

For Immediate Release

# NUS MUSEUM

presents

## Writing Power | Zulkifli Yusoff

Singapore, 25 August 2011 – NUS Museum present two seminal works by Malaysian artist Zulkifli Yusoff.

The exhibition *Writing Power | Zulkifli Yusoff* opens at NUS Museum on 9 September 2011 and runs till 6 December 2011.

As an enquiry into the development of conceptual and installation art in Malaysia since the 1980s, *Writing Power*, brings together two seminal installation artworks by the influential Malaysian artist Zulkifli Yusoff. The two installations, completed almost two decades apart, are curated in such a manner that they systematically unpack the conceptual grounds and the workings that have informed the artist's practice since the 1980s. According to Ahmad Mashadi, Head, NUS Museum, "Zul is one of the most influential Malaysian artist of his generation. He shaped new perspectives on contemporary art making during the early 1990s, looking at history as ways to think about the current issues. He immerses his audience into his large scale installations. These installations, powerful in their experiential quality, circulated in international biennales including the Asia Pacific Triennale in 1993."

The two artworks are as follows:

- *Pelayaran Munsyi Abdullah*, 2003, Aliya and Farouk Khan Collection
- *Power 1*, 1991, Singapore Art Museum Collection

Entering into the Malaysian contemporary art scene in the late 1980s, Zulkifli Yusoff's practice looks at how historical texts colour cultural memory and affect contemporary understandings of the Self. Often arranging materials in a matrix of citation and juxtaposition, and presenting them as *archival scaffolds*, a complex of texts and objects. Curator Shabbir Hussain Mustafa commented, "We are fortunate to have assembled two of Zul's most significant installations. Zul's works are significant for his use of historical literature from colonial Malaya. He brings these texts into contemporary reckoning, providing his audience perspectives into history as much as the present conditions. This exhibition is presented conceptually as an encounter between colonial and native texts. Making reference to the artist's methods, *Writing Power* mobilizes the colonial archive as a potent site for creative encounters. In other words, working collaboratively with the artist, in this exhibition, we want to demonstrate to the visitors the building blocks that go into themes conceived by the artist."

Combining literary passages, facsimiled pages from historical texts, and images from old newspapers and adverts with the artist's installations, the exhibition is curated to provide an insight into the artist's approaches in installation making. As an artist, Zulkifli constantly melds critical and historical perspectives with newer formal approaches. Zulkifli Yusoff notes, "I needed to look into the fundamentals, in this case, the structure, the planes, the angles, the trajectories, the lines, shapes, forms, textures, the directions,

movements, flow. I needed to come up with my own 'hukum' or 'order' so-to-speak, and even at times break from it."

**Writing Power** draws on three texts which were mobilized by Zulkifli Yusoff for his installations since the 1990s.

The three historical texts are as follows:

- *The Story of Abdullah's Voyage to Kelantan* (c. 1838) which remains a crucial reference for the study of modern Malay literature and authored by the father of modern Malay literature Munshi Abdullah;
- *Malay Annals* (c. 16<sup>th</sup> century) which locates the genealogy of the Malay Sultanates of the Malaccan Empire; and
- *Malay Sketches* (c. 1895) penned by the first Resident General of the Federated Malay States, Sir Frank Swettenham, which provides glimpses into his interactions with the communities of the region.

Curator Mustafa adds, "Whilst the title of the exhibition claims how power comes to be 'written' or 'scripted', the attempt is to also project into the dynamic role of 'reading' and the multitudinous potentials it holds."

**Writing Power** enacts a play which prospects engagements between image, texts and ideas and the associated authorial positions, negotiations that implicate the viewer's interpretative agency.

As an assemblage of sites exposing everyday work materials ranging from archival traces to testimonials to media prints which make 'seeing' possible, **Writing Power** form clusters of traces that are fragmentary rather than complete.

**Writing Power** constantly calls out: if it matters not-knowing what these traces means, who made it, when and why, where do we place them, or how to approach them?

## Credits

Curated by Shabbir Hussain Mustafa, NUS. The exhibition is made possible with loans from the Aliya and Farouk Khan Collection and Singapore Art Museum. The exhibition catalogue will include essays by Assoc Prof Hasnul Jamal Saidon, Universiti Sains Malaysia and Zanita Anuar, Jabatan Muzium Malaysia.

Zulkifli Yusoff (b. 1962 Yan, Kedah), Malaysia's sole representative to the Venice Biennale in 1997 is one of the first Malaysian artists to investigate installations and digital prints, Zulkifli has also made tin sculptures as well as ceramic paintings and sculptures, besides the usual paintings and drawings. He graduated from the MARA Institute of Technology in Shah Alam, Malaysia with a Diploma in Art and Design (Fine Art) in 1989 and with a Master of Arts from Manchester Polytechnic, UK in 1990. He received Major Awards at the Young Contemporaries show in 1988 and 1989 at the National Art Gallery in KL, and the Grand Minister's Prize at the 3rd Salon Malaysia in 1992. He is collected by the Petronas Art Gallery and National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur, Singapore Art Museum, Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum and the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum. In 2007, he was bestowed the Anugerah Akademik Negara by the Malaysian government, its highest academic honour, for his contributions to the visual arts.

## **Media Enquires**

For more information on ***Writing Power | Zulkifli Yusoff***, media interviews, gallery tours or high resolution images, please contact

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## **Exhibition Details**

Exhibition period: 9 September 2011 – 6 December 2011

Venue: NUS Museum  
University Cultural Centre  
50 Kent Ridge Crescent  
National University of Singapore  
Singapore 119279

Opening hours: 10am – 7.30pm (Tuesday – Saturday)  
10am – 6pm (Sunday)  
Closed on Monday & Public Holidays

Admission: Free

## **About NUS Museum**

NUS Museum is a comprehensive museum for teaching and research. It focuses on Asian regional art and culture, and seeks to create an enriching experience through its collections and exhibitions. The Museum has over 7,000 artefacts and artworks divided across four collections. The *Lee Kong Chian Collection* consists of a wide representation of Chinese materials from ancient to contemporary art; the *South and Southeast Asian Collection* holds a range of works from Indian classical sculptures to modern pieces; and the *Ng Eng Teng Collection* is a donation from the late Singapore sculptor and Cultural Medallion recipient of over 1,000 artworks. A fourth collection, the *Straits Chinese Collection*, is located at NUS' Baba House at 157 Neil Road.

NUS Museum launched the NX Gallery in 2006. It is conceived as a contemporary art venue to showcase emerging artistic trends in Singapore, Southeast Asia and beyond, as well as to encourage critical curatorial and museum practices. For the NUS Centre For the Arts and the NUS Museum, these aims afford an emphasis in partnerships within the University and beyond, underscored by the recognition that art and culture form a powerful nexus that connect different disciplines and institutional interests. Past exhibitions organized at the NX Gallery include *Picturing Relations: Simryn Gill and Tino Djumini* (2007), *Strategies Towards the Real: S. Sudjojono and Contemporary Indonesian Art* (2008), *Bound For Glory: Wong Hoy Cheong* (2008), *Jendela: A Play of the Ordinary* (2009), *Illuminance | Agus Suwage and Filippo Sciascia* (2010) and most recently *Cingondewah | An Art Project by Tisna Sanjaya* (2011).