

# VISUAL ARTS

Singapore’s focus in the early years was to put in place infrastructure and establish cultural institutions – namely the Singapore Art Museum (SAM), STPI – Creative Workshop & Gallery and National Gallery Singapore (the Gallery) which were formed in 1996, 2002 and 2015 respectively. These institutions have been instrumental in bringing major exhibitions and artworks to Singapore, and expanding the National Collection into the world’s largest public collection of Southeast Asian art. The Nanyang Technological University Centre for Contemporary Art (NTU CCA) was launched in 2013, offering cutting-edge exhibitions, residencies and a space for research and critical discourse.

Public funding was extended to diploma programmes offered by LASALLE College of the Arts and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) in the early 2000s, making art education a more viable option for Singaporeans. NTU launched its Arts, Design and Media (ADM) faculty in 2005 offering Bachelor of Fine Art programmes to expand options for aspiring arts practitioners.

In an effort to profile our artistic talents, Singapore began showcasing our artists at the prestigious Venice Biennale in 2003. In addition to showcasing made-in-Singapore content internationally, major events such as the Singapore Biennale and Singapore Art Show were introduced in the mid-2000s to connect Singapore with the international art world, and to position Singapore as a go-to destination for contemporary art.

Public art schemes were introduced to add character to public spaces and to make art a part of everyday life. These include the Land Transport Authority’s Art in Transit Programme, Urban Redevelopment Authority’s (URA) Public Sculpture Masterplan, URA’s Art Incentive Scheme and National Heritage Board’s Tax Incentive Scheme.

To encourage artists to engage Singaporeans through public art, PAssionArts by People’s Association (PA) and the Public Art Trust by NAC have commissioned numerous public art projects for our neighbourhoods.

As a means to catalyse the art market and create a credible marketplace in Singapore, Art Stage Singapore was established in 2011, and Gillman Barracks was launched as a contemporary art cluster in 2012. Both initiatives were spearheaded by the Economic Development Board. Gillman Barracks offers quality programming and is an anchor venue for major arts and cultural events in Singapore. Singapore Art Week was launched in January 2013 by the Singapore Tourism Board, which has branded Singapore as a destination for visual arts, attracting more regional and international visitors.

## ► ANALYSIS OF CURRENT STATE

### Strengths

Singapore has the largest art institutions in the region, acquiring more than 8,000 artworks making the National Collection the largest Southeast Asian art collection in the world. The collection is conserved, maintained and stored at the Heritage Conservation Centre, a world-class facility with exemplary standards in artwork conservation and storage. In addition, both arts colleges moved into new purpose-built facilities, and together with NTU ADM are training a steady stream of artists every year. Audience growth for the visual arts has increased since 2011<sup>1</sup>, possibly due to the numerous visual arts programmes available all year long.

<sup>1</sup> 2017, Population Survey on the Arts.



To enable art practitioners to create and present new artworks, grant schemes provide flexibility for diverse artistic practices and programmes. This has helped develop the professional capabilities of our practitioners and increase audience engagement. Arts housing support is also available to artists and arts organisations, allowing many to benefit from affordable studio spaces despite high real estate costs.

### Weaknesses

Most art cities around the world have organically-driven art scenes comprising non-profit spaces, artist-run collectives, residencies, art archives and research organisations. In Singapore, there are few grounds-up and privately funded initiatives due to the lack of suitable spaces and high costs. Despite growing audiences, visual arts appeal less to the 'Married with Kids' and 'Seniors' segments<sup>2</sup>. There is also a lack of research on the behavioural patterns of our current and non-art audiences. Artists, art galleries and art fairs also find it difficult to be more self-sustaining as the market for buyers of Singapore art is relatively small. The art market is still in a nascent state where trade represents only 1% of global art export and import. In addition to the lack of art buying, individual giving to the visual arts is not an established norm in Singapore with crowdsourcing only an emerging trend among Singapore companies and artists.

Space is an important resource for art practitioners to focus on art-making and programming. As affordable spaces are scarce, it poses a constraint for the sector as government-subsidised arts spaces are limited, resulting in a shortage of spaces for a growing number of artists. Presentation spaces are also limited, restricting arts groups such as art societies from presenting large-scale exhibitions. There are also few development platforms available to support art practitioners such as curators, art writers, gallery and exhibition professionals.

