

Experience Singapore

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APR - JUN 2018



a state for the arts

Singapore's transformation into a global arts hub is part of a conscious effort to groom a new breed of artists while keeping audiences engaged

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ED'S NOTE

Dear readers,

Many of the world's major cities are centres for the expression of ideas. When the Singapore Government outlined its plan in 2000 to establish Singapore as a 'Renaissance City' for the 21st century, it took its mission very seriously. Fast forward to the present, and the Republic is a hive of creative outpourings. This is largely due to support from both the public and private sectors, as well as collaborations between arts practitioners, citizens and residents. Singapore is also establishing itself internationally, attracting artists and cultural organisations from abroad to not only participate in events, but even base themselves here.

This issue of *Experience Singapore* looks at how all this has been achieved. A State For The Arts (pages 3-5) charts its transformation into a global arts hub. Besides raising Singapore's profile internationally by nurturing homegrown talents, investment in the arts has also served as a way to bond the people and communicate key social messages. Creatively Speaking (pages 8-9) meanwhile presents an 'insider perspective', as two locally-based artists share their views on how to maintain this upward trend in support for the arts. Lastly, Expanding Perspectives Through Expression (pages 10-11) looks at the fruits of these efforts, showcasing the rich tapestry of international influences that colour our current scene, as well as how Singapore itself has exported its artistic offerings to the rest of the world.

'Renaissance Cities' are however more than just venues for artworks and performances. The elevated thinking that underlies the ideology of creating such a city encompasses other aspects as well, such as a concern for the environment. Studies in Sustainability (pages 6-7) examines two successful case studies in conservation in Singapore, and how we are now sharing our expertise with other countries as well. It is with this spirit of sharing, then, that we hope you will read this issue, and be inspired to find new ways to promote exchange and goodwill!

Teo Lay Cheng

Director
Strategic Communications Directorate
Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore



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MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SINGAPORE

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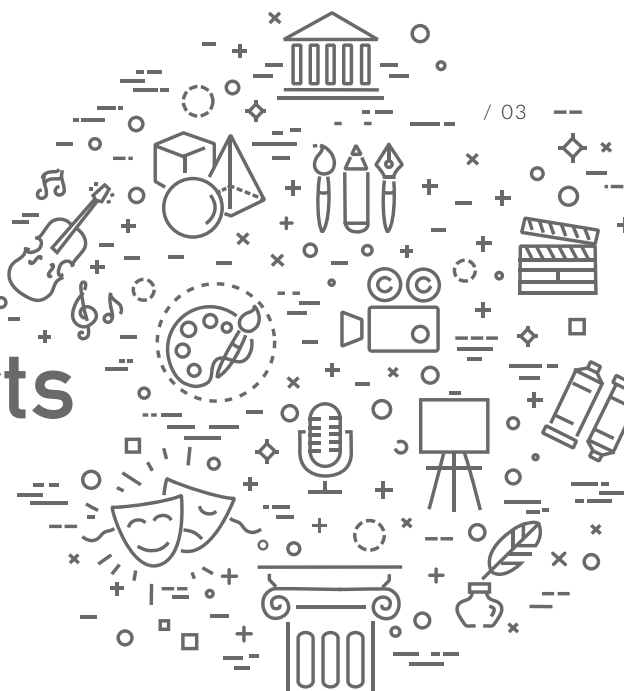
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a state for the arts

Singapore's transformation into a global arts hub has not been an accident: it's part of a conscious effort to groom a new breed of artists while keeping audiences entertained, engaged and informed.

Every January, artists and art enthusiasts from around the world descend onto Singapore for a string of art-related events held as part of Singapore Art Week (SAW). Despite its name, the event is held for more than seven days. This year's edition ran for 11 days and showcased works that appealed to every shade of art enthusiast. Those attracted to street art by the likes of British artist Banksy could head to the Aliwal Urban Art Festival, while those who prefer performing arts could enjoy a storytelling session by famed orator Kamini Ramachandran.



the arts is not just limited to January, but is instead a year-long experience. Statistics show that in 2016, there were around 100 arts activities and events on average across the island each day, catering to audiences of all interests.

