

Of Bureaucracy and Creativity:
Full Report on the IPS-SAM Roundtable on Our SG Arts Plan
(part of the IPS-SAM Spotlight on Cultural Policy Series)

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Executive Summary

This is the report of a roundtable discussion organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) on 14 December 2018 titled “Our SG Arts Plan (2018–2022)”. This roundtable series is organised in collaboration with the Singapore Art Museum.

The recently unveiled Our SG Arts Plan (2018–2022) maps the strategic priorities and initiatives of the National Arts Council (NAC) over five years. This blueprint follows on earlier masterplans, namely, the 1989 Report of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts; the Renaissance City Plans of the 2000s; and the 2012 Arts and Culture Strategic Review. To what extent are the priorities in this new plan the most important ones facing Singapore arts and culture at this stage of development? Are there areas that ought to be part of it, which have been left out? What are the issues and challenges that the NAC will face in implementing the plan? What, in particular, are the specific opportunities and obstacles faced by each sector? These and other questions were discussed by artists, academics, and other experts at the roundtable.

The six speakers were as follows:

1. Mr Terence Ho, Nominated Member of Parliament and Executive Director of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra Company Limited;
2. Dr Venka Purushothaman, Vice-President (Academic) and Provost of LASALLE College of the Arts;
3. Ms Kathleen Ditzig, PhD student at the Nanyang Technological University School of Art, Design and Media;
4. Ms Chong Gua Khee, independent theatre practitioner;
5. Mr Tan Peng Sing, musician in M1LDL1FE;
6. Ms Charmaine Poh, Visual and Media Anthropology MA candidate at Freie Universität Berlin

Following the six presentations, Mr Paul Tan and Mr Low Eng Teong, Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Assistant Chief Executive, respectively, of the National Arts Council gave their thoughts and responses to the six presentations.

The roundtable ended with a discussion session that was open to all participants, moderated by Professor C J W-L Wee of Nanyang Technological University's College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences.

Speakers' presentations

Mr Ho spoke about the three key success factors to implementing Our SG Arts Plan, namely (1) reach and receiving; (2) agreement and alignment; and (3) milestones and measurement. He stressed the importance of dissemination and ensuring that Our SG Arts Plan reaches the arts community, as well as being mindful of how the community receives the plan. For instance, arts groups in the community need to agree on the values that Our SG Arts Plan articulates in order for the community to work together in that direction. He added that it is important to set milestones and measurements that would allow us to gauge whether the outcomes listed in Our SG Arts Plan have been met.

Dr Purushothaman spoke about the importance of nuancing the relationship between two axes — the bureaucratic axis and the creative axis — that exist within cultural policies in general. He pointed out that artists often do not embrace cultural policies because cultural policies do not speak *to* them, but instead speak *of* them. Moreover, artists often use a language that is borrowed from cultural criticism to frame cultural policies, which runs the risk of being seen as reducing cultural policies to a mere resistance of governments and governmentality, when in reality artists may not be resisting it, but instead, simply manifesting and expressing it in different ways. He stressed the importance of allowing these creative expressions of cultural policies to emerge and to give voice to multiple viewpoints that have the potential to shape cultural policies.

Ms Ditzig spoke about the issue of sustainability of artists, focusing on the international aspects of Our SG Arts Plan. Citing official numbers on the full-time enrolment of tertiary arts courses and the total employment in the arts sector, Ms Ditzig said Singapore was heading towards a situation where there was an increasing supply of manpower but insufficient jobs. Internationalisation of artists is important as producers will have to look outwards given the limited available capital in our

local market. However, she pointed out that internationalisation and positioning Singapore globally would also bring about certain challenges. For instance, one stumbling block in terms of funding was the idea of “Singapore dollars for Singaporeans”, which limits the invitation of foreign guests that in turn impacts Singaporean artists who have limited resources to develop their regional networks.

Ms Chong agreed with the general directions set out in Our SG Arts Plan, but questioned where the plan was relative to the previous arts plans such as the Renaissance City Plans; this is crucial to understanding which strategies were more successful than others, and what issues have persisted. Furthermore, she called for greater transparency and clarity in terms of how certain priorities in Our SG Arts Plan had been decided. She also proposed that future arts plans take on a more collaborative tone where NAC works more closely with the arts community in the drafting of the plan so there can be greater synergy between the two players.

Mr Tan Peng Sing also agreed that the three strategic thrusts outlined in Our SG Arts Plan were aligned with what musicians were trying to do on the ground. However, he pointed out that more can be done to engage another important group of stakeholders, i.e., broadcasters, in this effort to promote local music, citing results from a survey he conducted which suggested a low proportion of local music being played on English radio stations. He concluded his presentation with some suggestions such as introducing radio quotas, mandatory programming as well as co-opting homegrown organisations as sponsors to incentivise the support of local music.

Ms Poh gave her responses to three policy suggestions in the visual arts plan. First, in response to the suggestion of reaching under-reached segments of audiences such as seniors, Ms Poh asked if the art that is being presented truly reflects the realities of the audience, as this was integral to successful engagement. Second, in response to heightening the awareness of Singapore art in schools, Ms Poh stressed that art cannot be taught in isolation from disciplines like history, sociology and anthropology, and that provocative conversations should not be avoided. Third, in response to the idea of forging new partnerships to grow Singapore as a centre for visual arts discourse, Ms Poh stressed the importance of reflexivity, in particular to our socio-political climate, as fundamental to creating this critical discourse.

Response by the National Arts Council

Following the speakers' presentations, Mr Paul Tan and Mr Low Eng Teong gave their responses to what was said.

Mr Paul Tan and Mr Low thanked the speakers for sharing their thoughts and feedback, and said the points raised serve as an important reminder that even though Our SG Arts Plan has been launched, some issues remain to be resolved, and these need to be addressed moving forward into the next stage of operationalising and implementing the plan. They highlighted that Our SG Arts Plan was not only meant for the arts community, but also for other government agencies (and the wider public in general) to better understand how NAC as a statutory board plans to guide itself in its work moving forward. Both men pointed out a key concern, that while 54 per cent of Singaporeans have attended at least one arts and culture event in the past one year, only 37 per cent of Singaporeans expressed interest in the arts. This suggests that the sustainability of the arts in Singapore cannot be addressed by simply pumping in more funding. Furthermore, each art form — whether it is the literary, performing or visual arts — faces its own specific set of challenges. They also acknowledged that NAC does not have all the answers and solution, and is thus open and prepared to work with the arts community over the five years to implement Our SG Arts Plan.

Discussion

The main points raised in the discussion were:

1. **Strengthening NAC's role championing the arts in Singapore.** Participants spoke about how NAC's role as a champion of the arts does not solely mean engaging in activities such as putting out more programmes or disbursing more funding, but also articulating the value of the arts in society — what the arts is fundamentally about (and is not about); what the arts serves beyond the instrumental; and how the arts is a fundamental part of life, existence and being human.
2. **Growing audiences.** Participants discussed the question of whether free arts events end up “cannibalising” ticketed shows while bearing in mind the need to have free events in order to grow audiences in the first place. Participants also considered the possibility that Singaporeans do not attend arts events because

the artwork is not what the artist *wants* to say, but is instead what the artist is *allowed* to say. Thus, perhaps the underlying problem that needs to be addressed relates to compromised and diminished art rather than increased funding.

3. **Measuring the success of the arts.** Participants spoke about the importance of being critical about the devices that have been used to measure the success of the arts as that has become the basis of creating many policy papers over the years. For instance, basic quantitative indicators like audience numbers and event numbers do not shed light on the level of engagement with the arts, and more has to be done to critically measure the level of engagement with the arts on a deeper level.

Introduction

Together with the Singapore Art Museum, IPS organised a roundtable discussion on 14 December 2018 to look into the recently unveiled Our SG Arts Plan (2018–2022). The plan maps the strategic priorities and initiatives of the National Arts Council (NAC) over the next five years. This blueprint follows on earlier masterplans, namely the 1989 Report of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts, the Renaissance City Plans of the 2000s, and the 2012 Arts and Culture Strategic Review.