### Opportunities

Working more effectively with key visual art institutions can contribute to growing new audiences, capability development, and positioning Singapore as a regional thought leader. Art gallery associations can enhance the capabilities of our art galleries by developing strategies for art businesses, cultivating collectors,

organising events and facilitating networking opportunities to share best practices. To grow new audiences particularly in under-represented segments, art can be made more accessible through educational and family-oriented programmes<sup>3</sup>. More research can also be done to understand different audience segments and non-audiences better. To nurture interest in Singapore art among the young, exposure to more Singapore art and artists in engaging ways can be introduced across levels within the classrooms, and through facilitated school visits to the museums.<sup>4</sup>

More publicly-owned spaces can be made available, and land planning agencies can be encouraged to consider public art as part of their land redevelopment plans. To create more spaces for artwork creation and presentation, unused public properties can be explored for interim art use like creation, production and presentation. Lifestyle events, especially those which include art in their offerings, can also serve as alternative presentation platforms for artists. With the global shift in focus towards digital transformation and engagement, Singapore has a mature environment that supports the growth of new media technologies and scientific infrastructure, and can be used to increase digital engagement, grow new audiences, and spark more collaborative new media art practices.

As more reputable foreign galleries are established, and arts precincts such as Gillman Barracks are created, Singapore is in a good position to develop a reputation as a key art centre in Southeast Asia and beyond. More curators and writers can be developed, to mediate and validate the qualities and values of artists and artworks and contribute to developing a national narrative on Singapore art that resonates with audiences. To strengthen Singapore's position as a visual arts city, it is important to raise Singapore's standing in art and enhance our global reputation. More can be done to showcase our artists at key international platforms, bringing our exhibitions to international museums and galleries, and presenting our artists and galleries at reputable art fairs. It is also important to consider the economic contributions of art from our commercial and art businesses, as they are integral to a sustainable art sector. More focus can be given towards developing the capabilities of these intermediaries in order for Singapore to develop a competitive art

market. Apart from their economic contributions, art galleries can also play an important role in identifying up and coming artists.

### Threats

While audience numbers are growing steadily, getting people to attend visual arts events continues to be a challenge. There are many competing arts events in the cultural calendar, which make it challenging for the sector to grow new audiences. Although visual arts events provide a lower barrier of entry (generally non-ticketed), free programmes offer little to no cost recovery for their organisers. In the long run, this perpetuates an unwillingness to pay for visual arts events and affects the overall sustainability of the ecosystem.

Emerging art cities like Hong Kong, Jakarta and Bangkok are putting in place new infrastructure, institutions and high-signature platforms to brand themselves as art destinations. New regional contemporary art biennales are also emerging in Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok. These new developments will rival Singapore’s position of being the visual arts city of the region. In terms of art commerce, Singapore still lags behind more mature regional art markets like Beijing and Hong Kong, which continue to be dominant platforms in Asia.

### ► ENVISIONED STATE AND OUTCOMES

Singapore will be recognised as the visual arts city for Southeast Asian art globally. Local and foreign visitors enjoy visiting our art institutions and galleries and are excited about our year-round programming. Our ecosystem is robust, and we have an art industry that is supported by an appreciation for art and deep patronage among audiences, including Singaporeans. Our museums are key destinations for schools, and help us grow audiences. Attractive and meaningful public art can be found in many areas of our civic spaces, adding character to our visual landscape.



### Strategic Thrust 01 Inspire Our People

#### *Our art institutions and intermediaries will contribute significantly towards a sustainable ecosystem*

Our art institutions and companies will play a key role in creating opportunities for our artists and helping us develop the professional capabilities of the sector. Our art institutions, which are the biggest and most well-resourced employers of artists, can develop training programmes that benefit the wider art sector. These programmes can focus on professional development in the areas of curation, exhibition management and other supporting roles. Growing critical art writing will be a key focus to nurture more art writers. To encourage more industry-led efforts in developing the sector, art companies will be encouraged to develop residency programmes which will be instrumental in grooming our next generation of prominent visual artists. This will support our artists in developing an oeuvre of artworks that will add to our distinctive art narrative.

- 2 2017, Population Survey on the Arts.
- 3 2017, Population Survey on the Arts. Main barriers of entry reported include family commitments, unfamiliarity with artists/performers and finding the arts difficult to understand.
- 4 MOE’s art curriculum from Primary 1 to Secondary 2 aims to develop visual literacy and art appreciation through three core objectives in seeing, expressing and appreciating, with Singapore art being taught at all levels.



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### ***Ensuring our National Collection stands in good stead for current and future audiences***

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To ensure that our National Collection continues to stand in good stead, an acquisition strategy must be developed to guide our National Institutions in building and enhancing the collection. This is important as both acquisition and presentation of the collection in exhibitions are key to strengthening Singapore's position as a thought leader in Southeast Asian art. The Gallery, SAM and STPI will collaborate to create shared services that can help them benefit from economies of scale. One area is in the acquisition and conservation of artworks, where research of new methods for the storage and conservation of art can be conducted. These institutions can then advise on possible new infrastructure, and enhance processes to ensure that standards of artwork care are continuously developed and upheld.

