy Fost Gallery, Singapore.

Acknowledgments: Herman Chong, Binjin Ho, Gwen Pew, Russell Storer



SIMRYN GILL, (left to right) *Sweet Chariot No. 2, 3 and 4*, all 2015, gelatin silver photographs taken from a small fishing boat on the Straits of Malacca, 82 x 169 cm each. Courtesy Michael Janssen Singapore.

legacy of utopianism in Southeast Asia and beyond, was one of the best received. "5 Stars: Art Reflects on Peace, Justice, Equality, Democracy and Progress" (10/2-5/2/16), a show looking at the values embodied in the stars on the Singapore flag, featured new commissions from prominent local artists Zulkifl Mahmod, Suzann Victor, Ho Tzu Nyen and Matthew Ngui, and an installation that paid tribute to the work of art historian TK Sabapathy. SAM rounded off the year with a co-curated exhibition, "Time of Others: Contemporary Art from Four Museums Across the Asia Pacific" (11/21-2/28/16), a traveling show organized in collaboration with the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, National Museum of Art Osaka and the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane.

Along the Singapore River, the trinity of the Visual Arts Cluster comes together with the Singapore Tyler Print Institute, now rebranded with just its initials, **STPI**, which featured a roster of shows by several blue-chip artists. Particularly noteworthy were those by Singaporean Suzann Victor, "Imprint: New Works by Suzann Victor" (1/18-2/21) and Entang Wiharso from Indonesia, in "Never Say No" (4/24-5/29).

Newcomer **Singapore Pinacothèque de Paris**, the first international outpost of the Paris-based private museum, opened on May 30 within Fort Canning Park. Displaying works from its permanent collection of 20th-century Western masters, it also debuted with a show about the ancient Egyptian queen Cleopatra (5/30-10/11).

The **Gillman Barracks** precinct ushered in its third birthday with sad news: five galleries announced in April that they would be giving up their spaces, while a sixth quietly shuttered its doors with little

fanfare. Almost all departing galleries featured programming devoted to Southeast Asian artists: Silverlens Gallery and the Drawing Room (both based in Manila), Tomio Koyama Gallery (Tokyo), Equator Art Projects, Space Cottonseed and Future Perfect. A report in the local daily, the *Straits Times*, noted that "in the three years of its operation, the art enclave had fallen short of its ambition, suffering from a hard-to-shake listlessness in terms of sales and visitorship." The primary institution within the arts compound is the **NTU Centre for Contemporary Art (NTU CCA)**. It organized a solo show by Singapore-born Sydney-based Simryn Gill, "Hugging the Shore" (3/27-6/14), which returned the much-missed figure to Southeast Asia. NTU CCA's robust residency program included



GEORGETTE CHEN, *Self Portrait*, 1946, oil on canvas, 22.5 x 17.5 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore. Courtesy National Heritage Board, Singapore.

Malaysians Yee I-Lann (4/27-7/3) and Shooshie Sulaiman (6/8-8/28), Filipino Gary-Ross Pastrana (7/6-10/2) and London-based Erika Tan (7/6-8/3).

Founded in 2012 by Savita Apte, Christine Pillsbury and Shareen Khattar, to initiate collaborative programming that has a particular leaning toward involving art collectors, **Platform Projects** landed a permanent space in Gillman in January, inaugurating with an exhibition by Indian multimedia artist Jitish Kallat, "Here After Here" (1/20-3/18).

Notable commercial gallery exhibitions within Gillman included **Arndt** gallery's presentation of British superstars Gilbert & George, "Utopian Pictures" (1/20-4/12), and veteran conceptualist Cheo Chai-Hiang's "In a Cowboy Town...人在江湖....." (9/12-11/15) at **Michael Janssen Gallery**, which presented elliptical, elusive art objects characteristic of the artist's sensibilities. Indonesian artists were well-represented at **Yeo Workshop** and **Pearl Lam Galleries**: Yeo with a group show of Bandung-based artists curated by Roy Voragen, "Looping Loopholes" (4/24-6/28), and Pearl Lam with an exhibition by Gatot Pujiarto, "Masquerade of Life" (10/3-11/15). **Fost Gallery** put on a series of four solo exhibitions by young local artists, Khairullah Rahim, Luke Heng, Ashley Yeo and Izziyana Suhaimi, and a solo showcase of Jimmy Ong's narrative drawings, in "[The History of Java]" (1/16-3/1). **Ota Fine Arts** from Tokyo featured Chen Wei's takes on contemporary China in "Noon Insomnia" (7/3-8/15) and those by satirical painter Tang Dixin (10/24-12/5).