Held at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, the roundtable examined the following issues:

- To what extent are the priorities in this new plan the most important ones facing Singapore arts and culture at this stage of development?
- Are there areas that ought to be part of it, which have been left out? What are the issues and challenges that the NAC will face in implementing the plan?
- What, in particular, are the specific opportunities and obstacles faced by each sector?

A total of 41 participants attended the roundtable, including policymakers, academics, artists and arts practitioners, and experts from other relevant sectors. The roundtable was chaired by Professor C J W-L Wee of the Nanyang Technological University, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences.

Mr Tan Tarn How, Adjunct Senior Research Fellow at IPS kicked off the session with some introductory remarks. Following which, six speakers gave their presentations on the topic in the following the order:

1. Mr Terence Ho, Nominated Member of Parliament and Executive Director of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra Company Limited;
2. Dr Venka Purushothaman, Vice-President (Academic) and Provost of LASALLE College of the Arts;

3. Ms Kathleen Ditzig, PhD student at the Nanyang Technological University School of Art, Design and Media;
4. Ms Chong Gua Khee, independent theatre practitioner;
5. Mr Tan Peng Sing, musician in M1LDL1FE;
6. Ms Charmaine Poh, Visual and Media Anthropology MA candidate at Freie Universitat Berlin



From left to right: Mr Terence Ho, Professor C J W-L Wee, Dr Venka Purushothaman, Ms Chong Gua Khee.

Following the six presentations, Mr Paul Tan and Mr Low Eng Teong, Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Assistant Chief Executive, respectively, of the National Arts Council gave their thoughts and responses to the six presentations.

The roundtable ended with a discussion session that was open to all participants, moderated by chairperson Professor Wee.

Speaker 1: Terence Ho

I strongly believe that Singapore's art and culture can be a strategic national resource, whether we see it as "soft power", "hard power", or even a "superpower". The question is, "How should we do it?" To do so, we need to have dialogues and to ask questions that challenge ourselves. Why the arts and culture? Why the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) and the National Arts Council (NAC)? What should be the benchmark?

Key success factors to implement Our SG Arts Plan

Today, I would like to share my thoughts on what I think are three key success factors to implementing Our SG Arts Plan: (1) reach and receiving, (2) agreement and alignment, and (3) milestones and measurement.

I conducted a survey with some arts groups that were in the practice of traditional arts and asked them if they had heard about Our SG Arts Plan. Out of the 10 whom I surveyed, only one of them said they had heard of the plan. When I asked if they knew what Our SG Arts Plan was about, they said, "I think the government is going to give us more money." The remaining nine of them had probably not read up about the plan because of a language barrier.

I believe that there are three key success factors to implementing Our SG Arts Plan. The first is about "reach and receiving". An important factor for ensuring the success of Our SG Arts Plan is to reach the community, and the next factor is in how the arts community receives it. In particular, there must be a buy-in in order for us to talk about the plan and what future actions should be taken as a community. The second is "agreement and alignment". Agreement and alignment must exist among the arts groups in the community, and we all have to agree on the values that Our SG Arts Plan articulates in order to work towards that direction. Third, I believe that there must also be "milestones and measurements" set in order to measure the success of Our SG Arts Plan. This will allow us to gauge if we have achieved the outcomes of Our SG Arts Plan, whether it is the three strategic thrusts or the eight priorities listed in the plan.

Building the ecosystem for the Chinese music scene

I would like to share with you a case study on building the arts and culture ecosystem of the Chinese music scene in Singapore.

One of the aims of Our SG Arts Plan is to grow audiences, especially audiences who pay to attend and participate in arts events. To do so, I believe there are certain factors that we need to look at, such as the artist and the content, because the content will account for almost 60 to 70 per cent of concert sales. Other factors to pay attention to include marketing, and partnerships and sponsorships, which will make up the remaining 40 per cent for growing audiences. I think adopting this arts and culture ecosystem approach (see Figure 1) is something that we all need to look at, including gathering the support government agencies like the NAC.

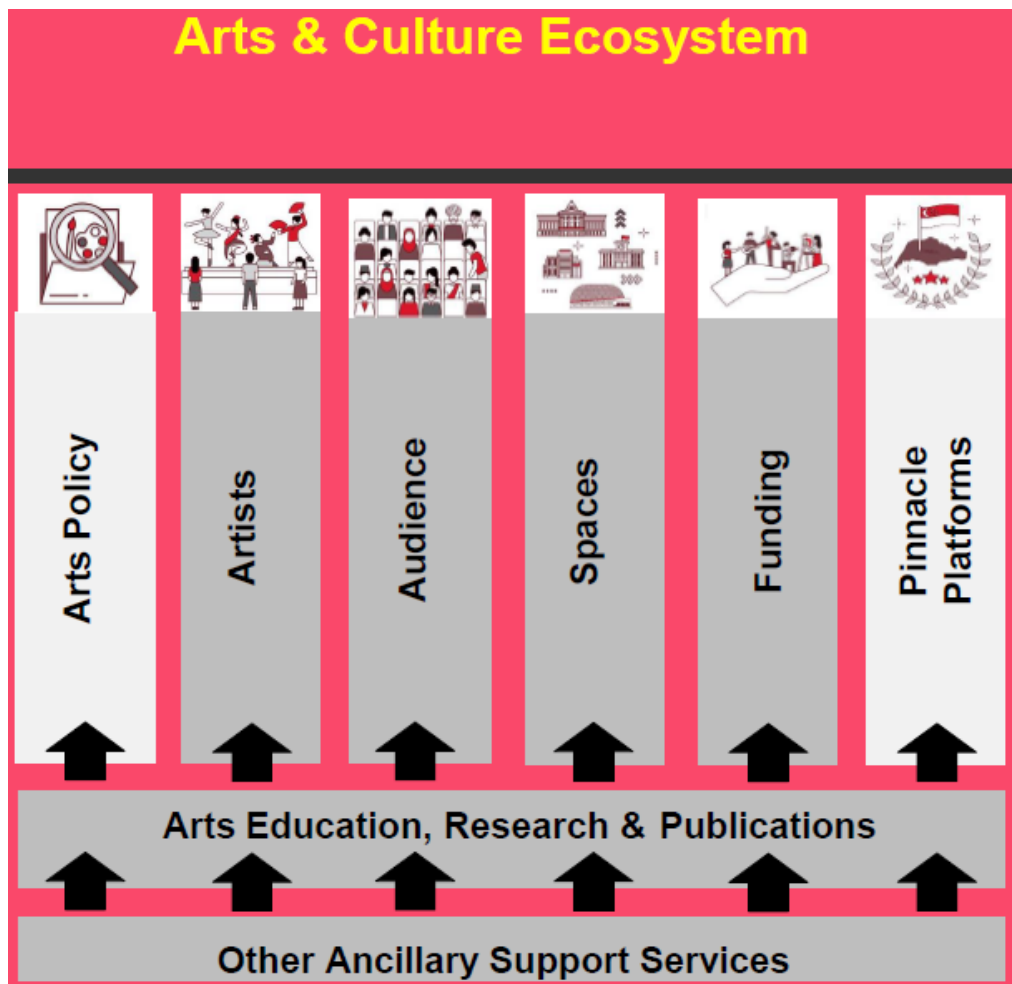


Figure 1: Arts and culture ecosystem. Image courtesy of Terence Ho.

