Chapter 2

SHAPE
A robust and vibrant arts scene is driven by diverse artists and arts groups who inspire their audiences. Through a canon of quality works that reflect our multifaceted society, we hope to expand the cultural offerings of our artists to audiences in Singapore and beyond our shores. This will build an arts scene that Singaporeans would be proud to call their own.
2015 NATIONAL READING & WRITING SURVEY

*Based on 1,015 Singaporeans and Singapore permanent residents.

**READING**

- 44% read at least one literary book in the past 12 months

*Most popular genres read:

- Fiction 63%
- Creative Non-Fiction 52%
- Children 9%

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- Fiction 63%
- Creative Non-Fiction 52%
- Children 9%

**ATTITUDES**

- The most significant benefit of reading was learning new things (1 in 4)
- The most significant barrier to reading was the lack of time

**BUYING**

- 32% bought at least one literary book in the past 12 months
- 77% would go to physical bookstores to buy books

**TOP 3 LITERARY EVENTS WITH THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF PUBLIC AWARENESS**

- Singapore Writers Festival 16%
- Read! Singapore 13%
- SG Author Series 8%
SINGAPORE WRITERS FESTIVAL 2015

Audiences enjoyed the Singapore Writers Festival (SWF) helmed by new Festival Director and former Straits Times journalist Yeow Kai Chai. SWF 2015 saw the introduction of five new tracks, bringing varied experiences to festival-goers.

With a lineup of over 300 different events, the programmes ranged from lectures and panel discussions to performances and even an instrumental rock concert to reach new audiences and give them a taste of the literary arts. In branding itself as a gateway to the region, SWF 2015 also introduced a Southeast Asian focus incorporating more regional voices.

NEW TRACKS

SWF STAGE
Margalith Events

SWF CLASS
Moderators/Hosts Workshops

SWF SECTORS
Events for Families

SWF POP
Evening Series of Live and Streaming Pop-up Literary Events

19,700 PARTICIPANTS

310 EVENTS

324 AUTHORS AND PERSONALITIES FROM SINGAPORE AND AROUND THE WORLD

WHAT’S DIFFERENT?

Events were given a twist, going beyond the page to entice the audience. 18 events featured cross disciplinary collaborations to showcase literature in novel ways. For example, original short stories and poetry by Singapore writers Alliance art, Amanda Lee Kue, Dave Chua, Chow Teck Sung and Vanessa Ng were turned into animated short films.

WHAT I LOVE ABOUT YOU IS YOUR ATTITUDE PROBLEM

Fun Fact

SWF 2015 PROGRAMMED ITS FIRST-EVER OVERNIGHT EVENT, CURATED BY CHECKPOINT THEATRE’S HUZIR SALIMAN:

01 SWF Stage Lecture delivered by Man Booker nominee, Deborah Levy, on “What Dreams Reveal About Our Secrets and Desires”.

02 SWF (Singapore Writers Festival For Families) programmes for children as young as four years old.

03 Engaged audience at SWF Stage Lecture, “China Re-visioned”, by Hong Kong’s Chip Tsao and Beijing’s Xu Zhiyuan.

04 Indonesian writer and poet Goenawan Mohamad discussing the fate of literature in “When Meaning is Managed”, moderated by Peter Schoppert.

05 Singapore rock band I Am David Sparkle performs at Victoria Theatre as part of a double-bill gig for Singapore Writers Festival, which also featured In Each Hand A Cutlass.

06 Dave Chua’s “The Tiger of 1428”, animated by Henry and Harry Zhuang.

*Based on 606 respondents.
PROMOTING THE LITERARY ARTS

To raise awareness of Singapore literature, the Council partnered radio station 938LIVE to reach a wider audience. Six monthly interviews featuring industry professionals and authors were broadcast monthly from August 2015 to February 2016, giving listeners insights into the Singapore literary scene.

This year, the Council also saw increased interest in creative writing, with a record 798 entries received for the 2015 Golden Point Award (GPA).

BRINGING SINGAPORE’S AND THE REGION’S LITERATURE TO THE WORLD

In partnership with the Institute of Translation and Books Malaysia, the Council commissioned a bilingual anthology of plays from Singapore and Malaysia that was launched at SWF 2015.

