1st Museum Open House

Sarah Chan and Fidelia Chen
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, Year 3
Boulevart members

Held at the start of the 2nd semester, it was a ‘welcome back to campus’ party for students who were entertained by Circadian’s dj set and performances by Sidd & His Self-Esteem and NUS Electronic Music Lab (one of 22 groups managed by NUS Centre For the Arts). The Museum Open House offered a chance for students to find out more about three newly launched exhibitions and the Paper-to-Gallery programme.

On 31 January, NUS Museum showcased how it was definitely more than what a mere description of a museum entails. Indeed, it showed itself to be an intellectually and culturally vibrant milieu, not just for the NUS community, but also for the Singapore community as a whole.

The event kicked off with three exhibition tours, Reconfiguration, Fragments, Histories, Contexts and Sculpting Life. Each exhibition tour served as bite-sized and digestible introductions to the exhibitions. The tours definitely whetted everyone’s appetite to discover each exhibition in much closer detail.

First up, it was the Reconfiguration exhibition tour, which focused on contemporary Chinese art. Mention Chinese art, and many would conjure up images of dragons and phoenixes or Chinese brush paintings. Yet, it caught many of us by surprise how Chinese art has evolved tremendously. Tracing this evolution allowed one to “hear” the many stories about the evolution of the Chinese as a community—an example of how art is perhaps a reflection of life and society.

Lim Qinyi (back facing camera), curator of Reconfiguration, conducting a guided tour for visitors.
Next, there was *Fragments, Histories, Contexts* where the spotlight was on the Museum’s South Asian Collection. We loved this tour because the exhibits not only showcased the different forms of South Asian artistic expressions from sculptures, paintings to even textiles, but also brought to our attention how one could explore contemporary concerns like postcolonialism through such exhibits. It was definitely enriching to be in touch with the art of our region.

In the *Sculpting Life* tour conducted by Foo Su Ling, the curator focused on a Singapore sculptor, the late Cultural Medallion recipient Ng Eng Teng. It was indeed intriguing to realise that while we look to foreign shores for art, there are local artists in Singapore who rightly deserve our attention and commendation.

After having been intellectually stimulated and mentally fed through these 3 exhibition tours, we were by then more than ready to have our stomachs fed too. As we munched on food and took swigs of beer (free booze by Archipelago Brewery), it was indeed delightful to witness groups of people mingling in the name of art and it was a case in point that art is certainly something not just for the aficionados, but rather that art is and can be for everyone.

As I sat at the bus stop opposite the NUS Museum that night waiting for my bus, I looked at the Museum and watched as different coloured spotlights cast the building in splashes of colours. With live music playing from within the Museum grounds, it was indeed delightful to observe how the NUS Museum can be such an intellectually and culturally vibrant milieu.

**Boulevart** is a newly-initiated student group formed in collaboration with the NUS Museum. From being guides at NUS Museum, organising events in relation to visual arts to receiving training in and conducting art appreciation classes, **Boulevart** hopes to be an avenue through which students on campus can explore their interest in the visual arts.
Site, Situation, Spectator

Lim Nam Leng

Four NUS Architecture students in the University Scholars Programme offer new perspectives and critical interpretations in projects that investigate relationships between site, situation and spectator. After months of in-depth research, site visits, dialogues and a series of curatorial workshops and artist-based programmes, the site-specific works demonstrate linking of architecture and art with creative use of video, photography and installation.

Canteen Brick-Down by Debbie Loo, Year 5
Site: The Deck (Arts Canteen), National University of Singapore, Kent Ridge

This video installation sited at NUS Arts Canteen projects a sense of dislocation. The past is represented by the redbrick column that we see Debbie building at the beginning of the video. She wheels it around in the new Arts Canteen, imposing its presence on the diners. Later, the physically marking out of positions is made by people in red t-shirts trying to relocate themselves within the new site.

Bali Revisited by Jan Lim, Year 3
Site: NUS Museum

A display of souvenirs from Bali.

‘It has been so commercialized, so tourist-minded. Plastic, yes, plastic everywhere.’