In terms of building the arts and culture ecosystem for the Chinese music scene in Singapore, we have been looking at three important dimensions — digital reach, global reach and community reach. One example of how the Singapore Chinese Orchestra has been working on our digital and global reach is by staging the world’s first online Chinese orchestra digital concert, where e-tickets were sold to reach out to the world. It was a very costly effort to pull off but we asked ourselves if it was worth it. The answer was, yes, as it was a dimension that no other Chinese orchestra in the world was looking at. To improve our community reach, we want our peaks of excellence, champions and role models in the Chinese music scene — be it a composer, conductor or young artist — to be highlighted. For example, we want the works, compositions and concerts of our Cultural Medallion and Young Artist Award recipients from the Chinese music scene to be highlighted and recognised in the community. Another example of how we improve community reach is through the cross-cultural ensembles where professional and semi-professional musicians come together to build and groom the next generation of musicians. We also have the Singapore Chinese Music Federation that brings together community orchestras — from schools, institutions and organisations — to work together and to stage concerts to inspire the next generation of our young musicians.

I believe that there are three key success factors to implementing Our SG Arts Plan — “reach and receiving”, “agreement and alignment”, and “milestones and measurements”.

Finally, I would also like to highlight what I think are some essential traits of an effective cultural leader, what are some challenges that we might face in the future, as well as how we can rise to these challenges. First, I think it is important for an effective cultural leader to have creativity and critical thinking, and always to be dynamic and have vision. Our SG Arts Plan serves as a good platform for the traditional arts groups to exercise this strategic thinking to see how we can make the arts and culture part and parcel of everyday life in Singapore. Having diversity, quality and competency are also other important traits.

However, with limited resources — in terms of grants or arts spaces provided — it is important that we produce content that is relevant to society, which is important for growing audiences as well. Thus, I am very glad to see that one of the focuses of Our

SG Arts Plan is on growing the audience, which is something we need to work very hard on moving forward. In terms of content production, we also need to ask ourselves what kind of content allows us to position Singapore on a global stage, and what kind of content international festivals will value in order for us to reach out to these spaces. Last but not least, I would like to reiterate that communicating Our SG Arts Plan to various government ministries and agencies (e.g., Ministry of Education, Economic Development Board or Ministry of Foreign Affairs) is an important mode of engagement for us, whether it is by individual arts groups or organisations. Perhaps we can invite decision-makers and policymakers in such institutions to attend roundtable discussions like this in future so that they can understand the arts and culture better. For example, one of the points made in Our SG Arts Plan was about working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on cultural diplomacy projects so that such programmes can help sell Singapore art across boundaries. This is something I would like to lobby more to other Members of Parliament.

In conclusion, I hope I can perform my role as Nominated Member of Parliament for the arts, and I am determined to inspire the Parliament. Do give me your feedback so that I can voice them in Parliament, and I hope to have the support of the arts community support to do so.

Speaker 2: Venka Purushothaman

I seek to take a more distanced approach to Our SG Arts Plan, and that ties in with my research on the emergence of cultural policies in Southeast Asia over the last couple of years. As a clarification, I am using the term “cultural policies” to also refer to religion and language policies.

One of the many things that I find when it comes to cultural policies is that there is an increasing need to give nuances to the relationship between two axes that exist within cultural policies. The first is the “bureaucratic axis”, which primarily deals with the public agencies and looks at how people’s lives are grounded in, say, religion and other social practices within the community. The second is the “creative axis” — how people’s sense of belonging starts to emerge through the preservation of ideas or the development of new ideas and new ways of expressing society. It also looks at how social and personal identities are being developed, and how artist communities generally resist cultural homogenisation and cultural globalisation.

So, how do we look at the points where the two axes meet? Much of the research that I have looked at does not necessarily deal with how these two axes meet, but instead looks at resisting the language of cultural policies, which again, is itself a manifestation of how the cultural policy discourse is primarily a European discourse. This was brought out through a kind of demarcation that governments are responsible for national policies, and that artist communities will continuously resist these national policies. In actual fact however, artist communities might not be resisting them, but instead, manifesting and expressing them in different ways. Preservation and safeguarding histories; cultural production and dissemination; artist identities; arts research and education; training and administration; and job creation — all these are tied back to the symbolic language of cultural policies. With these creative expressions of cultural policies, what does this mean for the identity of our society?

In many communities, artists do not embrace cultural policies because cultural policies do not speak *to* them, but instead speak *of* them. Herein lies a particular conundrum — which is not peculiar to Singapore but very much due to the way we frame cultural policies that have been historically and globally developed — that there are always some people who are the gatekeepers of culture, and there are others who are outside that gate on many levels. So, we are here today to look at where we

are at, and how we should “open the gates” and meet at the midpoint in order to facilitate this conversation.

When looking at cultural policies, I think we need to ask ourselves, “How can we start to build a language that is of our own, and how does that language express us at this point in time in history, and in this moment of change?” This is important because on one front, cultural policies are to certain degrees tools for political and cultural hegemony as there are indeed certain geopolitical imperatives that need to be addressed. At the same time, this is confronted by artist and academic communities that are framing “culture” within a particular lens of cultural criticism and cultural studies, which they use as a toolkit to look at the world. So, when artist communities are looking for a language to speak about cultural policies, this language often comes from cultural criticism. Herein lies yet another challenge — on some level, we continuously face a risk of reducing cultural policies to merely a resistance of governments and governmentality, especially when it comes to issues relating to censorship and funding. There is almost an inherent paradox in seeing cultural policies as “top-down” rather than “bottom-up” initiatives, when cultural policies can in fact also afford artists alternative media and new initiatives.

How do we then start to create that discourse around and within the community? These are important questions that I am researching. How should we critically reflect on important documents — such as Our SG Arts Plan — that seem to affect us in many different ways? I try to start with the premise of referencing Our SG Arts Plan within Singapore’s history of cultural policies and the idea of “cultural tautology”. There is a cultural tautology that happens because of how we have borrowed the framework of cultural policies, much like UNESCO has cultural policy models for developing countries. One issue when looking that cultural tautology is to appreciate the precariousness of culture in its many forms, which is manifested in the cultural industry. How do we give voice to the multiple viewpoints and dimensions that emerge?

Perhaps one way of looking at it is this, “How do we narrate ourselves?” In terms of Our SG Arts Plan, how do we give sense and meaning to it, and to the way we use it? Perhaps we have to give meaning to this document as it starts to get practised and lived in a particular way. Perhaps it is not so much about trying to give it voice from the outside, but rather, how do we do so from within and how do we negotiate our way through that?

I think many of us are familiar with the idea of cultural policies. Singapore has produced voluminous amounts of policies, and I think it is very impressive that we have been doing that. For example, looking back at our colonial legacies, the British have, as part of decolonisation, cultural policies to introduce multiculturalism, such as language policies. The construction of the “community” was an important part of the cultural policies during the colonial period. Then we had cultural policies during the Lee Kuan Yew period during the 1970s and 1980s, which were about national identity and industrialisation. Issues like “how do you speak to the nation and to the external world” and the internal formulation of multiculturalism, were fundamental. For example, the National Dance Company was one of the major instruments of cultural policies that went out globally to “perform Singapore” — it “performed” what “Singapore” meant. This was followed by cultural policies during the Goh Chok Tong period that dealt with cultural symbolism through buildings and the construction of institutions. Then came the Renaissance City Reports (RCPs), which focused on cultural diplomacy. The subsequent Arts and Culture Strategic Report (ACSR) dealt with the issue of “community”.

“There is an increasing need to give nuances to the relationship between two axes that exist within cultural policies. The first is the “bureaucratic axis”, which primarily deals with the public agencies and looks at how people’s lives are grounded within the community. The second is the “creative axis” — how people’s sense of belonging starts to emerge through the preservation of ideas or the development of new ideas and new ways of expressing society.”

So, my question is this: Is Our SG Arts plan a national policy or is it just a small part of a larger ambit? The key point about cultural tautology is that it lends itself to conventionality. We assume that culture in Singapore is necessarily multicultural. We assume that communities are in need of creative sustenance. We assume that convention and repetition are good, which is why we hear words like “community” and “diversity” repeated over time. I would like to ask, perhaps in a hyperbolic fashion, if there are certain things that are *not* natural to Singapore — that are “unnaturally creative”? Yes, it is vibrant, engaged, provocative, participatory and negotiated, but have we shifted ourselves from a “cabinet of curiosities” towards becoming a “house of culture”? Is that where Singapore is?