We also cooperated with our regional partners to deepen the appreciation for Malay literature. For the first time, Singapore hosted MASTERA 2015, a regional Malay literature conference, receiving delegates from Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and Thailand.

New opportunities were created for our writers through the inaugural National University of Singapore-National Arts Council (NUS-NAC) Malay Writing Residency.

The Council promoted Singapore literature at international platforms like the London Book Fair 2015 and the Frankfurt Book Fair 2015. As a result, more Singaporean writers had their works published overseas.
NAC spearheaded the fourth edition of the Singapore Art Week 2016 in collaboration with the Singapore Tourism Board and the Economic Development Board. Over 100 visual arts and lifestyle events were featured, catering to both international and local audiences.

To bring quality art closer to Singaporeans, our first three Public Art Trust (PAT) installations were launched in the Civic District, breathing new life into the historic area.

Farther afield, Singapore artist Charles Lim and curator Shabbir Hussain Mustafa exhibited at the Singapore Pavilion at Venice Biennale 2015. The pavilion showcasing SEA STATE drew over 130,000 visitors over the course of seven months, and was critically well-received for being a conceptually strong, well-presented work.

*Based on 1,078 respondents.

| 82% | WERE SATISFIED WITH THE SINGAPORE ART WEEK |
| 85% | WERE WILLING TO RECOMMEND THE SINGAPORE ART WEEK TO FAMILY, FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES |
| 84% | WERE WILLING TO VISIT THE SINGAPORE ART WEEK AGAIN |

Credit: Jensen Ching

*01 Children having fun at the Aliwal Urban Art Festival 2016, held as part of the Singapore Art Week 2016.
02 Opening of Art Stage Singapore 2016 at Marina Bay Sands from 21 to 24 January 2016.
03 Guided tour for Envision: Sculptures @ the Garden City, from 14 January to 15 April 2016.
04 Viewers at ‘Undescribed’, an annual exhibition by emerging talents from a range of photographic fields in Singapore, held from 8 to 24 January 2016 at Deck.
05 Viewers at ‘SCOUT SINGAPORE: EMERGING ART PRACTICES’, a commissioned project to showcase emerging art practices by 25 Singaporean artists in 16 converted shipping containers at Gillman Barracks during the Singapore Art Week 2016.
Visitors enjoying the view of “Cloud Nine: Raining” by Tan Wee Li at night.

“24 Hours in Singapore” by Baet Yeok Kuan, in front of the Asian Civilisations Museum.

“The Rising Moon” by Han Sai Por and Kum Chee Kiong, at the Esplanade Park.

Grace Fu, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth, interacting with students on a tour of “The Rising Moon” with artists Han Sai Por and Kum Chee Kiong at the launch of the Public Art Trust’s public art commissions on 20 January 2016.

Then Minister of State for Culture, Community and Youth, Sam Tan, delivering his opening speech at the Official Opening of the Singapore Pavilion at the Venice Biennale on 6 May 2015.

The SEA STATE Exhibition at the Singapore Pavilion at Venice Biennale 2015.

SEA STATE 6: capsize, 2015
Single-channel HD digital video, c.7min
Credits: Charles Lim & Future Perfect, Singapore

SEA STATE 6: phase 1, 2015
Single-channel HD digital video, c.7min
Credits: Charles Lim & Future Perfect, Singapore
DANCE
We created positive experiences and memories surrounding the diversity of dance through the Got To Move initiative, which gathered the masses to appreciate and participate in different dance genres.

The inaugural festival took place from 8 to 24 October 2015, offering a range of free dance activities such as classes, workshops and seminars, which culminated in Got to Move NOW, a one-day dance carnival at The Promontory @ Marina Bay.

To encourage more cross-cultural exchanges and collaboration, NAC worked with the Australia Council for the Arts for a first-ever Singapore-Australia Dance Exchange. In November 2015, Singapore welcomed 10 Australian dance practitioners and producers, following a reciprocal visit to Australia’s renowned Dance Massive festival held in March 2015. During both trips, artists, producers and presenters from both countries networked and shared their practices and experiences.

The Council also created a new space for training, performance and networking to help our independent practitioners hone their craft as a community. Dance Nucleus, a dance studio and incubation space at the Goodman Arts Centre, presented its debut showcase, Hatch, to the public in January 2016.

*Based on 438 respondents.
Traditional Arts play an important role in connecting us to our cultural roots. In preserving and evolving these art forms, much can be learnt from other culturally rich countries.