For instance, there's the Singapore Writers' Festival for literature buffs, and the Singapore International Film Festival, which consistently attracts audiences from around the world. No festival? No problem. The Republic boasts nearly 60 world-famous galleries and museums that each offers a different experience and artistic vision: the National Gallery Singapore focuses on Southeast Asian art, while the Singapore Art Museum houses an impressive collection of contemporary pieces.

All this art in such a tiny city-state might seem like an anomaly, but to Mr Kwok, it reflects changing attitudes towards the sector in Singapore. "There's a growing recognition of the value of the arts, with 70 per cent of Singaporeans [surveyed] saying that the arts help to improve our quality of life," he says, citing figures from the National Population Survey of the Arts. Conducted biennially, the study tracks Singaporeans' engagement with the arts.



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The diversity of these events is a reflection of Singaporean society, explains Mr Kenneth Kwok, the Assistant Chief Executive (Planning & Engagement) of the National Arts Council (NAC). The Council is one of the organisers of the annual SAW, alongside the Singapore Tourism Board and the Singapore Economic Development Board.

SAW is just one of the events that NAC supports. As the Government-appointed "champion of the arts", NAC aims to promote an appreciation of the arts, as well as nurture the Republic's next generation of artists. It ensures that Singaporeans' exposure to



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1 Crowds taking in the exhibits at Art Stage during Singapore Art Week 2018.

2 Colourfully-painted shophouses and graffiti street art at Haji Lane.

GROWING ENGAGEMENT

The most recent edition of the study shows that this engagement is fast-growing. Singaporeans are now attending more arts events and doing so more frequently. According to the survey, eight in 10 residents attended at least one arts and cultural event a year. These numbers are encouraging, given the challenging climate facing the global arts scene – including Singapore's.

"With so many lifestyle and leisure options available to the public, gaining and sustaining audience attention in the arts can indeed be challenging," notes Mr Kwok. NAC's solution? Bringing the arts to audiences, instead of having them come to the artworks. "Reaching out to audiences where they live, work and play is one way to capture their attention," he explains. But this is something that arts bodies can't do alone – as Mr Kwok shares, collaboration with other partners is essential.

Be it fellow Government organisations or even shopping malls, NAC works closely with community partners to bring performing and visual arts to the doorsteps of audiences. "As a result, more people have been experiencing the arts in unconventional locations such as shopping malls, public squares or community parks," explains Mr Kwok.

Another reason for the heightened interest in the Singapore arts scene is the belief that it has become more vibrant with time. The secret to achieving vibrancy lies in developing the next generation of arts practitioners. In this vein, the NAC offers scholarships annually to deserving undergraduate and postgraduate students.

There are also avenues of support for artists who prefer not to enrol in formal education. Such individuals can tap on schemes like the Arts Fund,



which encourages practitioners to create quality works that engage and entertain local audiences. "We also recognise our artists through annual arts awards and provide customised support structures for arts companies as well as independent artists," adds Mr Kwok.

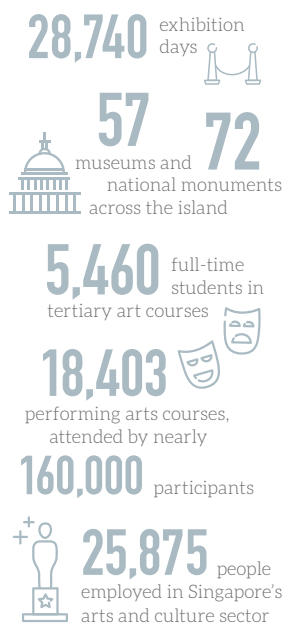
PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION

Historically, art has been the realm of the upper classes, far out of reach of the *hoi polloi*. But realising its tremendous potential to bring communities together, NAC also aims to make art accessible to all. To do this, it strives to keep attendance costs to a minimum.

"We try to broaden access (to the arts) for everyone regardless of socioeconomic background through free or low-cost arts events and activities," shares Mr Kwok. In 2016, there were 3,430 ticketed performances in the Republic. In contrast, there were nearly 6,000 non-ticketed performances that year.