I am also interested in looking at the key questions around the significant impacts of Our SG Arts Plan relating to the internationalisation of Singapore and the reputation of Singapore as a global city. One interesting conundrum is that Southeast Asia has a rising youth population while Singapore has an ageing one. As artists, how do we start to negotiate this if our hinterland is going to be a major source of engagement? Who do we then speak for? This is important on several fronts. Positioning Singapore as a global city for the arts has appeared at different junctures in Singapore's history of cultural policies and I am trying to see how this is different from cultural diplomacy during the RCPs. How does Our SG Arts Plan respond to the immediacy of geopolitics shifts today?

In terms of "diversity", the idea that Singapore is multicultural is what we seem to proactively live for, but I am also interested see how we can shift the categoricity of "multiculturalism" to the creation of new cultural communities. Can multiculturalism foster new cultural communities to emerge, and how would they start to emerge in this highly mobile environment?

Finally, I think we also need to look at education and research. The fact that there is a strong push for research and documentation is an important and welcomed move. But I think education and research must also remove itself from the romance of culture to look at the textures of culture. Yes, we can document and look at what we have done, but we also have to look at teasing out the textures and critical dimensions of culture, and see if we have delivered what we put ourselves out there to deliver.

I will conclude with this. Our SG Arts Plan is well mapped out and addresses many of the issues that fall short in the earlier masterplans. But because the policy is framed as "this what we aim to do in order to achieve these KPIs", we might also be missing an opportunity to shape policies that seek to give voice to the seismic shift of this generation.

Speaker 3: Kathleen Ditzig

Sustainability and the international: Some thoughts on Our SG Arts Plan

First, I would like to thank NAC for being part of this significant and meaningful engagement, as I understand how difficult it can be to be open to comments, especially when NAC is marshalling different sectors that have competing interests. I work in the visual arts so I mostly speak from that sector, but I think what I have to say also has implications across other art forms and industries.

Today, I would like to talk about sustainability, focusing on the international aspects of Our SG Arts Plan. What I have done here (*in Figure 2*) is compare the statistics on full-time enrolment in tertiary arts courses with the figures on total employment in the sector, which was taken from MCCY's 2017 Singapore Cultural Statistics. If we look at the number of students being produced over the years and the number employed in the visual arts, we see a trend where there is an increasing supply of manpower but not enough jobs. While there are limitations (as we do not know whole figures or more details), extrapolating from what we do have tells us that the schools are producing more students than there are jobs. In fact, the figures might actually be more dismal than this because we know that half of the sector are freelancers. So, how can we sustain all our freelance artists?

Another point I would like to make is that the arts sector is heavily reliant on government. This is a threat because we saw how that played out in Europe where there have been massive cuts in government funding for the arts. We also know that we cannot expect government funding to remain high in the long run especially with global turbulence. While one possible solution may be to increase private patronage — as mentioned in Our SG Arts Plan — we also know that this is increasingly difficult as private patronage may not scale enough to meet the manpower supply in future. A lot of funding comes from personal connections and we know that the small and medium organisations face stiff competition when they go up against international galleries. Thus, if the capital available in our local market is limited, producers will have to look outwards. This is why I want to talk about internationalisation because the international policies are very important in preparing artists to work in international markets.

Table C-1: Full-time Enrolment in Tertiary Arts Courses

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013*	2014	2015	2016
Total Enrolment	3,637	3,823	4,530	5,470	5,584	5,457	5,460
Diploma	2,267	2,415	3,005	3,682	3,724	3,657	3,624
Undergraduate	1,165	1,224	1,358	1,617	1,689	1,614	1,638
Post-graduate	205	184	167	171	171	186	198

Source: National Arts Council

* Film figures included from 2013.

Notes:

Figures from 2014 onwards have been updated with latest figures.

In 2015 the Diploma in Music was added and three new master programmes were added (Master of Music, Master of Asian Arts Histories, and Masters of Arts in Pedagogy).

Table E-1: Total Employment

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total Employment	24,396	25,339	24,814	25,329	27,436	26,568	25,875
Film	3,518	3,841	3,834	3,826	4,529	4,388	4,069
Cultural Heritage	1,407	1,531	1,069	1,066	1,283	1,343	1,381
Literary Arts	6,674	6,509	6,596	6,533	6,818	6,756	6,630
Performing Arts	5,543	5,976	5,759	6,058	6,669	6,620	6,453
Live Performing Arts	3,702	4,108	4,021	4,384	4,960	5,034	5,016
Recorded Music	1,841	1,868	1,738	1,674	1,709	1,586	1,437
Visual Arts	7,254	7,482	7,556	7,846	8,137	7,461	7,342
Fine Art, Crafts & Collectibles	3,427	3,687	3,733	3,930	3,586	3,241	3,283
Photography	3,827	3,795	3,823	3,916	4,551	4,220	4,059

Source: Administrative Records

Notes:

Data from 2016 onwards is based on SSIC 2015 codes (Annex). Data prior to 2015 is based on SSIC 2010.

Source: MCCY Cultural Statistics 2017

Figure 2: Tables comparing full-time employment in tertiary arts courses and total employment. Image courtesy of the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth.

The first point I would like to talk about is inequality and exploitation; manpower versus jobs. It seems like we are heading towards a situation where workforce supply is high, but people have to work four jobs to survive because wages are low. Exploitation is also at the core of the arts industry. But the question is, “Who gets to participate and who gets to be the makers?” The answer is artists from the upper and middle classes can afford to do these non-paid jobs because their families have them covered. So, if we want to see how far we are headed in terms of this inequality, we need to study our institutions and look at who are getting jobs at the entry levels (instead of the middle management). Singapore is in a “sweet spot” as our salaries are pretty good compared to our regional and international counterparts. But this is not always great for freelancers. For instance, there is a pervasive practice where art galleries expect art writers to write for free. Institutions have writer fees that are dismal, e.g., \$200 for a thousand words, which would take six hours to write. Systems

have been set by other governments — such as in Canada, where the rates of art writing are fixed — that allow more power and agency to freelancers. Institutions can lead by example. So, I think it is great that the freelance resource centre is being set up because freelancers need protection and need to be able to negotiate. While there might be a fear that we will over-regulate an economy before it is even able to grow, I think something needs to be done to curb the risk of inequality. Thus, we need to keep in mind where we are headed towards in terms of inequality and exploitation, and policies must mitigate this. What policies are being developed to provide checks and balances to prevent monopolies of power and broad distribution of opportunity for young, emerging, mid-career or established artists?



Ms Kathleen Ditzig giving her presentation.

While NAC does a great job in supporting arts organisations in finding art spaces, one hurdle is the capitalist mentality that some government agencies have about “space” in Singapore, which works against NAC’s good work. With the rising cost of land and the competition from the region where land is cheaper to host “spectacular”

art events to draw an international audience, this may be a long-term sustainability issue. In 2015 for example, the Southeast Asian Creative Cities Network proposed a new alliance for cheap labour and cheap space. Thus, without a governmental-wide change in terms of how space is dealt with, artists may end up being charged a premium by other government agencies (e.g., the Singapore Land Authority) for using a space even if we already have a deal with NAC. In short, we need the value of art to be seen across government agencies – other than just NAC – in order to work.

Another point we need to think about in terms of internationalisation is the issue of “currency exchange”. Five years ago, I did an interview with an artist, and I asked him why Singapore collectors were not collecting his works even though they were great. He said, “It costs \$6,000 for one of my works, and at that price, a Singapore collector can buy two pieces of work by a Filipino or Indonesian artist.” In short, currency exchange works against Singapore artists.

