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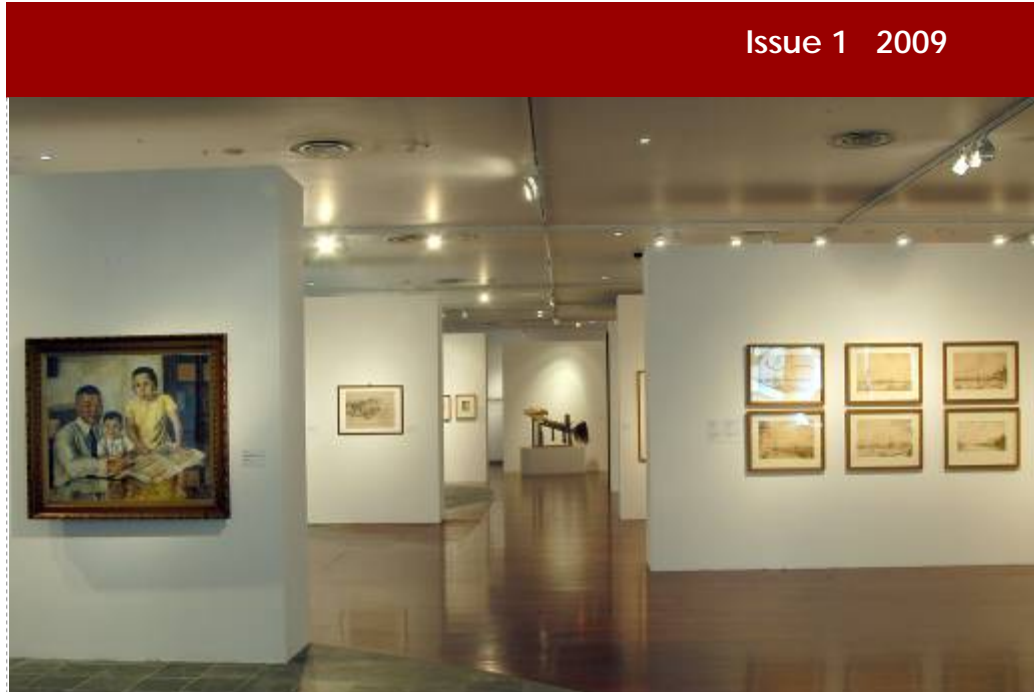
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Constructed Landscapes Singapore in Southeast Asia

Angeline Ooi

Angeline is a Year 4 English Literature student from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Her research interests include literature of war, gender issues, and Southeast Asian art and literature.

If one were to ask me about Singapore, the first image that comes to mind would be the numerous cranes that fill the skyline of Marina Bay. As the joke goes, Singapore's national bird is the 'crane'. The point is that Singapore is constantly redeveloping and reconstructing its land, such that the memories that we have of places fade away as easily as they appear. For me, *Constructed Landscapes: Singapore in Southeast Asia*, which displays several artists' perspectives of Singapore, holds much appeal for it evokes familiar memories, as much as it lends fresh insight to the remembrance

of places. Through paintings, photographs, videos, sculptures and installations, the exhibition traces artistic interpretations of wellknown sites, hidden areas such as alleys and back lanes, as well as places that have changed significantly over the years.

Eng Tow captures Bukit Timah in a series of watercolor illustrations on 6 x 9 cm handmade 'washi' paper. The miniature size of the illustrations in comparison to the actual size of Bukit Timah seems incongruent, yet the series speaks out. She explores the different angles of Bukit Timah, as seen from its summit, and from Hill View Estate, to the closeup details of the forest interior and the sites within Bukit Timah such as the quarry. Bukit Timah is personalized and compressed into the artist's own impression of the place. The soft watercolor effect and the use of warm tones reveal something haunting about Bukit Timah, as a place that has long existed but always, quietly, remains in the backdrop of a modernized city. Eng Tow's representation of Bukit Timah serves as a reminder of nature, a temporary sojourn for solitude and contemplation.

Cheong Soo Pieng's *St. Andrew's Cathedral* questions the subject of its own painting. The spire of the cathedral is seen on the top left of the painting while dilapidated houses and rubble on the ground dominate the foreground. Is it perhaps a commentary on the paradoxical nature of construction



Cheong Soo Pieng
St Andrew's Cathedral, 1955

as that which also involves destruction? The building of a colonial cathedral, which marks civilization and progress, also masks the ruins that [literally] lie behind it. And it is in this invisible and overlooked space behind the cathedral that Cheong calls our attention to.

Heman Chong's *Plants* is an installation that is strategically placed in the middle of the gallery. It occupies its own space within the exhibition space. Yet it is as inconspicuous as the dark corners of a room – and there are no dark corners in this room. *Plants* is made up of seven pots of black artificial plants, arranged in a single file within a semidarkened space. On a primary level, the use of artificial plants can be seen in relation to the rise of gardens. Trimmed, cultivated and perfected, the garden stands for man's desire to recreate nature. As an allegory, the installation points to the state of the modern nation. As an extension of the garden, there is also a desire in many, as we often recall, to 'mould the future of the nation', by 'molding the people'.