Such efforts bode well for Singapore's social cohesion, as they prove a valuable bridge between different communities. For instance, 2016's **Kapor ChatParty** encouraged greater interaction between the island's migrant worker population and the community-at-large. At the event, migrant workers and Singaporeans learnt how make *rangoli*. The Indian floor

THE ARTS SCENE IN NUMBERS (2016)



SOURCE: SINGAPORE CULTURAL STATISTICS 2017



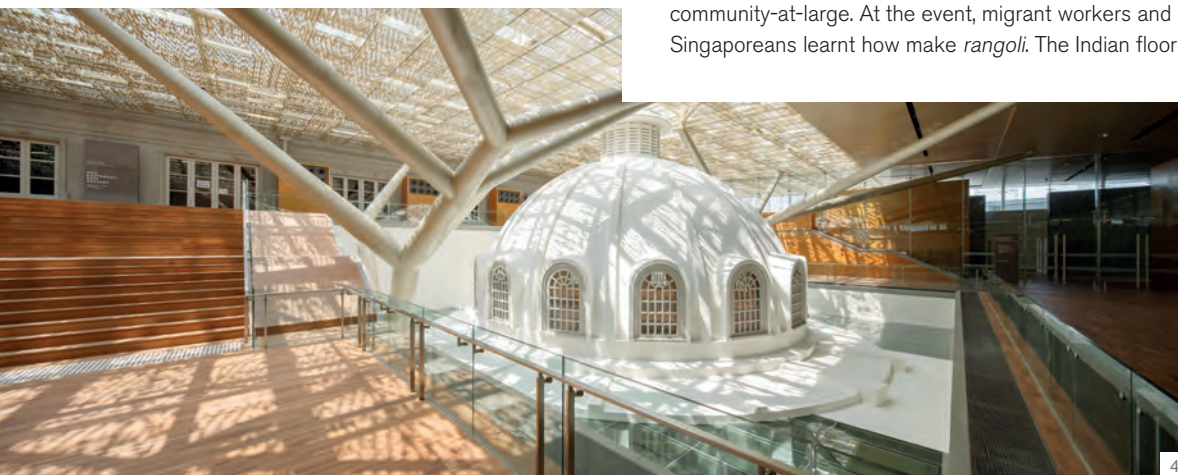
SENIORS AND ART

Given that Singapore houses one of the world's fastest-ageing populations, the National Arts Council makes a special effort to reach out to this group. Seniors in Singapore prefer to attend:

- Film
- Theatre
- Heritage-related events

The Council found that seniors engaged in the arts experienced a greater sense of holistic wellbeing.

SOURCE: NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL



We try to broaden access (to the arts) for everyone regardless of socioeconomic background through free or low-cost arts events and activities.

Mr Kenneth Kwok Assistant Chief Executive (Planning & Engagement), NAC





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3 Panellists taking questions from the audience at a session held during the Singapore Writers Festival 2017.

4 The former Supreme Court Rooftop Terrace, now housed within the National Gallery Singapore complex.

5 Admiring the creative efforts of seniors at the Silver Arts 2016 Exhibition.

6 The umbrella trees, an installation piece in Little India.

7 Preschool students from PCF Sparkletots at an Indian dance workshop conducted by Bhaskar's Arts Academy, as part of the Traditional Arts Taster Programme.



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art is traditionally made with rice flour but at this event, it was made with household items like pasta, rice grains and recycled utensils. The event was a cultural exchange among various communities in Singapore and was

a hit among locals and foreigners alike.

Ms Marie Le Hung, a French student on an internship, told local daily *The Straits Times*, "I think it's really awesome that there is something like this for the residents and free food for the workers. It's a great way to involve people in the area."

Although the event was a ground-up initiative, it received partial funding from NAC, explains Ms Faye Lim, a co-organiser of Kapor ChatParty. "Besides a grant, the Council also linked us up with an artist (familiar with the area) and we ended up involving him in a fringe activity." Explaining the importance of such events, Mr Kwok says, "They create opportunities for people from different backgrounds, ages and cultures, to come together and better understand each other."