“We need to keep in mind where we are headed towards in terms of inequality and exploitation, and policies must mitigate this. What policies are being developed to provide checks and balances to prevent monopolies of power and broad distribution of opportunity for young, emerging, mid-career or established artists?”

Our SG Arts Plan outlines how Singapore can be positioned globally in three ways.

One way is by establishing Singapore as a valuable collaborative partner for arts and culture in region. I think is this great for ensuring Singapore’s reputation on the international stage. However, I also wonder how NAC is supporting this at the grassroots level. One of the stumbling blocks in terms of funding is the idea of “SG dollars for SGeans”, which we know does not come solely from NAC but is instead a government-wide approach. Moving forward, will NAC extend funding (as part of regular grant cycles) towards the invitation of foreign guests? This is keeping in mind that emerging and mid-career arts practitioners face fewer funding opportunities at the international level because Singapore is not a developing country and hence artists have less resource to develop regional networks. These are integral to their career progression and market or audience growth because they do not have the cultural capital yet.

Another way Our SG Arts Plan aims to position Singapore globally is by developing international residencies and capability-building programmes. I think residency schemes are great and I am so happy that NAC is doing this. Residencies are integral parts of the arts ecology and economy. They enable artists to develop their practice and create artworks. However, residencies are also high-cost and high-risk, both for the artists and the institution. In other words, funding models of residences have a big impact on their sustainability in the arts ecology. So, I am just wondering what is the strategy for the development of international residencies going forward? What is the model of funding for local residencies? Is it more along the lines of the International Artists Residency Scheme as part of the RCPs or is it more along the lines of the Seed Grant? These are important questions because first, artists at different phases of their careers have different needs in relation to international residencies and we cannot put all our eggs in one basket; second, some residencies need to scale up and develop, whereas others need to stay small and remain more flexible. Thus, I am curious how NAC (as well as we as a community) will do this? To add on, I am also really happy to see that critical writing is featured again in the visual arts policies. However, what kind of critical writing is NAC supporting and with what aims in mind? Critical writing does not get a lot of money internationally but is important to do. So, what are we looking for and what are we looking to do?

To end off, I would like to talk about the opportunities in the international art world while looking at Singapore as a backyard to global art centres. These two companies — Maecenas: The Decentralised Art Gallery and Arthena — have their back offices in Singapore. They are basically a stock exchange for the arts and works on blockchain, looking at new ways of venture capital into developing arts funding. My point for highlighting these examples is that there *are* opportunities within the legal and finance sector, which we know typically have been separate from the art world. Are there ways to bring them together to address some of the problems we are facing in terms of sustainability?

Speaker 4: Chong Gua Khee

I would first like to set the context for what I will be sharing today. I am an independent theatre practitioner, but I have a strong interest in movement as well, and therefore I often collaborate with dancers in my projects. In my own practice, I mainly focus on directing and facilitating, but I also sometimes write as well as take on arts research assistantships.

In preparation for today's sharing, I had a number of casual conversations with people from different parts of the arts ecology, ranging from theatre and dance practitioners, to arts researchers, and so on so forth. I also tried to speak to people with different levels of experience, ranging from artistic directors to established practitioners, as well as practitioners who are newer to the field. Of course, this is hardly a rigorous survey, and what I share today is ultimately my perceptions and thoughts from these conversations.

In general, I do not think most people I spoke to had major issues with Our SG Arts Plan, myself included. In principle, I largely agree with the directions that are set out, especially about the freelancer resource centre and internationalisation. But I do have questions about how the plan will be implemented. For instance, while I and a few other people were quite happy about the emphasis on more research, I have questions about who will be conducting the research, how the research will be disseminated, and what are the plans for those areas of focus while studies are ongoing, which will take at least a couple of years.

I understand that it is impossible to spell out everything in the arts plan, and I appreciate that some details were highlighted wherever it seemed possible, but it would be definitely more helpful to be able to hear more specifics about the plan as and when possible.

On this note, I have a few questions to raise about the specifics (or the lack thereof) regarding certain details in Our SG Arts Plan.

Where are we relative to the previous arts plan?

My first point is about where we are relative to the previous arts plans. What I appreciated about the RCP III is that it outlined briefly what has been achieved in the RCP I and II, and therefore made it very clear how it was trying to build on what had already been achieved or to fill the gaps that had yet to be addressed.

However, in Our SG Arts Plan, there are hardly any references to what had been outlined in the previous arts plans, and I would argue that not all the challenges highlighted in the previous plans have been met. For instance, the first priority in the Arts Master Plan talks about “greater support for artistic creation”, and notes the high output of the arts and the issue of shortened creative processes, and proposed in turn the creation of a centre for text-based works — which is Centre 42. From my own experience and observations, it has been amazing having Centre 42 as part of the performing arts ecology, and they have definitely contributed a lot to creating space for works to be incubated. At the same time, I feel that overproducing and also short incubation periods are still issues; and in fact, in Centre 42’s recent event, “In the Living Room: Year in Reviews 2018”, one of the four topics singled out for discussion about the year was as follows:

“Many original plays debuted this year. But are we churning out too many new works too quickly? Are we putting in enough effort to support the developmental process before new plays are staged?”

This topic was partly meant as a provocation to kickstart the discussion, but I think the fact that it was raised as a year-in-review point should give room for pause. Clearly, having Centre 42 has been helpful, but it is not sufficient. What are the various factors that are contributing to this situation of having so many new works that seem to be underdeveloped? Off the top of my head, might it be the case that certain companies feel the pressure of KPIs to produce original work (and of course I acknowledge that in certain cases this pressure is self-imposed); or perhaps it is that practitioners feel the pressure to produce many new works because each project does not pay them sufficiently? Going back to Kathleen Ditzig’s point about exploitation of artists and a lack of substantial funding for individual practitioners, this issue warrants further investigation and discussion in Our SG Arts Plan. Yet, this as well

as other issues that were raised in the Arts Master Plan do not seem to appear again in the Our SG Arts Plan.

To be clear, I do not mean that every single point that was raised in the Arts Master Plan needs to be re-addressed in Our SG Arts Plan, but I think it is important to highlight for discussion in this art plan where we are relative to the last arts plan, to look at which strategies have been more successful and which have been slightly less so, and what issues still persist — or perhaps understand why it is more urgent at this point to spend our energies focusing on one issue rather than another. For instance, it is fine if research indicates that the usage of technology in the arts is a more urgent issue than that of overproducing and short incubation periods, and that the former is likely to be more beneficial to the overall arts scene than the latter. But perhaps the thought processes behind such decisions should be outlined in Our SG Arts Plan or at least be flagged out in an annex so that there is more transparency and clarity about how certain decisions came to be made.

Leading by example

The second question I have with regard to Our SG Arts Plan is the possibility of NAC being more conscious to lead by example. What I mean by this is that the arts plans to date have quite consistently talked about audience development and the importance of accessibility. Yet, Our SG Arts Plan in particular does not seem reader-friendly. While I can understand the three strategic thrusts and the eight priorities independently, I must admit that I find it difficult to understand how the three translates into the eight, and I do not think I am alone in this struggle. Perhaps some clarifications would be helpful.

Another related point that I think NAC can consider for the future is how Our SG Arts Plan is perceived and developed. Given the strategic thrusts of “Inspiring our People” and “Connecting Our Communities”, is it possible that future arts plans could be framed as collaborative artworks among NAC and the arts community, so as to inspire NAC and practitioners alike, and to draw NAC and the arts community closer together? This ties in with Venka Purushothaman’s point about a meeting between the bureaucratic axis and the creative axis. Using such a frame, how might the terms of engagement and the process look like, and how might the physical manifestation (and style) of Our SG Arts Plan be similar to or different from past reports, and how much more invested might the arts community be in moving

towards a jointly developed vision? As Terence Ho had mentioned, I think there is a need for the arts community to agree on the value proposition that NAC puts out, and if it were developed in tandem from the very beginning, I think there would be greater synergy between the challenges that the arts community feels and what NAC sees from a larger point of view.