Walking inside this darkened space one feels curiosity mingled with a fear of the unknown, and a sense of blindness. Is this a cautionary tale of the future that one will inhabit?

As the title reads, one realizes that a landscape is ideologically constructed; space is organized and structured in ways that offer and steer the viewer into a particular vision. What I like about the exhibition is that it recognizes the plural and multidimensional constructions of landscapes. There is no single, demarcated view of Singapore. The exhibition allows for multiple possibilities of seeing and revisiting places – places that are overlooked, forgotten, or have simply disappeared.

As a side note, it is rather interesting that the gallery space is itself categorized according to the themes of engagement, memory and imagination; the manipulation of the movement and the thought process of the viewer is aptly congruent to the very notion of an ideologically constructed landscape. A museum *is* such a space. ■

'The exhibition allows for multiple possibilities of seeing and revisiting places – places that are overlooked, forgotten, or have simply disappeared.'

Exhibition Review

Woodblock Prints

*Constructed Landscapes
Singapore in Southeast Asia*

Sarah Chan

English Literature, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Year 4. Sarah is the Vice President of NUS Boulevard, a student group managed by NUS Museum to promote the arts.



Lim Yew Kuan. *Seaside*, 1966

As the saying goes, 'A picture speaks a thousand words', and paintings, drawings and photographs can indeed convey and tell a story, even where words have failed. However, as I scanned through some of the woodblock prints from the exhibition *Constructed Landscapes: Singapore in Southeast Asia*, featuring different artists' impressions of Singapore, it became starkly evident how varied people's interpretations of a common subject can be and it struck me that while a picture does

indeed speak a thousand words, singly, it can only tell a story that is a partial fragment of a larger and more complex reality. From woodblock prints which capture the rustic and idyllic charm of Singapore as a fishing village, to others which document tragic events like the Bukit Ho Swee Fire, yet others which show inhabitants of Singapore engaging in more shady activities like extortion, these pieces when taken singly, merely tell a monolithic and all-too-static story of Singapore. Yet, when viewed as a collective, they tell a story of Singapore that is so multifaceted that it cannot be fully encompassed in a sole picture.

In Lim Yew Kuan's prints titled *Seaside* and *Malay Kampong (Attap Singapore)*, he presents Singapore in the past, in all its simplicity and charm that is considered typical of the countryside. From capturing villagers engaging in the simple pleasure of fishing, to featuring the *kampong* as Singapore's once communal form of living, Lim conveys an image of Singapore as a rustic and idyllic fishing village. Further to documenting the inhabitants of Singapore and their activities, Nature also occupies most of the space in Lim's works and he pays a considerable amount of attention to capturing and detailing Nature in its relatively untouched and unspoiled state. Lim's works inadvertently then present Singapore in a more

Prelapsarian light, where inhabitants are both at one with each other and with Nature.

Koeh Sia Yong's prints, *Gambling* and *Extortion*, on the other hand, present a shadier side of Singapore. In contrast to Lim's works, human figures dominate the space of *Gambling* and *Extortion* and their activities are brought to the forefront and become the focus of Koeh's works. Yet, these activities are evidently not respectable ones and the predominantly darkened areas of the prints not only recreate the shady and dingy locales where such activities normally occur, they also aid in conveying the figurative darkness that tends to be associated with such activities.

The Singapore that Koeh conveys in his works then is evidently quite incongruous with the Singapore that Lim presents, yet despite this incongruity, neither is necessarily more true than the other. Just as nothing is merely black or white, reality too cannot be reduced to starkly separate absolutes and a picture can only ever reveal one side of a story. Each of these prints thus only represents one artist's interpretation and impression of Singapore and it is only when these prints are viewed as a collective, can one glean a more complete and complex view of Singapore, that is truer to life. ■

Extract from Welcome
Address by Ahmad Mashadi,
Head of NUS Museum during
the Opening of Constructed
Landscapes: Singapore in
Southeast Asia on 15 January

NUS Museum

Established in 1955 before Singapore's independence, the NUS Museum may be regarded as a prototypical institution. The passage through decolonisation, simultaneous formation of newly independent states, and the emergent experience of modernity in its disruptive, tumultuous and transformative forms provide a context to the Museum's establishment and development.

The NUS Museum operates within a fluidity of contexts. Since 1955, contingent on the developments of Singapore and curatorial directions, the Museum and its collection underwent a series of changes. The collections were divided, transferred temporarily, recalled, integrated and separated, amalgamated with other collections, expanded, eventually into its current form. In other words, the Museum mirrors the historical contours of the University from 1955 to the present.

The Museum's collection today is diverse ranging from classical Chinese and Indian materials to

modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art. Of course, it is impossible to talk about the NUS Museum without acknowledging the significant role of Michael Sullivan. As its first curator, Sullivan initiated the collection, conceived as a teaching collection. Among Sullivan's original vision were the provision of 'a centre for the study into art'; to complement an art history programme; to facilitate 'research into the art and archaeology of Southeast Asia'; and to gather a 'representative collection of art of those civilisations that have chiefly contributed to the creation of Malayan culture'. Sullivan positioned the Museum's broad and fundamental role in contextualizing and reading modernity through the multiple problematics of continuity and change, originaries and circulation, cultural transfer, pedagogy and adaptation.