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WHAT LIES AHEAD

As the local arts community prepares for yet another edition of SAW in 2019, administrators like Mr Kwok have high hopes for the place of art in Singaporean society. "NAC aspires towards a future where all Singaporeans will appreciate the arts as an organic part of their everyday lives," he shares. "In this future Singapore, anyone who wants to pursue the arts as a hobby or career will find support and opportunity because everyone believes in the value of such pursuits."

But he adds that art crosses borders — and the future of Singapore's arts scene is intertwined with that of the region's. That's one reason why NAC stresses the importance of exchanges and collaborations between local artists and their international counterparts, especially in Southeast Asia. "The infrastructure we have established locally can benefit the wider region as well," says Mr Kwok. "There is certainly much potential for Southeast Asia in terms of strengthening intercultural dialogue and regional collaborations, and establishing thought leadership internationally in specific areas of expertise and experience."

NEW AND NOTEWORTHY

FOUR RISING STARS FROM THE SINGAPOREAN ARTS SCENE TO KNOW:

Lucinda Law is a botanical illustrator, whose stunning creations resemble the early botanical drawings of William Farquhar and Stamford Raffles. Through her feather-light strokes, she hopes to spark conversations about the beauty of nature. Lucinda was one of 30 Singaporean artists appointed to design the façades of the National Gallery Singapore and Victoria Theatre for the Light to Night Festival 2018. [For more: lucindalaw.co](http://www.lucindalaw.co).

Post-rock? Neo-soul? Electropop? It's hard to confine **Charlie Lim**'s music to just one genre. The homegrown singer has won over global audiences with last year's ambitious *TIME/SPACE*. A split album that spans both experimental pop and folk-rock, it's a testament to Charlie's songwriting talents. He was most recently enlisted to perform this year's National Day theme song, a cover of 1987's 'We Are Singapore'. [For more: charlielim.net](http://www.charlielim.net).

Comic artist **Sonny Liew** is well-loved by the masses for his frank — and often hilarious — depictions of Singapore's political landscape. His seminal work, *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye* was the first graphic novel to win the Singapore Literature Prize for fiction in 2016. Last year, it proved to be a global hit when it bagged three Eisner awards, dubbed "the Oscars of the comic book scene." [For more: sonnyliew.com](http://www.sonnyliew.com).

The works of **Norah Lea** are rooted in self-portraiture and explore themes as diverse as gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Her mediums are largely photography, film and performance art. Through these, Norah investigates the performative aspects of our identities. Her recent work *Mandi Bunga* (2018) was showcased at the *Waning, Waxing* exhibition at ION Art Gallery. [For more: norahlea.com](http://www.norahlea.com).





- 1 A guided visit to the Keppel Discovery Wetlands at the Learning Forest, Singapore Botanic Gardens to understand the conservation and restoration of freshwater forest wetlands and rainforest ecosystems.
- 2 A nursery with young mangroves transplanted from shorebird roosting and feeding areas.
- 3 NParks staff introducing the different wild fruit trees found in the Singapore Botanic Gardens in front of the information signage at the Learning Forest.
- 4 Whimbrels roosting on high ground at high tide in the Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve.

studies in sustainability

Conserving Our Green Heritage: Singapore Botanic Gardens and Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve.

A statutory board established under the auspices of the Ministry of National Development, the National Parks Board (NParks) is Singapore's lead agency in nature conservation. Other than its own set of strategies and action plans to conserve biodiversity on a national level, NParks is also highly involved on a regional front. Under the framework of ASEAN Cooperation on Environment, NParks is the national focal point for the ASEAN Working Group on Nature Conservation and Biodiversity (AWGNCB), as well as a governing board member of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB).

In support of SDG Goal 15 on Life on Land, NParks collaborated with the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) to share Singapore's experience and practices in Biodiversity Conservation with participants from across the globe. Over the past two years, NParks and SCP have jointly delivered two programmes on "Greenery Planning and Biodiversity Conservation" and "Biodiversity Conservation – Wetlands Management". These SCP programmes have enabled mindshare among subject experts from different backgrounds.