Chen Chong Swee

In 1952, four ‘pioneer’ artists - Liu Kang, Chen Chong Swee, Chen Wen Hsi and Cheong Soo Pieng – visited Bali, a trip that is often regarded as pivotal in the crystalisation of the Nanyang style. Jan Lim makes reference to this artistic sojourn that has been credited with having influenced the Nanyang artistic identity. She addresses the relationships between material, museum and myth in the Bali trip with a display of various items such as photographs of Charlie Chaplin in Bali who had remarked to Liu Kang that “Whoever hasn’t been to Bali can’t say he has been to Southeast Asia”; a 1952 map of the region; a catalogue of the 1953 exhibition resulting from the Bali visit; ikat textile; and souvenirs from Bali. These materials and information gathered by Jan Lim were in part real, and in part imagined – as a critique of the museum as a theatre of cultural construct.
Jalan Kubor by Hanan Alsagoff, Year 5  
Site: Jalan Kubor, Kampong Glam

The Kampong Glam Cemetery - the oldest Malay cemetery in Singapore - is the inspiration for this captivating work. Hanan has created a trail of viewing boxes with peepholes containing a photograph in each. By following the trail that starts from Bussorah Street leading to the cemetery at the junction of Jalan Kubor and Victoria Street, you can view a series of photographs of what was once known as the “tombs of the Malayan princes”. One is struck by the beauty of this neglected site. Viewing it through the peephole is symbolic of the process of life and death; one has ‘to experience darkness before seeing the light’.

My Architectural Travel Map 1:n by Juliana Chan, Year 5  
Site: NUS Museum

This is a collage of maps incorporating Juliana’s travels and her interpretation of the map as a subjective tool in defining space. Her preferences are reflected such that Changi Airport is located in the west close to where she stays. Nearby is Sentosa, also relocated to the west. On the map are also locations showing other places and streets outside of Singapore.

At the Opening…

(L-R): Ahmad Mashadi, Prof Wong Yunn Chii, Christine Khor and A/P Tan Teck Koon.

The four student artists (L-R) : Hanan Alsagoff, Jan Lim, Julian Chan and Debbie Loo sharing a lighter moment.
NUS Arts Festival 2008

The Body

Nurul Huda bte Abdul Rashid
Masters student in Sociology, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences

Conceived as an Open Art Show for photography works by NUS High School students, NUS staff, students and alumni, the exhibition explored the complexity of the question of ‘the body’ as a physical or symbolic form.

The Cartesian duality states that the ‘body’ and ‘mind’ are two separate entities, existing at extreme ends on the spectrum of worldly experience. This entrenched dualism of the ‘body’ and ‘mind’ has however slowly eroded to reveal a more dialectic relationship, each illuminating of the other. The category of ‘body’ has transcended its trait as a mere ‘physical’ entity, and is now discursively bridged as depictive of a state of ‘mind’. One medium that successfully portrays this bridging of old extremes is Photography.

In mid-February to March, the NUS Museum presented a photography exhibition, The Body. Entries were submitted from various faculties and disciplines, brewing a cornucopia of visual bodily representations each field of thought has to offer. Albeit different in approach and execution, all the photos have a resounding similarity in their meaning. They impart, onto the audience, a visual representation of not only the physical body, but also an insight into the dynamics and interplay of power and negotiation with ideas of space and the bodily ‘normal’ played out on the level of our subconscious mind.

Upon entry into the exhibition gallery, one is greeted by a magnitude of space. The open-ceiling concept of the gallery further illuminates this vast space, perimeted by all the different visual bodily representations, each encased within its own world of meaning. Constantly surrounded by space, not surprisingly the body becomes one of the main visual discussions in most of the photos. The representation of the body in
everyday space is not without negotiation. Body Politics by Andiara Schwingel & Wojtek Chodzko-Zaiko and Little Epiphanies by John Yap Yin Gwee are a few examples that illustrate the power negotiations that take place between the body and space. How does the body define itself within the embedded meanings of space; already loaded with its implications of being gendered or cosmopolitan? These photos show just this. The tension between the two entities help us better understand the everyday negotiations we subconsciously make as we travel within and across spaces.