Beyond teaching, the Museum and its collection, in Sullivan's vision shall provide the student a 'spiritual and emotional experience that will help to bring meaning and illumination into the rest of his life.'

We cannot also reflect on the NUS Museum without mentioning the significant critical and reflective inputs of T.K. Sabapathy, Singapore's eminent art historian, critic and curator. In 2002, referencing and adapting Sullivan's vision, T.K. Sabapathy

prospects series of ideas: defining the status of the museum in context of the university as teaching institution; development of collections, exhibition programmes and publications; engagement with institutions in Singapore, in the region of Southeast Asia and beyond; and, shaping a role of the museum as a distinct and productive entity.

Here, taken contemporaneously today, Sabapathy's invocation of Sullivan's vision provides a resonance that prompts a revisit of the Museum's purpose, beyond the focus on the modern conditioned by questions of national identity formation, and embracing the discursive possibilities that involve various theoretical and functional positions, where the plurality of contemporary knowledges and experiences is accommodated as a dynamic matrix that offers possibilities in exhibitionary experimentation and audience engagements. For the University, the Museum sits, as nexus between departments and the disciplines they represent, aiding through visual culture and exhibitions the communication and the debate of ideas.

The Exhibition

Positioned within these considerations, curatorial strategies in a University setting may be tasked to facilitate a fluid meeting of discourses and perspectives – complementary, differentiated or divergent. In operationalizing these

interests, curatorial methods are to be developed cognizant of diverse interests, involving learning which engages and experimentations alongside varied theoretical considerations, conjoining various disciplines and partnerships, yet always maintaining the primacy of the individual experience as modes of narration and signification. Here, the university museum may be seen to function as an interlocutor of disciplines and knowledges, a dynamic site where notions of publics and authorship collude to sustain indeterminate sets of readings.

Given these considerations, the NUS Museum is happy to collaborate with the Department of Architecture in organising and curating *Constructed Landscapes*. This is not the first time that the Museum has collaborated with the School. In 2007, we worked together to organise an exhibition on *Alvar Aalto* which dovetailed with a project on spatialisation and visualisation of architecture for first year architectural students. In 2008, we collaborated on a site specific exhibition project *Site, Situation, Spectator*, organised alongside the University Scholars Programme. These projects are significant for the engagements that we forged with a number of SDE (School of Design and Environment) staff including Prof Chan Yew Lih, Dr Lilian Chee and

Kiang and Prof Wong Yunn Chii for kindly providing their endorsement and support. Here, the Museum and CFA would also like to take the opportunity to congratulate the Department of Architecture on the occasion of its 50th anniversary and for its long service to architectural education and practice in Singapore.

The exhibition *Constructed Landscapes* features 80 works by Singapore and regional artists. By invoking the term 'constructed', we hope to highlight the transaction between man and his environment, ways in which the environment are observed and recorded and the transformations that take place, in physical and emotive terms. The curators have chosen Cheong Soo Pieng's *St Andrew's Cathedral* (1955) as a central image of the exhibition. It defines an urban space that is dynamic, conditioned by processes of change, but also continuities. Indeed one may read it as an image that marks urban conditions during the 1950s as redundant structures make way for progress, while others continue to persist as part of a vision of a modern landscape. It is a record of a moment, but not one that is dispassionate and pure in objectivity. In such a painting, the artist brings with him an aesthetic agency that empowers him to situate a sense of tension, ambiguity or ambivalence. It is also in the method of the artist that

Alvar Aalto



The Alvar Aalto exhibition (2007) featured selected presentations by Year 1 Architecture students.

Site, Situation, Spectator



Site, Situation, Spectator (2007) featured works by four Year 1 Architecture students in the University Scholars Programme.

one may see attitudes and dispositions. Here in the exhibition one will see works that are painted through various lens that lay bare the contingencies of their practice conditioned by migration, colonisation and sense of space or place. This is a rich exhibition where one may spectate from the perspective of factual urban change, or nuanced in the acknowledgement of indeterminate perspectives that conflate artistic vision and significance of interpretation. For this wonderful curatorial effort, I would like to congratulate co-curators Dr Lai Chee Kien, School of Design and Environment (SDE), and Karen Lim, NUS Museum. Dr Lai is an important researcher in Singapore and Malayan art history and he is known for his brilliant translation of Marco Hsu's *A Brief History of Malayan Art*. He had also recently curated an important exhibition *Building Merdeka: Independence Architecture in Kuala Lumpur 1957-66* (2007). Karen is significant for her work in curating Singapore contemporary art. She had also been a curatorial consultant to the LTA (Land Transport Authority) in its major public art project for the Circle Line. I would also like to thank Dr Johannes Widodo (SDE) for his significant contribution in

conceptualising the various programmes associated with exhibition. This includes the wonderful tieup with a module, *Singapore Urban History and Architecture* which introduces the students to the development of Singapore physical landscape through interdisciplinary means. We look forward to more collaborations with SDE, and with other faculties in the University.