The course on "Biodiversity Conservation – Wetlands Management" was about coastal wetland ecosystems, migratory bird flyways focusing on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF), shorebird conservation, community engagement and public awareness programming concepts. It gave participants an overview of wetland ecology, as well as effective management and sustainable utilisation of wetland resources. Government officials across 19 countries including Cambodia, Mauritius, Panama and Turkey also attended the course on "Greenery Planning and Biodiversity Conservation". This course, conducted by the National Biodiversity Centre (NBC) and Centre for Urban Greenery and Ecology (CUGE) of NParks, enabled participants to understand that effective planning, management and conservation are key factors to achieve a distinctive and quality living environment. The participants heard from subject-matter experts and visited various parks, gardens and nature reserves around Singapore, including both the iconic Singapore Botanic Gardens and Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve.



MORE THAN 200 SPECIES OF PLANTS HAD BEEN CHOSEN FOR CULTIVATION AT THE LEARNING FOREST SITE AND TO HIGHLIGHT THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PLANTS LIVING IN THE FRESHWATER FOREST WETLANDS ALONG WITH THE INLAND RAINFOREST.

The Gardens was established in 1859 and is an important institution in the study and conservation of the tropical flora of Southeast Asia.

The Gardens's Herbarium, which was founded in 1875, holds an estimated 750,000 voucher specimens of flora from the Malaysian region that are constantly studied and referred to by botanists.



SINGAPORE BOTANIC GARDENS

Singapore Botanic Gardens is one of three of the world's botanic gardens, and the only tropical garden to be inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Gardens is committed to educational outreach for the masses to connect plants and people. A new thematic garden, the Learning Forest, which opened in March 2017, provides a platform to convey the story of conservation and restoration of Singapore's endangered natural habitats, as well as facilitate research in conservation and restoration ecology. In the ASEAN region, the Gardens is highly regarded for its excellence in botanic garden management, as well as tropical horticultural management. Being part of the Southeast Asian Botanic Gardens Network, the Gardens has provided advice and training in the fields of horticulture, education outreach, and botanic garden and herbarium management for newly-developed botanic gardens along with other botanical institutions far and wide.

Short-term training in basic horticulture, plant records and database management, as well as nursery operations, was provided to staff of the Pha Tad Ke Botanical Garden, a newly-developed botanic garden in Laos. Well-established institutions such as the Queen Sirikit Botanic Garden in Thailand and the Royal Botanical Gardens, Peradeniya, in Sri Lanka, have also sent their staff for programmes in education outreach, herbarium management and horticulture. Interactions between the Gardens' staff and those of overseas botanic gardens have created an excellent avenue for sharing and imparting of skills, information and ideas.

The Gardens continues to be one of Singapore's most precious and highly-regarded 'Green Gems'. Its popularity is not only because of its beautiful landscapes and its appealing display of plant collections, some of which date back to before the Gardens' formation, but also because within its confines there is life. It is teeming with activities to engage all age groups to appreciate and promote the importance of conservation and biodiversity, thus ensuring the botanical wealth living in it can be enjoyed by future generations.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 15: LIFE ON LAND

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15 of the UN 2030 Agenda is about sustainably managing forests, combating desertification, halting and reversing land degradation, and halting biodiversity loss. Forests are key to combating climate change, protecting biodiversity, ensuring food and water security and reducing poverty. Deforestation and desertification – largely caused by human activities – pose major challenges to sustainable development. Considering the transboundary consequences of environmental degradation, it is in everyone's long-term interest to protect Earth's forests.



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In January 2014, NParks recaptured a **Whimbrel** that was banded about 19 years ago. During a regular bird census recently, a Common Redshank that was caught twice was observed. Estimated to be about 20 years old, these two birds are among a few of the oldest shorebirds that had visited the Wetlands.

SUNGEI BULOH WETLAND RESERVE

Located in the north-western end of Singapore, Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve contains brackish and freshwater ponds, mangrove mudflats, estuaries and swamps. It is the first ASEAN Heritage Park in Singapore, a designation given to educational and inspirational sites of high conservation importance within the region, and one of the two first Nature Reserves to be gazetted in Singapore.

The Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve is a haven for many migratory waterbird species, and one of the sites along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, where an estimated 2,000 migratory shorebirds roost and feed at during the northern winter. Through its sister site relationship with Seocheon County in the Republic of Korea and other exchanges, it encourages capacity-building for bird conservation and development of wetland centres.

