

## PHASE 2 OF 45 ARMENIAN STREET ENGAGEMENTS RESOURCE PANEL WORKSHOPS

Following Phase 1 of the 45 Armenian Street engagements, the Resource Panel suggested that it would be useful for them to come together to share their observations from the Phase 1 focus group discussions (FGDs), distill findings and further flesh out aspirations that would shape the ethos, programming, infrastructure, and operating model of 45 Armenian Street.

In discussion with the Resource Panel, it was agreed that the members of the panel would participate in a couple of workshops with the aim of developing a set of recommendations for NAC's consideration. The members were energised and glad to be able to finally meet in person, as Phase 1 had taken place mostly virtually given the COVID regulations in the latter half of 2021. The workshops took place over two half-days on 22 & 29 March 2022, following which the panel spent two months refining their recommendations and these were shared with NAC in early-June.



Key highlights of the RP workshop discussions are captured below.

### Ethos

The panel affirmed that the core of 45 Armenian Street must be an open and inclusive space for artists to experiment and present new forms of artistic and creative expression, with the objective of deepening practices, rejuvenating Armenian Street, and strengthening Singapore's cultural capital at both a national and personal level. Bolstering experimental, emerging, and inter-disciplinary arts, 45 Armenian Street must be a "counterpoint" to its neighbours to bring dynamism, diversity, and distinctiveness to a precinct that is otherwise marked by institutionalised arts and heritage spaces operating within set parameters.

Beyond an artist's enclave and a space for the discovery and nurturing of new genres and talent, the panel was of the view that 45 Armenian Street paid equal attention to the diverse audiences who would converge in the precinct. Through analysing key themes across the FGDs, there was general agreement that these roles had the most traction:

- i. An incubator/capacity-builder that accepts 'failure' as part of creative learning
- ii. An intermediary/bridge between disciplines, communities, and generations
- iii. A gateway/destination that changes the way art is presented, perceived, and experienced

Some members expressed concerns over 45 Armenian Street's feasibility to accomplish all the above, given its emphasis on experimental/emerging art forms, and the reality of limited resources. Priorities notwithstanding, it was noted that the ethos and mission must remain carefully safeguarded, managed through balanced programming. The panel also recognised a need for an advisory to be set up to govern and steward the mission of 45 Armenian Street to ensure it remained true to purpose as outlined above.

## **Programming**

Drawing on ideas from the FGDs, the panel indicated that 45 Armenian Street should focus on incubation, mentorships and other related programmes that build capabilities for artists and arts workers. While curation is necessary, members observed that 45 Armenian Street could benefit more from an open, collaborative approach to broaden possibilities beyond regular, in-house programming. This could mean the inclusion of ideas from guest curators, through periodic open calls, partnerships with external agencies and neighbouring tenants, as well as the hosting of international programmes to develop audiences.

There were discussions about how best to utilise the space for “around-the-clock” programming and placemaking that focuses on community-building, such that wider access and participation may be granted to audiences of different demographic and backgrounds. Importantly, the line-up should encourage and inspire forward-thinking ideas and cross-pollination between practices and generations.

Relatedly, to sustain these efforts at 45 Armenian Street, the panel raised the need to cultivate an iconic brand through developing consistent, dual strategies for marketing such that both specific programmes and 45 Armenian Street as an entity are well understood by the public. On the naming of the space, the panel suggested options that were direct and authentic<sup>1</sup>, and proposed working with an upstart branding agency/individual to assist with the branding exercise for 45 Armenian Street.

## **Infrastructure**

Beyond spatial needs<sup>2</sup>, the panel highlighted the importance of design and architecture in rebranding 45 Armenian Street given the potential impact it can have on the neighbourhood. 45 Armenian Street having the potential to be a key contributor to the rejuvenation of the precinct, the panel felt that it ought to be refurbished into an iconic, well-designed building that not only improves user and visitor experiences; but serves as a ‘post-worthy’ landmark that enhances its own identity and draws attention to the activities within it. Possible ideas for the building’s exterior include a changing façade, public art interventions, provision of streetscape amenities, and the use of technological and digital tools to work around limitations of a heritage-conservation building.

On the interior, the panel suggested a reallocation of spaces to make way for a canteen (i.e., *kopitiam*) and a preview space for visual merchandising. The panel envisioned 45 Armenian Street with specific zones comprising creation and presentation (performance, visual, and sound works), gatherings (i.e., open meeting rooms, F&B, and a garden), support services (i.e., multi-purpose/storage and back-of-house infrastructure), and finally, the pedestrianised Armenian Street.

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<sup>1</sup> The panel felt that “45AS” could work as it is authentic and direct, calling it what it is. Other ideas surfaced include: The Station, The Power Station, 45, 45 Art Station or 45 Art Space (a play on the acronym of 45AS) or possibilities for logo play as the numbers “45” look like the letters “AS”.

<sup>2</sup> The FGDs indicated the following: a porous and inviting space that fosters gatherings between people and disciplines; integration of dining and lifestyle within 45 Armenian Street to appeal to a broad-based audience; purpose-built with shared spaces, equipment and services that support the making and production of multi-disciplinary practices.

## **Operating Model**

The panel favoured a new operating model built on collaborative and collective decision-making to ensure that the ethos of openness, diversity, and inclusivity is preserved at 45 Armenian Street. On governance, the panel raised the importance for it to bear characteristics that would enable an iconic culture that thrives on connectivity, a curation that is open and exploratory, artists who are agile and bold, and resources that are sustainable and viable.

With these principles, the panel outlined three key roles that would make up the organisational structure of 45 Armenian Street: (i) an advisory setup, or a panel of individuals with expertise in relevant fields to guide NAC and the curatorial/programming team, (ii) a lean curatorial and programming team that not only partners others to create opportunities for emerging artists, but bears the task of balancing business and not-for-profit activities, and works with potential benefactors for sustainability, and (iii) a facilities/venue management that would alleviate the curatorial/programming team from dealing with non-creative matters, and whose costs would be covered by the MCCY/NAC. Overall, the panel agreed that 45 Armenian Street should seek to generate revenues to keep to its mission and purpose.

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NAC is grateful for the Resource Panel's invaluable time, commitment, and recommendations. These recommendations will form the basis for the next phase of development on 45 Armenian Street and more information will be shared as the development progresses.