Included in the exhibition are works principally from the Museum's permanent collection and other materials from artists' and other collections. We would like to thank the collectors and artists: Dr Hoh Kok Hoe, Eng Tow, Tolla Duke, Estate of the late Lim Mu Hue, Heman Chong, Jason Wee, Delia Prvaki, Jeremy Sharma, the family of the late Mohammad Din Mohammad, Milenko Prvaki and the NUS Central Library (for loan of Dr Ivan Polunin's film footage). The exhibition exemplifies an attempt to restate the didactic and dynamic possibilities of the University collection mobilised to facilitate formal teaching and learning, yet cognizant in its regard for curatorship as a significant mediator in unlocking and generating the value of aesthetic encounters that yield indeterminate yet productive intellectual outcomes. ■

Resource for students



NUS Students in the module, SSD2213 *Singapore Urban History and Architecture*, select works for their assignment – Reconstructing Singapore.



Schools such as Tanjong Katong Girls, visited on 20 and 21 January. The exhibition ends in December 2009.

At the Opening



L-R: Guest of honour Mrs Cheong Koon Hean, CEO of Urban Renewal Authority, Mr Joseph Mullinix, NUS Deputy President (Administration), Ms Christine Khor, Director of NUS Centre For the Arts and Dr Ivan Polunin.



And the Difference Is

Liau Shu Juan

The writer's interest is in western oil painting and contemporary works which can range from new media art to photography and graphic design. A Year 1 student at Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences majoring in Communications and New Media, she enjoys analysing and creating art works.

Inflatable garbage bags hanging in the air, a video of seemingly nonsensical conversations and an ordinary filing cabinet. The man on the street wouldn't call them art. However, before you turn around and scoff at them, do take a moment to reflect. For such works, the concept and the experience are what matters, coupled with specific aesthetic strategies. Welcome to the world of contemporary art where modern experiences collide headon with traditional concepts of what constitutes art.

The works on display are part of the *And the Difference Is* exhibit, a collaboration between Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces (Melbourne) and the NUS Museum. Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces values creativity, risk and experimentation and this vision is reflected in the works. As I entered

the gallery, I was greeted by a surreal sight of garbage bags or more accurately, a mishmash of colourful plastic bags hanging in the air, blown up to the point that they look like a distorted molecular structure. Simon Pericich the artist has intended it to be a commentary on the wastefulness of consumerism. However, the meaning behind this artwork is not immediately apparent as I was distracted by the varying patterns and color of the plastic bags which range from your typical NTUC bags to the distinctive yellow Art Friend bags. However, the title of the work adds another dimension to its meaning. *All Together Now!* reminds me of the rubbish bags being lifted up into the air in one sweeping motion from the dumpster to the incinerator and represents the idea of a mass of plastic bags of waste being disposed of. The hot air within the plastic bags also gives the bags ample volume; literally and metaphorically adding weight to the issue of wastefulness and consumerism.

Moving further into the exhibits, I came across a favourite of mine- *The Quote Generator* by Danielle Freakley. The quote generator is not a machine. It actually refers to Freakley herself. Freakley speaks only in quotes and they are meticulously referenced verbally as the conversation progresses, making the figure of speech seem unnatural and difficult to follow.

However, I find it a really interesting and creative way of communication. As the quote generator, she devised a new form of communication with her often witty one liner referenced from pop culture, ranging from John Lennon to Snoop Dogg (who is often a source for insults). The exhibit is divided into two parts. One is a video of Freakley speaking in quotes to strangers and the other is an interactive site where viewers can be a quote generator for once by standing opposite each other and speaking only in quotes to each other from a Quote Generator book.

I find the video particularly hilarious as it shows the reactions of the people when faced with Freakley's unconventional form of communication. Their reactions ranged from playful to confused and perplexed. There was a particular incident where an elderly man in reaction to Freakley's reply of 'Yes- Optus 1991', thought she was talking nonsense and impatiently brushed her away with 'Optus? What phone company is that?' Of course, he could not get the gist of Freakley's performance where Optus actually is a reference for the word 'yes'. Cinderella, one of the characters she spoke to in Disneyland, is another humorous example. Freakley through her quote reference way of talking, wanted to seek advice on love from Cinderella, the believer of

true love herself, but instead got a cold reaction. Cinderella in turn asked Freakley if she wanted to 'take a picture instead'. Although the context of the conversations changes, Freakley always manages to find a suitable quote and accurately mentions the year of reference. Hence it speaks volumes of her amazing memory, eloquence and wit. Furthermore, it was also a feat to be applauded as she has already been speaking in this unnatural manner for the past two years and will continue for a year more.