To open the doors for cross-cultural collaboration, the Council led a 13-member delegation to Jakarta, Bandung and Padang in December 2015, which connected traditional Malay dance and music practitioners from Singapore with their Indonesian counterparts. The practitioners gained new insights and ideas on rejuvenating and enhancing the appeal of traditional Malay arts to local and international audiences.

To raise the capability of the Malay music sector in Singapore, the Council organised the third run of the Malay Music Enrichment Course (MMEC) from 14 March to 13 May 2016. A partnership between NAC’s Malay Music Development Committee and PERKAMUS (The Society of Singers, Musicians and Professionals of the Malay Music Industry in Singapore), the MMEC equips traditional Malay music practitioners with the ability to read and understand notation. This would pave the way for traditional Malay musicians to document their repertoires and enable collaboration with other music genres.

Apart from preserving and building capabilities in these art forms, we hope to enable the public to gain a deeper appreciation of Traditional Arts. For example, to increase awareness of Chinese dance, we collaborated with the Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan Dance Theatre to present the Chinese Dance Fiesta at Chong Pang City Amphitheatre in September 2015. Quality performances by local arts groups were also commissioned at high-traffic events, such as the Mid-Autumn Festival @ Gardens by the Bay 2015 from 25 September to 4 October.
PERFORMING ARTS
The Council actively seeks opportunities for Singapore artists to be showcased at international platforms. At The Performing Arts Meeting (TPAM) in Yokohama in February 2016, Singapore musicians, theatre and dance artists were featured in the Singapore Focus programme, curated by dramaturg-producer Tang Fu Kuen.

We also facilitated CultureLink Singapore’s organisation of the Singapore Series at the Brisbane Festival 2015. The artists and companies presented by Brisbane Festival were Charlie Lim, Margaret Leng Tan (“Cabinet of Curiosities”), Tang Quartet (“Black Angels”), The Necessary Stage “Best Of”, and W!LD RICE “The Importance of Being Earnest”). NAC also organised the International Presenters Visit Programme (IPVP) in conjunction with the Singapore International Festival of Arts 2015.

To reach new audiences, especially families with young children, the Council embarked on promoting more content for young audiences. We also launched the inaugural ‘Best Production for the Young’ award, as part of the M1-The Straits Times Life Theatre Awards 2016, organised in partnership with The Straits Times.
MUSIC

In addition to supporting quality concerts and audience engagement activities by music groups and musicians in Singapore through NAC’s grant programmes, we helped to increase the profile of our musicians internationally.

At the City of London Festival 2015, crowds were treated to diverse musical performances by artists including the T’ang Quartet, violinist Siow Lee Chin, vocal band MICappella, jazz maestro Jeremy Monteiro and singer-songwriter Charlie Lim.

Back home, in celebration of SG50, the inaugural Singapore Choral Festival treated audiences to performances of 50 local compositions by all-Singaporean choirs, along with numerous ticketed and free performances by Singapore musicians throughout the year. 160 young classical musicians also competed live at the 2015 National Piano and Violin Competition held at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music and the Victoria Concert Hall.
BRISBANE FESTIVAL 2015
The inaugural Singapore Series showcase at this festival in September featured acts by established Singapore artists, including theatre company W!LD RICE, classical string quartet T’ang Quartet and toy pianist Margaret Leng Tan.

CHINA & HONG KONG
ART BASEL HONG KONG 2016
The Singapore art scene was represented by a record number of eight galleries taking part in Asia’s most prestigious art fair, which took place from 23 to 26 March 2016.

CHINA-ASEAN THEATRE WEEK 2015
Eight Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts theatre students represented Singapore at the event in Nanning, China, as part of a series of cultural exchanges between Chinese and ASEAN arts groups. The event took place from 10 to 17 September.

SINGAPORE CHINESE ORCHESTRA’S TOUR TO HONG KONG
Presented by the Hong Kong Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra performed in Hong Kong for the first time in October 2015. The orchestra played two concerts and attracted an audience of close to 2,000 people.

FRANCE
SINGAPORE IN FRANCE FESTIVAL 2015
Co-organised by the National Heritage Board, the National Arts Council and Institut Français, this three-month festival showcased the best of Singapore contemporary arts, culture and heritage to French audiences from March to June 2015. The festival was a befitting celebration of 50 years of diplomatic relations between Singapore and France.