Part of the reason why I feel strongly about this is because maybe about half of the people I asked about Our SG Arts Plan have not read the document, which echoes Terence Ho's point about reach and receiving. As mentioned earlier by him, one concern I have about accessibility is the fact that Our SG Arts Plan is only available in English. As for the other half, some had just skimmed through the document, and most just saw the report as a purely functional document that is largely irrelevant to their practice apart from getting a sense of how to frame their future grant applications.

“What I appreciated about the RCP III is that it outlined briefly what has been achieved in the RCP I and II, and therefore made it very clear how it was trying to build on what had already been achieved or to fill the gaps that had yet to be addressed. However, in Our SG Arts Plan, there are hardly any references to what had been outlined in the previous arts plans, and I would argue that not all the challenges highlighted in the previous plans have been met.”

Yet, when I asked them about what they perceived to be the biggest challenges, issues or gaps with regard to theatre or performing arts in Singapore, some of the issues they raised could actually be addressed through Our SG Arts Plan if the vision had been jointly developed. For instance, one of the practitioners I spoke to highlighted that the biggest challenge for them was that of the lack of smaller venues across Singapore that are open access. In looking at Our SG Arts Plan, this was actually not so different from the aim of “free[ing] up more spaces to showcase the arts, and ... bring[ing] the arts closer to specific communities,” I feel.

Ultimately, while I am very appreciative of the amount of time and effort that has gone into developing not just Our SG Arts Plan, but all the previous plans and masterplans — as Kathleen Ditzig rightly pointed out that there are many different factors, interests and voices to manage — what I would like to propose is that arts

and culture is itself infused in the framing and conceptualisation of Our SG Arts Plan. This will definitely take a lot of time and effort on the part of NAC as well as the very diverse artist community, but if part of the vision for 2025 as outlined in the ACSR is for arts and culture to be “a fundamental part of being Singaporean” and to look at arts not just in museums or gallery spaces, then who better to take the lead amongst governmental agencies than NAC? What are the possibilities for such thinking to be infused into the way we look at relationships within and across the agencies?

With that, thank you, and if there are questions or concerns, thoughts or reflections, about what I just said, I would be very happy to have a conversation with you during or outside of today’s session.

Speaker 5: Tan Peng Sing

Exploring cross-industry alliance for audience and capability development

Being in an indie band and having completed my Masters in Sociology, my research focuses on the music scene in Singapore and how it has commercialised over the years. Today, I hope to share some insights and also respond to Our SG Arts Plan.

From a musician's perspective, as well as from talking to some of my peers, music is meaningful and important to people, but often in intangible ways. We might listen to music on our commute — whether it is the radio or on our personal iPods — but it can be a bit of a challenge when it comes to articulating why music is important to us. All music, whether it is art, amateur or more popular forms, lie in concentric circles. They inspire each other, sometimes are made in contrast to each other to differentiate and distinguish themselves from each other.

The making of all music takes place within the capitalist-industrialist sphere of production and consumption. This is a particularly important point for what I am about to articulate because as compared to many other creative industries, music is the one that is most heavily commercialised. Today, as far as popular music is concerned, it is often difficult to express yourself musically without actually going through some form of transaction. It may be a transaction on Spotify or Apple Music; it may be the act of buying CDs or merchandise.

Unlike other art forms, musicians and their productivities are comparatively less constrained by existing morality markers (real or imagined). Perhaps musicians are not particularly subversive or naughty, but most of the time, as far as popular music genres are concerned, we negotiate this very well. It is very subtle and personal. And because of how music is heavily commodified, we usually just reach out directly to consumers who are interested; those who are not interested just listen to something else.

When looking at Our SG Arts Plan, and from talking to people, I find that the three strategic thrusts: (1) Inspiring Our People, (2) Connecting Our Communities and (3) Positioning Singapore Globally — are quite on point and aligned with what people on the ground are trying to do. This applies to my fellow musicians both in popular or underground music scene. The strong emphasis on technology such as using

digital analytics for marketing or digital tools for making music is also not foreign to us. Music has always been closely intertwined with technology and it is hard to make music without using any form of technology — even the instruments are a form of technology. In today's contemporary setting, we have been using techniques like digital audio sampling so the idea of using technology and constantly being on the cutting edge of technology is not new to musicians.

Using technology for marketing and to improve the visibility of arts events is a very important thrust for us because we are trying to reach out to more people as music-making takes place within the capitalist-industrialist sphere of production and consumption. Furthermore, the heavy emphasis on audience development is right because many musicians face the conundrum where music producers see broadcast media as tastemakers, and broadcasters themselves see themselves as trying to respond to the taste of consumers in the digital age. There is a constant fear of losing consumers to other digital platforms. Audiences, on the other hand, are spoilt for choice, especially on digital platforms. My conversations with people who work in labels and digital service providers tell me that Singaporean audiences tend to overwhelmingly rely on playlist recommendations rather than seek out music for themselves.

Another group of stakeholders are the major labels and the Recording Industries Association of Singapore (RIAS), where the latter mostly represents the interests of large multi-national conglomerates. They are risk-averse and profit-oriented. Thus, I think Our SG Arts Plan needs to address this problem.

The following was the Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI)'s response to a Parliamentary Question on radio airtime for local music in the Parliament Sitting on 15 November 2012. According to MCI,

“Mediacorp Radio [for instance] dedicates at least 10% of its airtime, on a whole, to local music. The amount of airplay depends on the database of local works at its respective stations, which ranges from 5% to 30%, depending on language Local English stations typically play at least one local song per hour.

“HotFM 91.3 has less airplay time for local artistes' songs due to its focus on top commercial hits. Nonetheless, the station airs a number of local acts including Electrico, Singapore Idol winner Sezairi Sezali, Quick Quick Danger, and Ming Bridges.

“What is pressing in the short to medium term is to develop a supporting ecosystem that extends beyond radio airplay and will help build a strong repertoire of quality local music as well as strengthen awareness of local music.”

This response was made in 2012 and Singapore’s music scene has made phenomenal improvements since then. For example, major labels have been signing local artists and putting them on the regional map. I conducted an interesting survey on my own and asked people, “Do you hear local music on the radio and when do you do so?” The data was collected between 5 and 11 December 2018 (see Figure 3). Clearly, on the one hand, we have many musicians and initiatives that try to push producers to help develop the ecosystem, but on the other hand, there is a very glaring non-participation by the broadcasters.

Proportion of local music on English radio stations in a week*

Station	12-6AM	% of total	Normal	% of total	Grand Total	% of Grand Total
987FM	123	17.6%	149	8.46%	272	11.05%
CLASS95FM	5	0.76%	15	0.98%	20	0.91%
KISS92FM	4	0.61%	9	0.61%	13	0.61%
938 NOW	(Mostly in Singapore Sounds on Mondays between 2-6pm)					
Money 89.3			None			
Power98			None			
ONE 91.3			None			

Data collected from <https://onlineradiobox.com/sg/> between 5-11 Dec 2018
 * Symphony 92.4FM and Gold 90.5FM omitted for lack of repertoire

Figure 3: Table showing the proportion of local music on English radio stations in a week. Image courtesy of Tan Peng Sing.

Let me now revisit the three strategic thrusts in Our SG Arts Plan. In terms of “Inspiring Our People”, I feel that as opinion leaders ourselves, as well as with NAC being a statutory board, we are in a unique position where we can influence other stakeholders and gatekeepers in Singapore to believe in the product. When thinking about “Connecting Our Communities”, I feel that we should consider partnerships beyond NAC and government-owned or government-linked assets and initiatives. Finally, in terms of “Positioning Singapore Globally” which is an important point previous speakers have articulated — local musicians also want to position

Singapore globally. However, music export requires massive financial, human and social capital, and these forms of capital needs to be accrued locally first.