Rounding the corner of the gallery, I came across two LCD screens placed side by side against each other. This was *Spice* by Matthew Ngui. If you are wondering why 'Spice', the answer is revealed in the interview of the people onscreen. What is most interesting about this work is its presentation. A man's face fills the left screen while a woman's face fills the right screen. The use of double TV screens to form a joint image is not new though, as seen in new media artists like Bill Viola. Speaking on gendered response, Ngui's work is a great example of how different males and females communicate. Although it may sound stereotypical, males are generally more reticent and less outspoken compared to females and this is revealed in the interviews onscreen. When I listened to the interview of the men on the left screen as they spoke in a reserved

manner, giving the impression that they did not want to reveal more. However, when I moved on to the interview of the women on the right screen, I was immediately drawn into their conversation as they peppered the interview with laughter and interesting tidbits of their lives. They also tended to reveal more of their personal history whether prompted or not, in an upbeat manner.

Gabrielle De Vietri's *Relationship Contracts* is located in a discreet corner of the gallery, made up of a simple filing cabinet standing on a grey carpet. The artist gives me the impression that she wanted it to look as mundane as possible, from the dull filing cabinet to the conventional office accessories on top of the cabinet. However, it is this ordinariness that draws me to the work to explore its nooks and crannies, to find out what exactly is interesting about this work. Most importantly though, the key to understanding this work is the filing cabinet's opened drawer. When standing at a distance and facing the filing cabinet directly, one will be psychologically drawn to the work as the square carpet on the ground aligns the viewer's eyes towards the cabinet and the opened drawer acts like an invitation to examine its contents. Within the drawer, one will find 11 brown folders containing 11 contracts, ranging from 'one-night stand' to 'meaningful', and 'expiry date' (aka exchange student)

relationships. To satisfy my curiosity, I went through every single folder and sentence in the document. It soon became a tedious and monotonous task as the relationship contracts are made to imitate formal legal documents. However, it was not totally yawn inducing work as there were snippets of interesting and hilariously true agreements in the contracts. For example in the 'meaningful relationship' contract, in order to terminate it, you have to agree to slip into severe depression, need the aid of antidepressants or get into a one night stand relationship (presumably to temporarily heal the broken heart). However, there are also snippets of painfully true information as seen in the 'smile and nod' relationship where the relationship progresses from brief greetings to forgetting the person's name and finally to pretending not to notice the person. Flipping through all the relationship contracts, I realise that the responses are all so real and true and this implies that our responses towards relationships are actually quite uniform despite our different personality or characteristic traits. Furthermore, the work reminds viewers of our human qualities that we are flawed by nature in our emotional responses towards the different types of relationships.

And the Difference Is is not your usual exhibition of traditional paintings and sculptures. Therefore,

the viewer has to go there with an open mind and the willingness to spend some moments contemplating the meaning behind the artworks. The intentions of the artists may not be obvious but that's the fascinating thing about contemporary art where the meanings behind the works are endless. You will stand in front of the work and wonder in what way it is considered art. But with an open mind and a boundless imagination, the possibilities are endless. ■



Gabrielle de Vietri
Relationship Contracts, 2004- 2008

Artist-in-Residence Simon Pericich



Simon Pericich
All Together Now! 2008

Australian artist Simon Pericich's practice employs found or salvaged materials that are repurposed or recycled in often socially useful or revelatory ways. He was in Singapore from 24 November to 14 December 2008 for a 3 week residency at NUS Museum to work on his piece, *All Together Now!* for the *And the Difference Is* exhibition.

NL: When did you first want to be an artist?

SP: When I was really young, I soon realised my antisocial behaviour could be labelled 'creative' and that this was deemed a good thing. I also learnt if you continue doing antisocial things, like working really hard making part-time monuments and not getting paid properly for it, it was possible to become a professional artist. This was appealing because I didn't have to be a farmer like my parents and their job looked too strange and too hard. Actually if I think about it, there is a lot in common with visual art and farming.

NL: What are the most important influences that have moved you as an artist?

SP: A disposition of paranoia, with a personal ability to afford the luxury of time in a world that celebrates a climate of insanity.

NL: Do you visualize your art before creating? How does the process of creating an art object begin for you?

SP: My process is kind of like creating an ad break. I get a very clear image of the product and the pitch. The whole activity is fuelled by a cathartic and playful desire to exorcise some kind of hysterical emotional misunderstanding, usually between myself and a handful of inanimate bits of rubbish.

NL: Tell us about your experience working in Singapore preparing for this exhibition.

SP: Aw, it was great fun. I haven't been to Singapore before so we spent most of our time with our mouths wide in gaping awe. It was great to meet the staff and their assistance in bringing in plastic bags to make the work was invaluable. I was so surprised by Singapore's efficient waste management system and its precarious love for procedures.

Singapore is an amazing place to experience.

NL: How have people responded to your work here and elsewhere?

SP: I think artworks are generally approached with an embarrassed apathy from the general public. My works have received everything from 'what the heck is that piece of nonsense. You're a moron' to 'that amazingly sublime masterpiece of our time has given me reason to live' (well not quite on the last one but there's always tomorrow(?)). The most flattering experience is seeing other people's work that has been directly influenced by my work. It's a funny situation because others influence my work heavily and maybe eventually all artworks will look the same and they will be exactly like daytime television programs.

NL: What do you want people to think about or take away with them when they see your work?

