

YOUNG ARTIST AWARD 2016

MARC NAIR



“Marc delights in providing collaborative platforms for emerging and established artists through various creative portfolios.”



PERFORMING AT PLUMSTEAD MANOR SCHOOL, LONDON, 2016
Photo credit: Hon Jing Yu



PERFORMING IN KUCHING, SARAWAK, 2016
Photo credit: The Local Mews

Marc Nair (b. 1981) is a poet, spoken word performer, and photographer. He has, to date, produced six poetry collections, the most recent being *Spomenik* (2016), a book of poems and photographs inspired by the Balkans.

The English Literature graduate from National University of Singapore, Marc has performed both locally and internationally over the last ten years, being a regular participant at local literary events such as the Singapore Writers Festival and the NLB Read! Festival. Abroad, Marc has taken part in such diverse festivals as the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival, LitProm in Frankfurt, the Queensland Poetry Festival and the Makassar International Writers Festival. His literary achievements are reflected in his accolades – a multiple winner of poetry slams in Singapore, he was a finalist at the 2010 World Poetry Slam held in Paris, France, and took home the first prize at the 2015 Text in the City Competition organised by The Arts House, Singapore.

Marc was the 2015 Writer-In-Residence at Gardens by the Bay and in 2016 he was appointed the national writer in residence at Nanyang Technological University.

Building on his legacy as an educator, Marc continues to inspire students with creative writing and performance workshops in schools. Through TEDx Singapore, where he was a featured speaker in November 2015, his spoken word poetry reached out to a much wider audience.

Marc delights in providing collaborative platforms for emerging and established artists through various creative portfolios. He was the artistic director of Lit Up, an indie arts festival, from 2011-2014. He was also the artistic director of Musicity, a spoken word and music festival, in 2014. For the past ten years, he has worked on the *mrbrownshow* as a scriptwriter and voice talent. In 2015, he co-founded Mackerel, an online culture magazine. ■

A CONVERSATION WITH MARC NAIR

*Tell us about your earliest memories encountering the arts.
Who or what were your key influences?*

I have always been an avid reader, and I have to thank my mother for this. She used to read me nursery rhymes and I developed an early penchant for memorising and reciting them. I suppose that was the root of performance poetry for me! I read a lot of fiction when I was growing up, and that expanded the landscape of my imagination by leaps and bounds.



What are some of the biggest challenges you face when creating new works?

I always need more time. Time to move my work past the initial stage of ideation into development and execution. As I grow older I become more ambitious and want to see my words live in different forms and media, but that often involves financial support as well as convincing stakeholders of the value and place of multidisciplinary art, and that is a continuing struggle.



What motivates you to continue in spite of these challenges?

Motivation has never been a problem. It's more a case of getting my brain to cease being endlessly engaged. I am usually involved in two or three creative projects at once, so it means I literally do not have the time to think depressing thoughts about art and life.

“There are stories everywhere, and I feel I have a duty to find a way to tell them, whether it is through poetry, photography or song.”

What is your personal philosophy in life, and how does it translate into your writing?

There are stories everywhere, and I feel I have a duty to find a way to tell them, whether it is through poetry, photography or song.



What do you want the audience to experience through your poems and spoken word performances?

A glimpse into a moment. The poem is frozen like a cinemagraph, much of it is still, but there's a moving element, the eye of the reader wending its way, lending their perspective and changing how the poem is received.

What advice would you give to students who want to pursue a career in your field?

You forge your own path, and when you look back, the jungle has closed up, and there isn't a way to return. You just have to go forward, in search of that elusive moment when light breaks the foliage and you see the landscape open like a new story in front of you.

What are your vision and hopes for Singapore's literary arts scene?

More systemic recognition of the value of literature; not just in school or in certain pockets of society, but as an accessible tool of expression. Creativity not for its own sake, but as a way of understanding the self.

How does receiving the Young Artist Award change things for you?

Tell us more about how you intend to further grow and contribute to the arts scene.

I do not think it will change things very drastically for me.

I have already planned projects and gigs well into 2017, but I am interested in curating more arts related events both locally and overseas, although the big questions of budget and audience interest remain. I also hope to start work on a third book of travel poems, so that means more travel is in the works. ■



WORDS OF APPRECIATION

I would like to thank God for inspiring me with the eternally creative work of art that is our universe.

My parents, for instilling in me a love of stories, and never holding me back from reading as much as I wanted. My brother, for keeping me on the edge with his inimitable sense of humour.

My wife, Carolyn, for being my pillar, and growing with me in this journey towards becoming better artists everyday.

Word Forward, for giving me my start in publishing and in the world of performance poetry and mrbrown, with whom I've been proud to create a satirical social history of Singapore over the past ten years.

The National Arts Council for their support and belief that art still has a place in Singapore.

My spoken word homies. I am glad to be part of a generation that is taking back the stage and bringing poetry into the unlikeliest of places.

The vibrant local community of writers, musicians and artists whom I have had the great privilege to work with all of these years. You truly inspire me to keep creating.