Another central idea that surfaces in this exhibition is that of disembodiment: the moving away from a state of the bodily ‘normal’. This is successfully displayed in this collection of works. By positing the body as a spatial dimension, Bodyscape by Lim Yaohui manages to extract the idea of bodily holism - dismembering, and reconfiguring it into a new entity, a new form. This new form then creates its own meaning and being about the state of the body, offering us a deeper understanding of our body’s diverse states of existence - beyond the mere physical. Untitled by Arthur Wong and the yoga series by Lin Feng also subvert this state of bodily holism and entrench the body in a state of the abnormal; suspended in its bodily contortions that interestingly offers a symbolic insight into a bodily representation of the mind.

In sum, this exhibition has successfully encapsulated the diverse discourses on the body and has not only presented us with a visual feast of our body, but also exemplified the power of photography as medium to mediate such an intellectual discourse.
NUS Arts Festival 2008 (15 Feb – 23 Mar)
Events at NUS Museum

The Festival featured more than 100 programmes ranging from music, dance, drama, film, visual arts, literary arts to a lifestyle bazaar. The theme for this year’s Festival was Arts + Medicine. Here’s a selection of what Museum had to offer...

Dr SK Chiew’s talk on Song Emperors’ Porcelain was entertaining and informative. Other talks such as Understanding Contemporary Art by Joan Yap and Art for Arthropods by Dr Andy Giger were also well received.

The Kids’ Day Out programmes, Puppet Making and People and Expressions Sketching workshops, were extremely popular and oversubscribed early in the Festival.

Andrew Yeo’s Introduction to Watercolours workshop drew enthusiastic response.

Learning to sketch - drawing inspiration from the late Ng Eng Teng’s sculptures.
This workshop was held as part of NUS Museum’s Paper-to-Gallery* platform. It introduced strategies and considerations for developing projects in public spaces involving art and aesthetics, and was planned for students who are contemplating various curatorial collaborations with NUS Museum.

Dr Patrick Flores (left), a professor in the Art Studies department at the University of The Philippines, and curator of the Philippines National Art Gallery, was the key speaker. Dr Flores started by introducing five major categories of curatorial projects. Conventional art projects, especially involving modern art, tend to be ‘exhibitionary’ in nature whereby themes and displays are conceptualised by a curator. Increasingly, however, curatorial projects involve conceiving temporary installations (‘The Installative’) or performances (‘The Performative’) as strategies for drawing an audience to a site. Building of monuments (‘The Monumental’) and urban spaces (‘The Developmental’) are endeavours which also involve elements of curating. Amongst the different categories, performative projects are highly interactive and often involve a greater degree of risk since the reaction of the audience is not always predictable.

Curating entails giving thought to what a project aims to do with or for the public. Objectives may vary widely including appealing to the sense of civic duty; encouraging a change in behaviour; creating awareness of alternative histories; and instilling the feeling of community. Whatever the objective, participants were reminded of the importance in understanding ‘The Public’. Far from being an undifferentiated mass, the public may be organised along social, political and cultural lines. Whilst a project may attempt to encourage convergence of the masses, it should also acknowledge that diversity exists in the audience and consequently, the need to be sensitive towards such differences.

Dr Flores also spoke about the motivations behind the act of artmaking and display, such as heritage conservation; refinement of culture; developing industry; promoting imagination and anticipation; and encouraging critique. Curators need to be alert to the driving factors and implications of the projects they undertake and how they are participating in the process of appropriating art for particular purposes.

In the second part of the workshop, Malaysian artist Wong Hoy Cheong (lower left) shared his experiences in working with the Roma community in Istanbul. Wong’s purpose was to gain a better understanding of the community and he did this through exploring the life, daily activities and aspirations of the children. The end product was a video assembled from raw footage taken mostly by the children involved in the project. Wong discussed the collaborations which were essential to success, the perceptions of the community towards his work, and the moral dimensions and cultural differences he had to grapple with.