SP: Lots of different things...ideally I'd like to think people muse about their current position within a larger contemporary community and also an opportunity to create and participate. ■



La Libreria Book Artist

Eriko Hirashima



Book artist Eriko Hirashima runs La Libreria, a workshop space on the Top level of NUS Museum. Apart from art books which are available for sale on her website, she holds book binding workshops.

NL: Tell us about La Libreria. When did you set it up and why?

EH: La Libreria is an artists' bookshop and a space for any book arts activities. Currently, book binding workshops (one of my activities) are held regularly. Although, La libreria started on Queen Street in 2004 to promote artists' books here in Singapore, it is also one of my book projects in Singapore.

NL: What is Book Arts?

EH: Book Arts is one of the visual art fields. It treats books as a visual art form. However, it can be also said that Book Arts or Artists' Book is still controversial among some Art critics. The technical side is not viewed

like other art forms, such as painting, sculpture, photography and printing, which already have been established and are mature art fields. Some discourses consider the Artists' Book as a new hybrid art form.

NL: Describe the work of one book artist whom you admire.

EH: I admire many artists' books and respect the book artists. It is honestly impossible to choose only one person's books...

NL: How do you select the art books and where do you find them?

EH: I have friends who make books and do book arts activities so I ask them to send books here. Also sometimes I go to find books at the (Artists) Book Fairs in Europe. What interests me is the concepts found in the books, as well as the techniques employed.

NL: What is your art background?

EH: I took a long journey to reach here... My grandmother was a master printer in *Bingata*, a traditional Japanese printing technique for textiles. I was influenced by her when I was a teenager and majored in Textile Design in college. In my course of studies, students learned weaving and printing techniques. The standards that we were held to were very high. When I was a student, I started to question why technical skills alone can be considered good work. But, later

I realized how useful these skills are for taking care of the small details, which determine the final quality of a work. I learned patience through the long process of weaving. After finishing college, my idea of Textiles was slightly changed. Then I went to Britain to continue my studies in Textiles. I was interested in a more conceptual approach to using textiles in art. In college, I had a lot of problems learning in English. It was very difficult for me to deal with finding the balance between the ideas and materials in the studio practice. Therefore, I continued my studies in Fine Art, so I could expand my horizons. Luckily I found the most suitable medium to express my ideas. It was the book. Since then I have you invite to you become a book artist.

NL: Who would book binding workshop? The person could be living or dead, including fictional. Describe why this person is your choice.

EH: It's a very tough question. Since a maximum of 5 people attend my workshop – how about 3 wise monkeys? They may not be human but I assume since one can't speak, one can't see, and one can't listen, that they would work well together. ■

Check out her website at www.lalibreria.com.sg.

Email info@lalibreria.com.sg or call 6516 8797 / 6775 0602 for more information.

Meet Our Interns

Syed Muhd Hafiz bin Syed Nasir



Hafiz was a 3rd year student at LASALLE College of the Arts when he took up a research internship at NUS Museum from 22 September to 3 November 2008. He conducted research on curatorial strategies and use of museum space for a Singapore Art Gallery Guide article.

My first brush with the NUS Museum was during a field trip organised by my LASALLE lecturer back in 2006. Then the museum struck me as a 'cold' institution and I remembered getting bored going through all the galleries.

However, since my knowledge of art increased through these few years, coupled with the 'sudden increase' of activities happening within the Museum, my interest was piqued. I began to see that NUS Museum offers an alternative narrative to curating exhibitions compared to our national museums (Singapore Art Museum, National Museum of Singapore, etc.)

My 6 week research internship confirmed my changed perceptions of the Museum. As I delved deeper into the realm of museology and curatorial studies, the experience of talking to curators like Mustafa and Qinyi, with regard to curatorial ideas and strategies, have proved invaluable.

The research internship has given me the opportunity to acquire knowledge at my own time and pace. Also, the access to information and archives of past activities within the NUS museum, has given me a deeper insight into the different collections owned by the museum.

On another note, the structure of my internship did sound ambiguous. As it was my first 'research internship' and coupled with the fact that I was in an unfamiliar environment, I admit that I felt 'lost' on a few occasions. However my supervisor, Mustafa has been a more than helpful advisor, considering his busy schedule.

To conclude, the research internship has been a generally positive experience for me. I have been exposed to a different kind of museum practice and I look forward to future collaborations with the institution. ■

Grace Kng



Grace was a Year 6 student from NUS High School who did her internship with NUS Museum from July to November 2008. This stint provided her with an overview of Museum work - programmes, newsletter writing, marketing and publicity, collections management and exhibition setup.

I was worried yet happy at the prospect of doing an internship at an art museum. I like art, and had even taken several art courses in school. However, due to my busy school timetable, I had been unable to have anything to do with art for the past 2 years. I did not even have time to visit an art museum. This and the fact that I was never very skilled in art class made me worry about what I could contribute to the Museum. Yet, this uneasiness about myself left me with a determination to at least give my best. I kept my eyes and ears peeled determined to learn everything I could. I found out about a number of things.