NParks has worked with other agencies to extend Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve and develop areas around the Wetlands as a buffer, including the Coastal Trail and Kranji Marshes. These new habitats help to form a contiguous green corridor, supplementing the biodiversity of the reserve core. NParks also undertakes a series of habitat enhancements and maintenance efforts in the Wetlands before the start of each migratory season to ensure optimal conditions for the migratory birds' habitats. Volunteers and partners have played an important role in NParks' shorebird programmes, by participating in various aspects of habitat maintenance and surveys. For example, they have participated in supporting projects such as mangrove replanting, habitat enhancement, clearing coastal trash and both benthic (bottom of a waterbody) and bird surveys.

Contributions from: Singapore Botanic Gardens, Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve and Centre for Urban Greenery and Ecology of National Parks Board.



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in singapore

creatively speaking

Reflecting on the local arts scene, two Singapore-based artists give their takes on how the industry can move forward and stay relevant.



ACCESSIBLE ART

It's a sunny afternoon when we meet multidisciplinary artist **Kray Chen** on the grounds of the National Museum of Singapore. The 31 year-old is in a jubilant mood, having just completed a month-long run of *Five Rehearsals Of A Wedding* at Singapore Art Week. The 20-minute video is a playful interpretation of the rituals of an average Singaporean Chinese wedding.

Besides completing a well-received project, Mr Chen is also celebrating winning the National Arts Council (NAC)'s 2017 Young Artist Award. He was the youngest of four artists to receive the award, Singapore's highest accolade for art practitioners aged 35 or below, that year. Established in 1992, the annual award supports winning artists with a grant of up to S\$20,000 each. "Singaporean artists are really fortunate to have this level of state funding," shares Mr Chen, pointing to growing support for art, both from the state and private organisations. Records show that non-Government contributions to the

arts and heritage scene have grown from S\$40 million in 2010 to nearly S\$75 million in 2016. State spending on the arts has also followed this trend; Government funding rose from S\$495 million to S\$713 million in the same period. Mr Chen credits this to an increased interest in the arts, especially among the younger generation.

Despite this growing interest, Mr Chen

believes that there is some way to go in cultivating local engagement with art. "In the age of Instagram, it's easy to attract visitors (to an exhibition) by having a large spectacle — but seeing art is only half the battle won," he explains. The next stage is equipping viewers with the tools to engage with the work on a deeper level. He feels this can be done by creating various entry points that cater to and interest different audience segments. However, he adds that different kinds of artists have varying degrees of commitment to accessibility. "For me, thinking about accessibility is second nature, largely because of the type of work I do. The same can't be said for abstract art for example. Ultimately, it's also the curators and institutions that have the power to make even the most alien art accessible. They are a crucial bridge that must be supported too."

"The curators and institutions have the power to make even the most alien art accessible. They are a crucial bridge that must be supported too."

Mr Kray Chen

GOVERNMENT SPENDING ON THE ARTS

\$495m

2010

\$713m

2016



THE ARTIST SPEAKS

"My works are usually presented as videos, either standalone as a film or as part of an installation. I also involve performances in these videos, so I like to call them video-performances. Content-wise, they show everyday scenes that appear seemingly normal but are quite offbeat, awkward or even absurd. In that moment of surprise or curiosity, I hope to capture the audiences' imagination and reflection."

FOR MORE, VISIT
kraychen.com

KEEPING TRADITIONS ALIVE

A stone's throw away from the National Museum of Singapore sits CHOWK. As we approach the dance studio, we are greeted by the sound of anklets jingling and the sight of six girls brightly decked out in colourful saris. Leading them in an elaborate *Odissi* routine is **Raka Maitra**, a 47 year-old who moved to Singapore with her family some 14 years ago. *Odissi* is a classical Indian dance that originated in the east Indian state of Odisha.

Upon joining the arts scene here, Ms Maitra was struck by its diversity — both in audiences and practitioners. When she opened CHOWK in 2007, she was pleased to note that despite its roots in traditional Indian dance, the studio's classes attracted students of all races. "Audiences in Singapore are very open and accommodating," she explains. "There is a genuine interest in learning about other cultures and their expressions."