“Looking back at some of the promotion policies NAC has been pushing for in the past few years, policies tend to be most successful when the products are granted the provision of carriage under widely distributed platforms, which currently musicians struggle to get onto. We have to take a critical look at the linkages between broadcasters and the existing cost structure and royalty collection system in Singapore, as music is a form of art production that has been heavily commodified.”

With that, I have some broad suggestions to make. Referencing NAC’s 2017 Music Consumption Survey, radio is still a dominant platform despite digital platforms being on the rise. Especially for those aged 25 years old and above, music discovery still largely depends on traditional channels like radio. Most people cited the lack of exposure to homegrown music and talent as one the key reasons for not listening to Singaporean music. So, the data paints quite a clear picture of what are some of the pressing things that we need to address.

One suggestion I have is to introduce radio quotas. I understand that quotas can be unpopular in today’s society, but given the legacy systems of these multinational entertainment companies, supporting musicians through funding and building ecosystems means seriously considering the implementation of quotas, as broadcasters have been unreceptive in doing so for the longest time. An alternative would be to consider mandatory programming, just like 938Now’s Singapore Sounds segment every Monday between 2pm and 6pm. Some other ways include co-opting homegrown organisations as sponsors to offer various incentives to support local music.

Recently, there has also been an increasing number of non-profit platforms like Hear65 and the Singapore Music Society, functioning as a middleman or aggregator to liaise between musicians and other industry partners such as broadcasters. Looking back at some of the promotion policies NAC has been pushing for in the past few years, policies tend to be most successful when the products are granted the provision of carriage under widely distributed platforms, which currently musicians struggle to get onto. We have to take a critical look at the linkages between

broadcasters and the existing cost structure and royalty collection system in Singapore, as music is a form of art production that has been heavily commodified. We depend heavily on these commercial structures, which are frankly still quite underdeveloped in Singapore.



Mr Tan Peng Sing giving his presentation.

In terms of future research, we also need to assess the cultural value of music and what kind of music are Singaporeans receptive towards.

In conclusion, while my presentation may have come across as very niche and inward-looking as compared to what the other speakers have presented so far, I believe there are some common threads as well. The idea of reach and receiving that Terence mentioned earlier is important, and perhaps we can even use radio and broadcast as a catalyst for all the exciting initiatives that are going to be rolled out in the next few years.

Speaker 6: Charmaine Poh

I am an artist working primarily with photography. I have been working as a freelancer for about two years, but I also used to have a contract position at NAC, which I feel enables me to be more aware when addressing certain policies, and how policies can affect people on the ground.

I work at the intersection of art, journalism, and anthropology, and I am currently midway through my masters in Visual and Media Anthropology. I first came to photography through the documentary genre. I often work with communities in Asia sharing narratives that are less visible or heard, and I wanted to be trained in a methodology that would enable me to ethically conduct research, and collaboratively form images.

The fluidity of the photographic medium means that I work across industries, making work for publications, exhibitions, and brands. As Kathleen Ditzig mentioned, international support is crucial to my development. It enables me to publish or exhibit work that does not have a platform here, and expands my sources of funding. It is also important for me that there is a diversity of audience response and discourse.

First, there are some points in the visual arts plan that I would like to reiterate. A lack of space means that artists not only create small-scale works, but that the mode of working can also be different. On a purely practical level, a lot of my work involves going to people's lived spaces, which means I do not need to have my own studio space, apart from a corner to put my equipment. Making work from a studio is a lot more challenging because of the need for a consistent space. A lack of space also means that places for experimentation, such as dark room printing or alternative processing, is a lot harder to find. That affects the type of work that eventually gets produced as well.

There are fewer serious collectors of photography as compared to sculpture and painting, and this tends to be the case across the world. Most photographers here in Singapore do not sell very much. The medium also has a more mass element to it, which means that the prints are more easily co-opted into commerce or design, selling for lower prices, but selling more. Thus, I think traversing political borders is even more important in such a climate. First, there is a principle of exchange and

discourse, and making work that is able to scale in thought and have a quality of universality. Second, there is the practical element of, as I mentioned earlier, finding more platforms and funding sources. Thus, I really appreciate the resource centre for freelancers and I am really looking forward to see how it can help majority of the artists.

Some questions I have are, “Why should artists respond to Our SG Arts Plan?” “Will it have an impact if we respond?” “Why was there no greater co-creation of Our SG Arts Plan to begin with?” That said, I will respond to some of the policy suggestions in the visual arts plan.

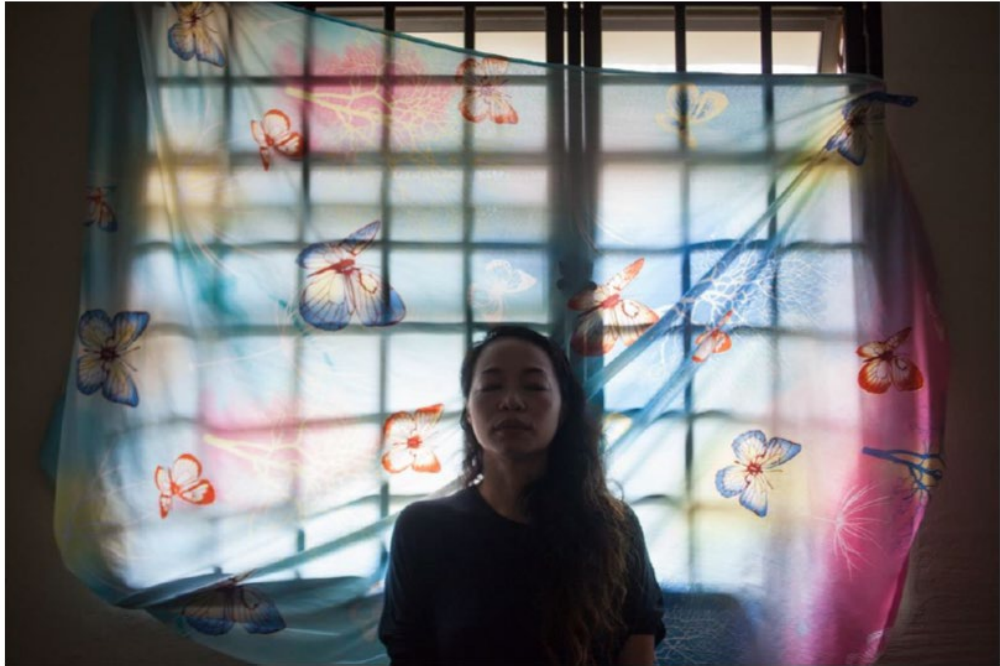
“Until censorship is addressed in an arts plan, there will be an unhealthy state of “out-of-bounds” (OB) markers, the admonishing trope of privilege over right, and the ungrateful, contrarian artist community.”

Reaching under-reached segments of audiences

First, there was the suggestion of reaching under-reached segments of audiences, such as seniors and those are married with kids, through expanding programming, like increasing public art trails or the number of community art programs. However, one question I have is whether or not the art that is shown reflects their realities. While I do not think that all art has to reflect a certain reality or be one-dimensional such that there is only one way of perceiving the work, audiences like seniors will only engage in art that works with their realities. So, I guess it is also a question of what themes we could look at, or what topics are not often, but should be, tackled in art in Singapore today?

There are many works that I could draw from, people like Drama Box or Lien Foundation’s most recent project on seniors, but I guess the best way for me to not speak for someone else is to speak for myself. This is an image from an ongoing work funded by the Global Gender Parity Initiative, a Washington DC-based think tank, on single parents in Singapore. The title is such because I was talking with an Indonesian single mother, Tutriati, and she was telling me about how she would let her children build forts out of pillows and blankets at home, even though it took up all the space in their tiny rental flat. And she said, I want “to make our house like a castle.” So one of the elements of the project was that I wanted to look at spatial

justice and housing policies with regard to the issue. Single parents form a swathe of the population that often do not get included in the narrative. They have children, and probably have more cause for being frazzled than those who are married with children, but they often do not have art that can speak to their reality.