First, unless one is in a very high position, one is generally expected to do your own photocopying and such. This confirms my suspicion that certain young people these days are very foolish in thinking that a university degree, even from an ivy league university would automatically grant one an office with a secretary. Second, I learned the importance of public opinion to institutes like the Museum. Viewership seems to be a top priority with numerous surveys to get the public's opinion and an emphasis on knowing the daily visitorship. I was surprised since the Museum is free and its income does not seem to be directly connected with the number of visitors. However, it seems that it is. Third, I picked up useful information about the workings in the art world. Despite their reputation for being temperamental people, most artists in general seem to act and dress like perfectly normal people. They do not go around wearing berets, drinking coffee and having long conversations about their inspiration all the time. The curator must often work with the artist to help bring out his/her vision.

At the end, I feel what is most important is not so much the skills I have gained but that I had the opportunity to experience office life. It's this intangible experience of the social interactions, the spoken and unspoken rules and how teamwork is like in the working world which is most valuable. All in all, I liked it here. ■

Exhibitions & Events

Constructed Landscapes: Singapore in Southeast Asia Till Dec 2009



Cheong Soo Pieng
St Andrew's Cathedral, 1955

The University Art Museum (precursor of NUS Museum) was inaugurated in 1955 at the University of Malaya in Singapore. The collection was instrumental in the teaching and study of Art History. Its holding of acquired paintings served as a vital archive and resource to interpret landscapes and themes in Singapore and Southeast Asia.

Presented in three sections - Engagement/Memory/Imagination - the exhibition explores artistic interactions with the land, personal and collective memory, as well as relationships with physical space, cultural imagination and practice. Through paintings, drawings, photographs, textiles and video documentations, the landscape observations convey, construct and represent aspects of such landscapes, as well as offer presentations and interpretations.

The exhibition forms the framework for reconnections with teaching and learning of architecture and urban history, through modules developed by the Department of Architecture, NUS, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. In conjunction with the exhibition, two forums will be organised at the NUS Museum alongside four walking tours at Kampong Glam, Padang, Telok Ayer and Tiong Bahru to encourage the public's interest in and appreciation of the Singapore landscape.

Past-Present: Craft Communities of Modern and Contemporary India Till 26 Apr 2009



Kalamkari Temple Hanging
circa 1960s

Making sense of the contemporary nature of craftwork on the Indian Subcontinent, the exhibition traces changes and continuity in practices, ideas and concerns in the livelihoods of craft communities and the politics of heritage management in postcolonial societies. Exhibited artifacts are drawn from the NUS Museum's South Asian Collection and from a recent field trip by a group of students from the University Scholars Programme, NUS

Jendela A play of the ordinary Till 19 Apr 2009



Yunizar, *Untitled, 2009*

The meteoric rise of Jendela that began in the mid 1990s is both fascinating and confounding. Starting from the mundane, Handiwirman Saputra, Jumaldi Alfi,

Yusra Martunus, Rudi Mantofani and Yunizar produce works that are visually seductive and clinical in their articulation, absent of the strident social imageries typical of Yogyakarta art. Is this a reaction against political art? A turn towards formalism? Or can we release them from the burden of reductive interpretations? This exhibition stages an encounter with Jendela's play of the ordinary, invoking a crisis of signification, one that oscillates between irrational fascination and context.

NUS Arts Festival 2009 Open Art Show Nature, Man Included Till 26 Apr 2009



Lee Guan Wei Daniel
You are not alone (photo essay), 2008

How do we contemplate Nature and Man's place in it - be it apart from or a part of Nature? What are the issues in the representations of Nature reflecting contemporary social and cultural values, economic and ethical issues? Are there iconography and popular imagery that are pervasive or examples of commodification of Nature? Should we highlight spatial domination or explore the boundaries between the natural and cultural, the urban and the undeveloped? Or can we reflect on the philosophical ideas on Human Nature? Drawing from the diverse intellectual disciplines and interests within the University, the photography exhibition which is held in conjunction with NUS Arts Festival 2009, hopes to present a range of perspectives by NUS students, staff and alumni

Exhibitions & Events

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
Peranakan Chinese in Globalising
Southeast Asia: The Cases of
Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia
Fri, 22 May 2009, 9am-5pm

Possibility Room
National Library Building
100 Victoria Street
\$30 per person
\$15 for NUS & NUS students

To register, email
babahouse@nus.edu.sg

The conference will address issues on Peranakan communities and their hybrid culture focusing on general trends and developments, case studies from three countries, and discussion on their material culture. The Keynote Address will be given by Prof Wang Gungwu. For details, visit www.nus.edu.sg/museum/2009.

Watercolor Painting on Landscapes
by Janice Chin



Charles Dyce
Government Hill from the New Harbour Road, Singapore, 1816 - 1853

8 lessons
4 April to 30 May 2009 (Saturdays)
4.30 - 6.30pm
NUS Museum and various sites
\$280 (excludes course materials)
Max 12 participants (16 yrs & above)

To register, email
museum@nus.edu.sg

This course introduces the basic techniques in watercolor painting. Students will learn techniques such as painting with volume, perspective, composition and expression. The instructor will use watercolor paintings on exhibition such as works by Eng Tow, Lim Cheng Hoe and Charles Dyce as reference for teaching the different techniques. Students will also experience having classes in an outdoor setting. For details, visit www.nus.edu.sg/museum/2009.