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### ***More support for development of contemporary art***

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Stronger support will be given to develop contemporary art. We need to invest more in helping SAM promote the appreciation of contemporary art, via commissioning, acquiring, and documenting the present for a future visual art narrative. SAM will also be given support to invest more into their education and outreach efforts. With the expected completion of SAM's new facility by 2021, the museum will be an important champion of contemporary art from Singapore and Southeast Asia.

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### ***More opportunities for artists to create and display their art***

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Bringing art to the public is an immediate and direct way of creating presentation opportunities

for artists and enhancing the visual aesthetics of a city. Public art will remain a key feature in major visual arts events such as Singapore Art Week and the Singapore Biennale. Along with public art, the interim use of unused public properties will be explored to create more short-term production and presentation spaces. Use of alternative presentation spaces – such as shophouses and vacant commercial units in malls – for art will also be encouraged.

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### **Strategic Thrust 02 Connect Our Communities**

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#### ***Grow research on visual arts audience segments and behaviours***

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More research will be commissioned to give the community a better understanding of our current visual arts audiences and non-audiences. It will be used to develop outreach initiatives to grow new audiences, and for arts groups and festival organisers to create meaningful programming and ensure that they reach their target segments.

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#### ***Reach under-reached segments of audiences through public art and accessible programmes***

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Art will be brought to the people through art presentations and programmes near their homes. New public art trails will be created, and public agencies will work together to provide spaces for more community art displays. We will work with PA, tapping on their expertise in engaging the community to form meaningful engagements between artists and the wider public. To reach more audiences, artists and art groups will be encouraged to take up commissioning and presentation opportunities offered by lifestyle events in Singapore. Organisers of these events will also be encouraged to feature art as part of their offerings.

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### **Heightening awareness of Singapore art in schools**

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As a longer-term strategy to nurture a more art-literate public, especially in Singapore art, NAC will work with Ministry of Education to heighten the awareness of key Singapore artists and artworks across all levels through engaging programmes, as well as teaching and learning resources, including digital resources. This will be in tandem with efforts to encourage all Singapore schools to participate in museum activities especially at the cohort level.

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### **Encouraging digitisation of research, knowledge and content to create new entry points**

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Singapore's technology expertise can help to attract new audiences through digital engagement. For starters, the digitisation of our National Collection and key institution exhibitions will be completed, so as to create new entry points and increase accessibility. Technology and new media can also be used to encourage collaboration between artists and the technology sector.

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### **Develop capabilities of art galleries and privately funded art intermediaries to cultivate patronage and grow new collectors**

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Cultural institutions such as STPI, which have established themselves as top-tier international galleries within the global art fair circuit, can work closely with art gallery associations to explore new ways of supporting art businesses, growing membership bases, and representing the interests of galleries in working with public agencies, media and stakeholders.

Through regular engagements, art galleries can be encouraged to adopt good business practices

to ensure that their commercial dealings are fair, and share ideas on how to meet the commercial sector's need for professionally-trained gallery managers. The growth of privately-funded intermediaries, such as private museums and collector-led art spaces will also be encouraged. These intermediaries can create opportunities for our artists and develop patronage through programmes and initiatives such as collectors' talks, workshops and presentations of private art collections.

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### **Strategic Thrust 03 Position Singapore Globally**

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#### **Forge new partnerships to provide opportunities for Singapore artists to gain exposure and grow Singapore's reputation internationally**

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Partnerships with acclaimed international and regional residency platforms will be established to provide opportunities for more Singapore artists to gain international exposure. Our art companies will also receive support to organise conferences that will establish Singapore as a centre for visual arts discourse. Support for intermediaries such as art societies will be provided to help older artists create and present new artworks internationally.

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#### **Continue to increase Singapore's international standing in visual arts**

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Singapore will support our artists to present their work on international platforms. We are committed to showcasing Singapore artists at the Venice Biennale until its 2033 edition, and support will continue for artists who are invited to key Biennales and international contemporary art exhibitions. Our institutions will travel our exhibitions to international museums and galleries overseas, and art galleries will receive support to present Singapore artists



at reputable art fair platforms. To encourage greater appreciation for our cultural icons, our Cultural Medallion artists and notable artworks will be celebrated to highlight Singapore's unique art history and narrative. Our institutions will spearhead efforts to write, record and preserve our art historical narrative, to reinforce and share our identity and values globally.

### ► SUMMARY

This sectoral plan will guide efforts to position Singapore as a visual arts destination that has a vibrant art scene and market, one that is internationally recognised as a thought leader in Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art. Singaporeans and visitors will have opportunities to experience and be inspired by the visual arts in spaces where they work and live, produced by artists and art professionals who are supported to create quality art that engages and grows new audiences.

In summary, efforts to develop the visual arts sector will go towards:

- a Equipping our art institutions and companies to develop manpower capabilities for the sector;
- b Encouraging programming that increases the public's access to impactful art experiences; and
- c Creating meaningful opportunities to share our art and artists with international audiences.