GERMANY
FRANKFURT BOOK FAIR 2015
In October 2015, NAC commissioned a Singapore literary showcase at this international platform. Three Singapore publishers – Epigram Books, Ethos Books and Pustaka Nasional – were also invited to represent the sale of rights of Singapore literary works at the event.

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF SINGAPORE 2015
Ding Yi Music Company, an established Chinese chamber music ensemble, performed at a celebratory SG50 concert on 4 June in Heilig-Kreuz Kirche, Berlin.

INDIA
NEW DELHI BOOK FAIR 2016
A Singapore booth was featured at the Fair in January 2016, with Singaporean authors conducting workshops, presentations and activities at public schools, bookstores and cafes from 14 to 17 January.

ITALY
VENICE BIENNALE 2015
The Singapore Pavilion opened to much excitement on 6 May 2015 at the Arsenale site in Venice. The pavilion, which featured SEA STATE, a work by Singapore visual artist Charles Lim, attracted more than 130,000 visitors over seven months. NAC also commissioned the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore to present an inaugural symposium on South East Asian art at the biennale on 9 May 2015.
ASEAN LITERARY SYMPOSIUM 2015
During the three-day symposium in August 2015, Singapore was represented by Associate Professor of English Language and Literature, Dr Loh Chin Ee, who shared about the Singapore literary landscape.

SINGAPORE-PHILIPPINES CULTURAL EVENING 2015
The Singapore Dance Theatre performed to a 500-strong audience at a special cultural exchange evening in Manila, organised by the Singapore Embassy in the Philippines on 27 August 2015.

INTERNATIONAL PRESENTERS VISIT PROGRAMME 2015
In September 2015, Singapore welcomed eight international presenters and producers to Singapore for the pilot run of this programme. These presenters and producers met with a wide range of Singapore artists and groups, and watched key Singapore productions at the Singapore International Festival of Arts 2015.

UK
CITY OF LONDON FESTIVAL 2015
In celebration of SG50, Singapore was featured as a highlight country at this high-profile festival from 22 June to 10 July with a strong line-up of music performances by artists including Jeremy Monteiro, Charlie Lim and MiCappella.

LONDON BOOK FAIR 2015
In April 2015, Singapore writers and their multilingual works continue to be presented at the Singapore Pavilion at the Fair.

USA
SINGAPORE JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS IN WASHINGTON, D.C.
In December 2015, the SYC Ensemble Singers presented a series of performances at the Peabody Institute and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. This was in collaboration with the Singapore Embassy in USA.

VIETNAM
ASEAN TRADITIONAL MUSIC FESTIVAL 2015
Chinese music group, Resonance – The Sheng Ensemble, represented Singapore at this event in Thanh Hoa Province, Vietnam. The event, which took place from 1 to 6 August, showcased a wide range of traditional music from across the ASEAN member states.
DENA FOUNDATION ARTIST AND CURATOR RESIDENCY PROGRAMME

This residency offers emerging Singapore practitioners opportunities to develop their practices, incubate new ideas and encounter creative challenges. In 2015, curator Jennifer Lam and artists Hilmi Johandi and Muhammad Izdiharuddin were sent for this residency.

SING-FRANCE CREATIVE WRITING RESIDENCY

The Sing-France Creative Writing Residency was started in 2015 with partners ECLA Aquitaine and Institut Français. Chinese writer Chua Chee Lay, the first resident selected for this initiative, attended the residency from 2 March to 13 April 2015.

SINGAPORE-AUSTRALIA DANCE EXCHANGE

Singapore welcomed 10 reputed practitioners and producers from Australia’s dance scene in November 2015, as part of an exchange programme initiated by the Australia Council for the Arts and NAC. The aim of this programme is to encourage more collaborations between dancers and choreographers from both countries.

KÜNSTLERHAUS BETHANIEN (KB) INTERNATIONAL ARTIST RESIDENCY

This residency offers professional contemporary visual artists the opportunity to incubate new ideas, network with international curators and artists, and present their projects at the renowned KB galleries. Singapore artist Sai Hua Kuan attended this residency from 1 June 2015 to 31 May 2016.