Topics in Contemporary Art
Programme by June Yap

8 sessions
7 June - 26 July 2009 (Sundays)
NUS Museum
\$400 per person
\$360 (NUS staff & students)
Min 10 & Max 25 participants

To register, email
museum@nus.edu.sg

The programme explores topics and issues related to contemporary art practices today. Through surveying international artist practices while focusing on Southeast Asian artists and artworks, the programme will introduce an aspect of contemporary art practice and the issues arising from it. In investigating these aspects, participants will have the opportunity to examine and discuss concerns of artists, institutions, curators and audiences in relation to the practice of art today.

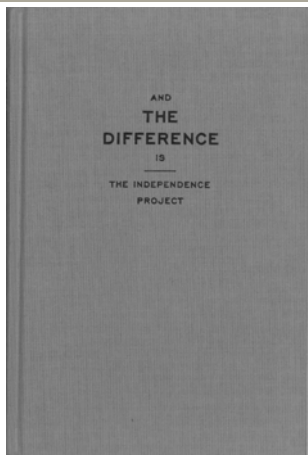
The programme is designed for participation by art students (post secondary / tertiary level) and members of the public and is not on artistic techniques. Art experience is not required. Topics include the following:

- Art Historical Readings
- Making History – Southeast Asia and Nation building
- Postmodernism, politics and society
- Methods and ways of thinking - death of painting, rise of installation
- Media – photography, video and film
- Performance art and performativity
- The art of Curating
- Market, circulation and exhibitionary systems

Publications

More titles are available at www.nus.edu.sg/museum/publications.htm. You can purchase the publications using the order form on the website or approach the counter staff at NUS Museum.

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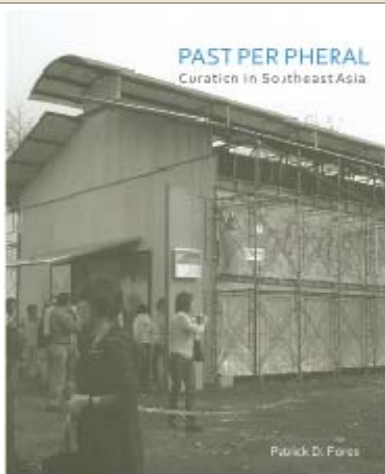
Wong Hoy Cheong 2002-2007



ISBN 978-981-08-1281-2

Retail Price S\$38.00
Mail Order Price S\$43.00

Past Peripheral Curation in Southeast Asia



ISBN 978-981-08-0663-7

Retail Price S\$30.00
Mail Order Price S\$40.00



Patrick Flores at the book signing session during the launch on 9 January. Following was a panel discussion by Prof John Clark from University of Sydney; C.J. Wee Wan-ling, Associate Professor of English at National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University and the author.

Past Peripheral: Curation in Southeast Asia by Patrick Flores, Professor of Art Studies at University of Philippines, traces the history of curation in Indonesia and Thailand, situating it within a broad framework of the emergence of contemporary art in Southeast Asia and the global interest in art production in the region.



Karen Lim, co curator of *Constructed Landscapes: Singapore in Southeast Asia* exhibition conducts docent training for NUS Boulevard.

NUS Boulevard

boul.e.vard (abbr.: blvd)
noun
a wide street in a city or town, typically one lined with trees

NUS Boulevard was formed in May 2008 by a group of NUS students who were keen to promote visual arts appreciation.

Members can organize activities, volunteer as docents at NUS Museum, write articles on art and culture, receive training and conduct art appreciation classes. Boulevard also merges an interest in art with volunteerism through the sharing of art with school going children. Through such activities, members are exposed to a range of artworks and learn to appreciate art better.

NUS Boulevard may be small for now but it's certainly big on ideas and welcomes anyone with an interest in art.

NUS Boulevard is managed by NUS Museum, NUS Centre For the Arts.

Boulevard – an avenue to the arts.

To join, please contact:
Fidelia or Sarah at
nusboulevard@gmail.com

Volunteering at NUS Museum

Are you interested in guiding at the Museum, organizing events or contributing articles to this newsletter? There is a wide range of volunteer opportunities for you. All you need is interest, commitment and enthusiasm. If you are keen, please complete the form at www.nus.edu.sg/museum/outreach_volunteer.htm and send it to museum@nus.edu.sg

Check out internship opportunities at www.nus.edu.sg/museum/internship.html

facebook

NUS Museum Groups found on Facebook

www.facebook.com/home.php?#/group.php?sid=27ada6eb61e25075fd604363bfdc077d&gid=40400358843
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NUS MUSEUM

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Tel: (65) 6516 8817
Website: www.nus.edu.sg/museum
Email: museum@nus.edu.sg

Opening Hours
10am – 7.30pm (Tuesdays – Saturdays)
10am – 6pm (Sundays)
Closed on Mondays & Public Holidays