Having been in the Republic's professional dance scene for some years now, Ms Maitra is familiar with local audiences and their tastes. "There is a misconception that traditional art forms don't have an audience in Singapore," says Ms Maitra. "But look at Indian dance — the largest turnouts are for traditional and classical forms."

She goes so far as to say that classical productions are the easiest way to reach out to mainstream audiences. Inspired by this, Ms Maitra strives to create a form that takes inspiration from both classical and contemporary dance. CHOWK's artistic productions

"Audiences in Singapore are very open and accommodating. There is a genuine interest in learning about other cultures and their expressions."

Ms Raka Maitra

include full-length works that have been commissioned by theatres and festivals in Singapore such as Kalaa Utsavam, an Indian arts festival, and dans: fest, a dance programme.

CHOWK received NAC's Seed Grant between 2014 and 2017. Aimed at nascent art groups, the grant helps them develop in a stable and sustainable manner. However, Ms Maitra stresses that art groups cannot rely on state funding alone to meet their creative objectives. "Our audiences and programmers have kept the company alive," she says.

THE ARTIST SPEAKS

"You never really overcome your fear of failure. Every time I take on a new work, I don't know how it's going to end, but I continue because I am working in collaboration with others; other dancers, musicians, designers. This collaborative effort sustains me and propels me forward."

FOR MORE, VISIT
chowk.sg



expanding perspectives

The Republic's arts scene is abuzz with contributions from, and collaborations with, global partners.

A few months ago, Dr Jeremiah James sat in a cinema, enamoured by *Belleville Baby*. A Swedish production, this 2013 film would not have seemed out of place at a theatre in Stockholm's artsy SoFo district. However, what made it special was that Dr James caught it at The Projector, an independent cinema that sits in the heart of Singapore. "I don't actually speak any Swedish but the film still really touched me," recounts the 26 year-old medical professional.

Belleville Baby was screened at The Projector as part of the Swedish Film Festival, an event held annually since 2016. The Swedish Film Festival is not the only foreign film festival hosted by The Projector: it has also showcased global films, among them titles from the Palestinian Territories, Denmark and Mexico.

Films aren't the only medium through which Singaporeans appreciate cultures from abroad. They also lap up other forms of

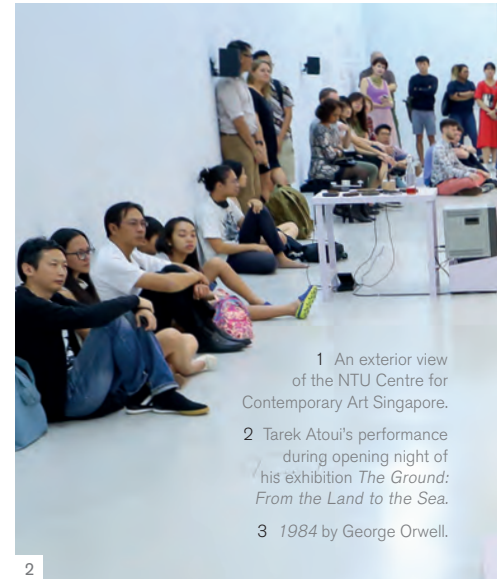
visual arts, as well as performances that range from classical dance to poetry recitals. For instance, a three-month exhibition of works from Tarek Atoui gave Singaporeans an insight into the Lebanese-French experience. The exhibition – held at the Nanyang Technological University's Centre for Contemporary Art in 2018 – saw a steady stream of visitors, both from within and outside of the arts community.

Marketing manager of independent gallery kult Ms Iffah Rakinah believes that the popularity of these events shows that the arts truly have no borders. "An artist's perspective of life in a big city, be it Amsterdam or Adelaide, can be appreciated by a global audience," she says. An example of this is *Pusaka*, an exhibition the gallery held last year that celebrated the blooming Filipino urban art scene.

Ms Rakinah continues, "In Singapore, there's an eagerness to learn about other cultures and shared experiences. Traditionally, this was done through travel but increasingly, we're turning to art to satisfy our curiosity about the world."