Curated shows also took center stage at Gillman Barracks in 2015: June Yap organized "Dear Painter" (9/4-10/25) at **Sundaram Tagore Gallery**, which featured local artists Jane Lee, Jeremy Sharma, Warren Khong and Kai Lam, among others. **Yavuz Gallery** held a retrospective of Burmese artist Po Po, "Out of Myth, Onto Logical" (8/2-9/13), curated by Yangon-based researcher Nathalie Johnston, and local artist Michael Lee mounted a group show of Singaporean artists, "What Is It About When It Is About Nothing" (9/25-10/25), at **Mizuma Gallery**, which featured names such as Robert Zhao, Adeline Kueh, Homa Shojaie and Ho Rui An.

Outside of the Gillman cluster, **ArtSpace@Helutrans**, a warehouse building in the Tanjong Pagar port district, started off the year with a group show at **Richard Koh Fine Art (RKFA)**, "Malaysian Art, A New Perspective" (1/15-30), which included Gan Chin Lee, Saiful Razman, Haffendi Anuar and Yeoh Choo Kuan. After this show, RKFA closed its Singapore gallery space but still maintains an office in the city-state. Within Helutrans, **Galerie Steph** also closed, though it occasionally uses its former space for pop-up exhibitions. In May,



Installation view of **CHARLES LIM**'s exhibition "Sea State" at the Singapore Pavilion for the 56th Venice Biennale, 2015. Photo by and courtesy Joleen Loh.

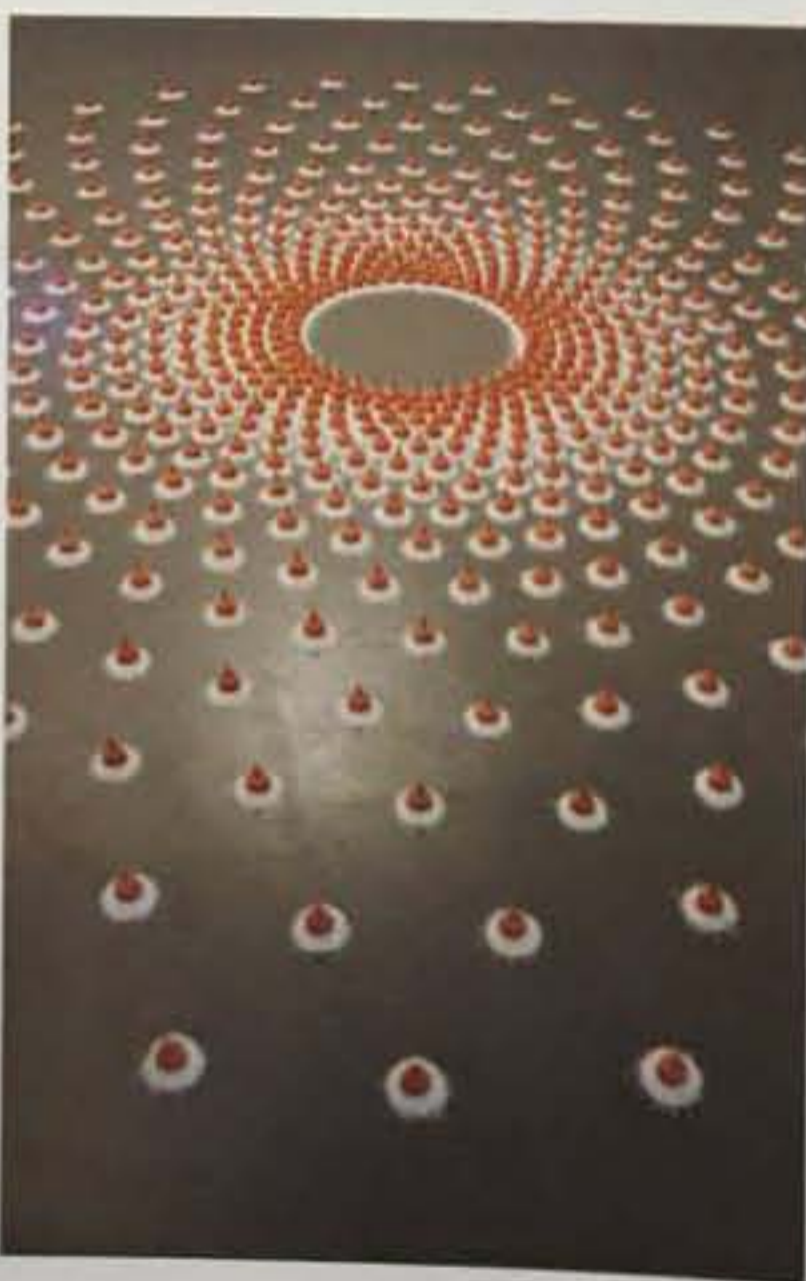
it organized "Peculiar Textures" (5/8–6/13), featuring collages by American Bradley Foisset, paintings drawn from archival film stills and photographs by Singaporean Hilmi Johandi and abstract drawings by Luke Heng, also from Singapore. **Valentine Willie Fine Art**, missing from the Southeast Asian art scene since the closure of its Singapore and Kuala Lumpur galleries, put on a final edition of its once-celebrated annual Singapore survey exhibition, "Hard Choices" (8/5–9/12), which boasted familiar names around town including Heman Chong, Green Zeng, Chun Kai Qun and Chun Kai Feng. While some galleries closed, **Gajah Gallery** moved into the Helutrans building, opening its new space in October with a group show (10/17–31). **Ikkan Art International** held a group exhibition of international artists, "Timely Manoeuvres" (5/8–6/20), featuring Richard Serra, Sol LeWitt and Felix Gonzalez-Torres. During the NGS opening, Silverlens held a pop-up show "Opera" for Gabriel Barredo (11/20–28).