TOJI RESIDENCY

From 10 May to 23 December 2015, three Singapore writers – Ng Yi-Sheng, Roslie Sidik and Tania De Rozario – attended this residency, which provided facilities and a creative environment for them to develop new work and hone their craft.

IOWA INTERNATIONAL WRITING PROGRAMME RESIDENCY

From 23 August to 11 November 2015, Singapore writer Yu-Mei Balasingamchow attended this residency at the University of Iowa, one of the most highly regarded creative writing programmes in the United States of America.

YOUTH ARTS OVERSEAS ATTACHMENT PROGRAMME

This is a three-month attachment programme for young arts managers to learn directly from arts organisations in the United Kingdom. This initiative is part of NAC’s ongoing efforts to develop artists, initiators, facilitators and youth engagement workers who can contribute to Singapore’s youth arts landscape. In 2015, Catherine Wong was attached to Chichester Festival Theatre (9 May to 7 August), Jasmine Ng was attached to British Film Institute (1 September to 20 November), and Rai Kannu was attached to Artswork (5 May to 2 August).

UK

SOUTH KOREA

USA

FRANCE

SINGAPORE

GERMANY

NEW ZEALAND
Clarissa Oon is an arts writer and communications professional who has been writing about the arts since the late 90s. Formerly a journalist, she has been a theatre reviewer, Beijing-based China correspondent and arts editor of The Straits Times. She is also the author of the book, Theatre Life!: A History of English-language Theatre in Singapore through The Straits Times (2001). Well versed in the arts, the mother of two pre-schoolers enjoys reading to her children and introducing them to the arts. She shares her views on how the Singapore arts scene has progressed over the years with a rise in quality and diversity of talents and programmes.

You have been writing about the arts since the late 90s. What are some of the common themes of our society that you have encountered?

Singapore is a fast-paced, urban and increasingly cosmopolitan society, which has seen tremendous changes in the last 50 years; some older Singaporeans personally experienced these changes, while for others, the concrete jungle is the only reality they have known.

Across the different art forms, there is, on one hand, a ready embrace of contemporary practices, which have emanated from North America and Europe. On the other hand, some artists are also drawn to investigating traditional Asian art forms, to bridge the distance with the past, or to claim it in some way as part of one’s identity.

There is nostalgia, coupled with an anxiety about the future and an insistent strand of socio-political questioning, particularly in theatre and contemporary visual arts. The arts are not merely entertainment but soul food and a public forum for discourse.

As an arts reviewer, critic and patron, what do you think is unique about Singapore’s arts scene? What makes you proud?

What is unique about Singapore’s arts scene is its hybridity – it has drawn freely from many different cultures, languages and influences, and this has evolved in a way that is very organic and unforced.

I am proud to have grown up along with the arts in Singapore; watching its productions, viewing its art and reading its literature; seeing the likes of playwright Haresh Sharma become masters of their craft and discovering fresh and funky talents like Amanda Lee Koe.

What have you observed about the changes and growth in our arts scene over the years?

The growing professionalisation and surge in artistic output are undeniable. The thing that stands out most for me is how several decades of theatre, music, visual arts, literature and dance in Singapore have produced a distinctive corpus of works and productions – each created at a specific historical moment but which, in some cases, transcend it. The fact that we can now look back and identify certain ‘classics’ that are worthy of revisiting, which speak to different audiences across time and space, is to me a sign of growing artistic maturity.

In charting our art history, we are also looking anew at Singapore’s place in the region. Significant initiatives in these areas last year included Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay’s fifty season of 50 seminal Singapore plays, WILD RICE’s Another Country dramatising choice literary excerpts from both sides of the Causeway, and the opening of the National Gallery Singapore, which casts an expansive and scholarly eye over Singapore and South-east Asian art history, exposing the public to its many treasures.

In your opinion, why should people engage in the arts and how can they do so?

The arts can bring us into worlds we will never otherwise be able to access, stir the emotions as well as the critical faculties, and make us more empathetic as people.

There is a good deal of art in Singapore that is free of charge or very affordable; for example, 70 percent of Esplanade’s programmes from dance performances to outdoor jazz concerts are free, and so is entry to most museums! For those new to the arts, you can pick up The A List, a free fortnightly guide, to find out what’s going on around town.

How can we build an artistic legacy for future generations?

By continuing to support noteworthy artists, embracing their failures and successes, and documenting and archiving their works for posterity.