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*Paper-to-Gallery is an exhibition platform which enables the academic community to present its research in a comprehensive and visually enriching format with an emphasis on curatorial methodologies. Details available at [http://www.nus.edu.sg/museum/paper_gallery.htm](http://www.nus.edu.sg/museum/paper_gallery.htm)
An Intern’s Life at NUS Museum

Ugkades Ongying, Naresuan University
Final year student majoring in History

In Nov 2007, I was offered a student internship in the Overseas Cooperation Education Project at the National University of Singapore (NUS) Museum. I am the fourth student to have received this internship with the NUS Museum.

One of Naresuan University’s aims is to develop its students’ competency so that they can become wellrounded graduates. With that in mind, the university established the Overseas Cooperation Education Project in 2004 to support and promote students in order for them to be well prepared to meet the requirements of the work market. During the internship, we are also encouraged to promote Thailand’s unique culture and heritage to the world.

The four month internship in NUS Museum has taught me to apply my knowledge to real work situations. It has also given me the ability to understand different perspectives and develop stronger analytical skills. I have also learned much about multiculturalism in Singapore - languages, religions, traditions, costumes and the cuisine. My English has improved through daily use.

I gained a better understanding of how a museum operates. I have learned how much work goes into the preparation and installation of an exhibition. I assisted in the installation of several exhibitions including Reconfiguration: Chinese Contemporary Art, Coretan: Recent works by Yunizar, NUS Museum South Asian Collection: Fragments, Histories, Contexts, Sculpting Life: The Ng Eng Teng Collection and The Body: A Photography Exhibition. I also learnt the finer points of how to remove, store and conserve artworks at the end of an exhibition.

I assisted in several events – for example the Museum Open House and exhibition openings. I was tasked with manning the reception counter where I had to greeted guests and had them sign the guestbook.

One of my most memorable experiences at NUS Museum was when I assisted as a guide to the President and delegates from Bangkok University when they visited the Museum. I also guided Thai students from ACS international School and showed Mr Nixon Chen, a part-time lecturer of Chulalongkorn University, Chiang Mai University and Thammasat University, around the Museum.

My other learning experiences were to aesthetically light the artworks in the exhibition gallery, photograph artworks, change Thermo-hydrograph charts (this machine monitors humidity and temperature levels in the gallery), check artwork details from catalogues before installation, handle artworks and provide logistics and administrative support to various Museum Officers.

I was an intern from 1 November 2007 to 29 February 2008 and it was a great opportunity to gain a better insight into how a museum operates. It was certainly a very rewarding experience and one that I will not forget. I would like to thank all staff of NUS Museum for their kindness and guidance during my internship.
Snap Shots…

1 Feb
Zhang Wanjing thrills the audience with her extraordinary skills on the accordion in *Gypsy Flame*.

4 Feb
Dr Mathana Santiwat, President (2nd from right) and delegates of Bangkok University visit *Reconfiguration: Chinese Contemporary Art*.

14 Mar
Garrett Kam performing an Oki-Jawa dance, an interesting fusion between Okinawan and Javanese dances.

22 Mar
Prof I Nyoman Sedana, Visiting Research Fellow from Asia Research Institute (seated) mesmerizing the audience with his mastery of Balinese performing arts.

20 Mar
Docent Rohaya guiding students from the Universiti Teknologi Petronas (Perak), guest performers in NUS Chinese Orchestra’s annual concert.
Seven Other Jobs A Curator Can Excel In

Wang Zineng

**Accountant.** Independent or tied to an institution, the curator makes prudent (and sometimes wasteful) expenditures, works within a budget, deals with freight and custom taxes, remembers and determines the value of works and takes care of loans.

**Dinner parttime host.** Whether the budget is modest or lavish, the curator selects and prepares artworks, plans the programmes, pays attention to the setting, and goes the extra mile to make guests enjoy themselves.

**Moneylender.** The curator on the ground is sometimes a moneylender to poor struggling young artists. But unlike the typical moneylender, interest comes in the form of much gratitude, friendship and perhaps offers of portraits.

**PR manager.** The curator who excels at the job smilingly notes expectations, demands, requests and deadlines. At openings, the curator sips free beverage on one hand and keeps the other free to shake hands and distribute name cards.