Beyond Helutrans, Jada Art held an exhibition for local artist Ren Zi, "Naming Our Bright & Dark Stars" (10/14–28), and **Chan Hampe Galleries** opened a new project space, **Shophouse 5**, in the vibrant red-light district of Geylang. One of the more interesting shows in its lineup included an exhibition of queer art, "Cruise" (11/7–29). **Element Art Space** celebrated its fifth anniversary and held young Indonesian artist Wisnu Auri's first show in Singapore (9/17–10/18), while **Galerie Sogan & Art** temporarily ceased operation in November and is in process of relocating. After four years, **Art Plural Gallery**, founded by Swiss art dealer Frédéric de Senarclens, closed in May.

Across the street, the **Substation**,

Singapore's oldest independent platform, found a new leader in Alan Oei, who assumed the role of artistic director in October. Oei also runs the annual art event, **OH! Open House**, which invites audiences into private homes as part of the art-viewing experience, and organized a successful run over three weekends in March (3/14–15, 3/21–22, 3/28–29) in the quickly gentrifying neighborhood of Joo Chiat.

Nonprofit **Objectifs** found a new home in the quarters of the now defunct Sculpture Square, throwing a housewarming party with an exhibition by Ernest Goh (6/11–7/19),



ALBERT YONATHAN SETYAWAN, *Mandala Study #4*, 2015, terracotta and marble sand, dimensions variable. Courtesy Mizuma Gallery, Singapore.

which was presented in collaboration with the online platform, the **Artling**, the brainchild of Talenia Phua Gajardo.

Another independent space dedicated to photography is the one-year-old **DECK**, housed in refurbished shipping containers. It organized a solo show by Singaporean Ang Song Nian, "A Tree with Too Many Branches" (1/24–3/15). The artist-run space **Grey Projects**, now in Tiong Bahru, hosts exhibitions as well as residencies. "Wave and Particle" was a solo presentation for Joshua Yang of Vertical Submarine (11/20–1/14/16). **Jendela** at the Esplanade celebrated Singapore's 50th birthday with a group show of local photographers, "TwentyFifteen: The Exhibition" (8/7–1/3/16), the roster of which included John Clang.

The ever-progressive **Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore** mounted a solo exhibition for London-based, Singaporean artist Jack Tan, "How to Do Things with Rules" (8/15–9/29). For the 10th edition of the performance art festival **Future of Imagination** (11/21–28), artistic director Jason Lim brought together an all-female cast.

Abroad in Europe, a large-scale cultural festival was organized in celebration of Singapore's jubilee and 50 years of diplomatic ties between Singapore and France. Singapore en France – Le Festival (3/26–6/30) offered a full program of events and exhibitions encompassing architecture, cinema, visual arts and other cultural endeavors across seven French cities, with artists such as Lee Wen, Ming Wong and Joo Choon Lin. On the other side of the English Channel, Heman Chong mounted installations and led interactive projects for "An Arm, A Leg and Other Stories" (12/11–2/28/16) at South London Gallery. Ang Song Ming participated in "Whatever Man Built could be Taken Apart" (9/5–10/18), a group show exploring the role of the internet and technologies in contemporary artistic practices at the Kunstverein Wiesbaden in western Germany, and was invited to show at the 14th Istanbul Biennial (9/5–11/1), curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev.

Come 2016, the **ArtScience Museum** will once again be hosting the Prudential Eye Awards and an accompanying exhibition in January, during the annual Art Week celebrations, which will also see the launch of a new art fair, Singapore Contemporary, to complement (or rival) Art Stage Singapore, with both fairs taking place over the same weekend. Singapore Contemporary is organized by the same team behind Hong Kong's twice-yearly Asia Contemporary Art Show, and is pitching itself to the section of the art market buying works in the mid-tier price range. Finally, the Singapore Biennale, organized by SAM, will open in October, marking the museum's 20th anniversary.

LOUIS HO