FROM SINGAPORE, WITH LOVE

More international artists are finding inspiration in Singapore as well. Mexican artist Natalia Ludmila applied for a residency with the Mexican government to set up base in Singapore after being



1 An exterior view of the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore.
2 Tarek Atoui's performance during opening night of his exhibition *The Ground: From the Land to the Sea*.
3 *1984* by George Orwell.

fascinated by what she had heard of the city-state. Ms Ludmila made Instinc studio her home for several weeks as she set out to create a series of Singapore-inspired artworks. She explored the island on foot, armed with nothing more than a camera. These walks bore fruit in the 12 pieces she exhibited at Instinc before leaving, which included a watercolour transit map and sketches of high-rise flats. "As an artist, I'm drawn to cities. I like to explore them and find their own unique vibe and personality. So, I wanted to experience Singapore first-hand and let it seep into my work," explains Ms Ludmila.

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

The government has also realised that the arts can be a great vehicle to share Singaporean culture with the world.

In this vein, the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth established the Cultural Diplomacy Fund to help Singaporean artists find their audience abroad. This fund supplements existing grants disbursed by the National Arts Council (NAC), some of which also cover international exposure efforts.

Explaining the need for such a fund, Ambassador-at-Large and Chairman of



through expression



the NAC Professor Chan Heng Chee said, "While there were efforts in the past to assist our artists to perform and showcase their works abroad, they were intermittent. The designation of 'cultural diplomacy' signals that there will be an institutionalised effort, working with our embassies, of promoting our cultural and creative assets and including the arts community as a partner in the role

of projecting Singapore internationally."

Thanks to the fund, Singaporean artists have found their works adorning unlikely corners of the world. Notably, pieces by Sam Lo and Soph O feature prominently in the Delhi Metro system. Local artists have also found support in Australia, with their creations being featured at OZAsia Festival, a leading arts festival Down Under.



CELEBRATING CULTURES

For the 41st year, arts venues around Singapore hosted the Singapore International Festival of Arts (SIFA). Over three weekends in April and May, the annual festival presented a plethora of theatre, music, dance, literary and visual arts from Singapore and around the world.

Highlights of this year's festival included *1984*, a stage adaptation of George Orwell's novel by Robert Icke and Duncan Macmillan; *Jazz At Play I, II and III*, three nights of jazz concerts by performers from Singapore and around the region; and dance show *OCD Love* by Israel's L-E-V Dance Company.

"I grew up looking forward to the SIFA every year. Watching shows across different genres from around the world played a big part in shaping my artistic sensibilities," writes SIFA 2018's Festival Director, Mr Gaurav Kripalani. "Shows such as Ninagawa's *Macbeth* (1992), for example, entirely changed my perception of how Shakespeare could be performed," he says, referring to Japanese theatre director Yukio Ninagawa's iconic interpretation of the English classic.

Some 55,000 people attended an array of 44 performances and panels over SIFA's 17 days. While some events were free and others were ticketed, heavily-discounted student tickets were offered to entice youth participation in the arts.



VOICES AS ONE

The Graduate Singers is one of Singapore's premier choral groups. Established in 2010, the semi-professional ensemble has taken part in a number of global competitions. While classical choral numbers feature heavily in their repertoire, the group has also commissioned several Singapore-themed pieces.

These include *Singapura Dilanggar Todak*, or, *The Swordfish Attacked Singapore*, composed by Dr Goh Toh Chai, a previous recipient of NAC's Young Artist Award (Music). Moving beyond classical pieces has been an eye-opening experience for the group. "In the process, we've discovered rich aspects of our heritage and we're eager to share this with fellow Singaporeans and audiences abroad," says Ms Tjan Hui Min, a member of the executive committee.

The Graduate Singers will be representing Singapore at the World Choir Games in South Africa in July.

A NEWSLETTER OF THE
SINGAPORE COOPERATION PROGRAMME



WEAVING A LARGER NARRATIVE

The arts in Singapore serves as a powerful tool for social cohesion, and this is often done by enabling people to interact while participating in the creation of the artworks themselves.