**Social worker.** Like social workers who pair up the needy with various service providers, a curator has clients and service providers at his or her fingertips. The curator is always ready to connect parties which match up to each other. A good database is essential. A measure of a good curator is being able to pair up one party with the most appropriate other.

**Teacher.** One often hears from great teachers that teaching is as much about learning from students. Every interaction a curator has on the ground – with artists, collectors, galleries – is an educational transaction.

**Window-dresser.** The curator dresses up the exhibition space with works, pondering how to make works stand out, their essences and characters unobstructed, whilst keeping in mind the overall aesthetics of the exhibition space.

*Wang Zineng is NUS Museum’s adjunct researcher in Indonesia where he is learning all about the world of curating.*

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**Sunday Programmes @ NUS Museum**

**Basic Chinese Ink Painting Course by Lim Choon Jin**

This course introduces the basics of this traditional art form and its application in present times. Students will learn the brushstrokes used in Chinese ink work and techniques such as ink-wash, water-wash and ink-splashing. This is the first of a 2-stage course. Each stage comprises 8 lessons.

**Date** : 13 Apr, 20 Apr, 27 Apr, 4 May, 11 May, 18 May, 15 May, 1 Jun 2008 (8 lessons)

**Time** : 10.30am to 12.30pm

**Venue** : Celadon Room, NUS Museum

**Fees** : $240. Cheque should be made payable to ‘Lim Choon Jin’ and sent to ‘c/o NUS Museum (Sunday Programmes - Chinese Ink Painting)’. Please send your cheques by 5 April 2008.

Max 15 students (16 years and above). Course will start only if a minimum of 5 participants sign up.
Upcoming Exhibitions

**The Blacksmiths’ Alchemy**

25 April – 29 June 2008

Presenting 73 works of the four Spanish artists - Julio González, Martín Chirino, Andreu Alfaro and Miquel Navarro - from the permanent collection of Valencian Institute of Modern Art, IVAM.

Blacksmiths’ Alchemy as the name suggests - comprises sculptures by artists who have background knowledge of the blacksmiths’ trade. Blacksmiths were the masters of fire with the ability to turn iron (material) into another material/form. In ancient Iberian times, blacksmiths were the initiators of artworks, tools, weapons and ornaments. The exhibition presents the reinvention of making sculptures by means of the welding torch. These artists expressed the art uniquely in an abstract style using materials like iron and bronze to create infinite possibilities in the form of unidentified shapes; examples are of the human form and even intricate flowers. González considers his sculptures as “drawing in space”.

A variety of works exhibited include drawings, sculptures, jewellery & installation.

**STRATEGIES TOWARDS THE REAL**

S. Sudjojono and Contemporary Indonesian Art

10 May – 24 Aug 2008

From Sudjojono’s idealistic articulations of the real as Indonesian nationalist and revolutionary aesthetic in the mid-20th century, the exhibition traces changes and continuities in ideas, polemics and practices in artistic representations of the real through to the works of fourteen contemporary Indonesian artists in the last decade. No longer seen merely as a visual style in artistic representation but instead as enduring values and attitudes, the exhibition will address ideas and discourse on the real by continually questioning the function of the artist in society and what constitutes the real as seen by them.

A total of forty works of S. Sudjojono and contemporary artists drawn from various private and institutional collections in Indonesia and Singapore will be exhibited alongside each other in two galleries in NUS Museum – NX Gallery and part of the South and Southeast Asian Collection Gallery – to reveal connections between the modern and contemporary along the discourse of artistic representations of the real.

**Participating Artists**

Abdi Setiawan | Agus Suwage | Arahmaiani | Eko Nugroho | Hafiz | Heri Dono | I Nyoman Masriadi | Iwan Wijono | Popok Tri Wahyudi | Rudi Mantofani | S Sudjojono | S Teddy D | Sigit Santoso | Taring Padi | Tisna Sanjaya

Organisers
State Corporation for Spanish Cultural Action Abroad, SEACEX
Valencian Institute of Modern Art, IVAM

Presenter
NUS Museum, NUS Centre For the Arts, Singapore

Collaborators
Spanish Ministry of Exterior Affairs and Cooperation
Spanish Ministry of Culture
Spanish Embassy in Singapore