To Make Our House Like A Castle | Global Gender Parity Initiative | 2018

Photo courtesy of Charmaine Poh.

In 2016, I worked on a series on the “ma jie”, commissioned by the Chinatown Pop-up Noise: Soul Searching show. It was funded by NAC, and I would consider it one of the most successful community arts programmes I had been involved with. The *ma jie* would come down to Kreta Ayer Square to look at the photographs of themselves, and read the stories told. A year later, the series was published on the website, Rice, and it gained a lot of traction. The family that was once taken care of by this *ma jie*, Khao Jie, actually contacted me to buy a print. It was a unique story, something that almost does not exist anymore; two years later all of them are now in nursing homes. I do not know if they still have their samfoos, but the story spoke to a crowd that would otherwise never be engaged with photography, not in this way.



Ma Jie | Pop-up Noise: Soul Searching | 2016

Photo courtesy of Charmaine Poh.

Home(work) was a project conceived by a few artists, Ong Lijie, Melvin Wong, Lim Cheng Jun, and myself, for Singapore Art Week 2019. It is an installation that looks at domesticity, labour, and the everyday experience of housework. We realised that the topic was not frequently tackled in contemporary art. Whether or not the public takes to it is yet to be seen, but it was certainly a work that focuses on the community. Here, I also want to make a point about artist wages. *Home(work)* was a Singapore Art Week commission and everyone in the collective was thankful that we could make the work. But because of a cut in budget, we could not give ourselves any wage. I hope more can be done to protect this part of the artists' career because if even a platform like Singapore Art Week is unable to give artists wages, how do we move on from here?

Heightening awareness of Singapore art in schools

Another suggestion was to heighten the awareness of Singapore art in schools across all levels. I think this is great and is something I would have wanted for my schooling self and for those younger than me. But I would also respond by saying that art cannot be taught in isolation from context. Art draws upon history, sociology,

anthropology — critical social milestones in Singapore’s timeline. Art is also sometimes provocative, and issues about self, identity, race, gender, culture are important conversations to have with young people. When it comes to photography, there is also the issue of image literacy and visual culture, which is a topic that is unavoidable among Generation Z. We need to have those conversations as well.

Currently, the Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) in photography at the Nanyang Technological University School of Art, Design and Media is the only BFA in photography in Singapore for photography education at the tertiary level, or continued adult education. However, the programme will be dissolved in a few years and students will have a major that includes design, photography, and other media art courses. I do not want to speak for the lecturers since I have only been guest-speaking at tertiary institutions, but if there is going to be a de-emphasis on photography, there will be an inevitable dilution of certain skills and aptitudes. It is a reflection of the times, but how then do we continue to educate when the image has become more central to life than ever?

Right out of college, a few friends and I got funding from the Davis Projects for Peace Foundation in the US and put together a camp in Ambala, India, which used photography to unite middle-school students from a disparate range of backgrounds. They had to share cameras, visit each other’s neighbourhoods and break social and class divides, and eventually, they told their own stories. During our camp, we also included lessons on reading images — the messages that portraiture was trying to convey, the social issues that a particular series might be trying to get at, the ethics of photographing — and while we were young, college graduates, I think the intentions behind what we were trying to do remain even more important now.

Forging new partnerships internationally

The final suggestion and response I want to make is the idea of forging new partnerships internationally with residencies and institutions to grow Singapore as a centre for visual arts discourse. My question is, “What kind of discourse that would be?” Is it about art criticism, or technique, or criticality, or industry? There are so many types of discourses but something I do want to point out that I feel might get left out because of a lack of emphasis on it here is the importance of reflexivity, in particular to our socio-political climate. Centres like Deck and Objectifs are great, and Objectifs in particular does try to programme these discussions in. I want to

bring up the examples of Magnum Foundation, which funds socially-themed work, and hosts creative labs looking at countering majority narratives; Open Society Foundations, which also funds and exhibits work in public places; and the International Center of Photography, which continually contextualises its programming. It is really a fundamental question of the environment and the discourse created. One cannot have critical discourse without provocation or questioning. They come hand in hand. How would one then encourage it and not suppress it?



Clicking Together | 2013-Present

Photo courtesy of Charmaine Poh.

Finally, I wanted to mention what I feel is quite fundamental but left out; these are points that underpin the policies created. It has been brought up by artists again and again, and with good reason. Until censorship is addressed in an arts plan, there will be an unhealthy state of “out-of-bounds” (OB) markers, the admonishing trope of privilege over right, and the ungrateful, contrarian artist community. There have been many statements made by government officials and Members of Parliament about the role of the artist, often in a declarative fashion. Is it to create happy art, to entertain, or to convey complexity, and to provoke and challenge? Can it be all of these? Can it be allowed to exist, not just with prettiness, with urgency?

I will end with two images. The first is of my ongoing work, *How She Loves*, which was initially funded by the Exactly Foundation. It looks at queer women, the tropes of matrimony, and the performance of gender roles. This is a couple whose names are Claire and Amanda. Claire is a para athlete. The second is of a sex worker named Ally. I photographed her through a two-way mirror as she got ready for work. I was making this series, *All in Her Day's Work*, on the labour of women and the beauty standards they had to adhere to, and I wanted to include sex work as part of the narrative. There are licensed brothels in Singapore after all; sex work has been worked into our laws. It is an income-earning position. I was not explicit in my exhibition at all and I did not use labels. The only indication besides the photographs were her shoes, which I placed on the floor. I had photographed the condoms she used, but did not use the image in the end. Sure, it worked with the idea, but at the back of our minds was still this idea of what it means to push the narrative, and what happens when it comes up against an OB marker. Until the multitude of voices and experiences is validated, the arts will not reach its full, messy, brilliant potential.



How She Loves | Exactly Foundation | 2018

Photo courtesy of Charmaine Poh.



All In Her Day's Work | M1 Singapore Fringe Festival | 2017-2018

Photo courtesy of Charmaine Poh.

Response by the National Arts Council

Paul Tan & Low Eng Teong

We would first like to thank all the speakers for sharing their thoughts. We are also grateful for this rare opportunity for this roundtable to be organised, among many other consultation sessions that have happened, to hear more inputs. Many of the points raised today are important and valid points that will be especially useful for NAC moving into the next stage of our work.

NAC launched Our SG Arts Plan in October 2018 and the plan has not been given the chance to be operationalised in a concrete manner yet. Some of the points that we have heard from the speakers today have also been raised in the over 40 focus group discussion sessions that we have conducted in the past one year leading up to the launch of Our SG Arts Plan. Thus, it is very important for us to remind ourselves that even though the plan has been launched, some issues remain to be resolved, especially as we move into the next stage of operationalising and implementing the plan.

When we were drafting Our SG Arts Plan, many warned us that nobody would read a 100-page plan. However, we believed that Our SG Arts Plan was not just meant for the arts community, but also for our fellow government agencies and the wider public in general as well. So, we thought it was important for NAC to articulate what the plan is moving forward. NAC is aware that Our SG Arts Plan has to be relatable to whoever finds it important, and we hope that this plan forms the basis for us to work with and carry on the conversation with these people. This is one of the functions of the plan to us.

At the same time, Our SG Arts Plan is also a strategy plan. As a statutory board, Our SG Arts Plan sets the broad direction and focus areas that we want to articulate — how we will guide ourselves in the work that we are going to do moving forward, and how we can have the conversation with the people who we are going to work with. While the plan lacks certain details, there are also parts where we are clearer and try to be very specific, for example, in each of the annexes of the sectoral plans, and on issues like education, research and capability development. For parts where we do not have as much detail yet, the hard work moving forward in the next five years is

in terms of operationalisation. This is where the real test will come in terms of finding out whether these strategic directions will work or not.

It is assuring to hear that generally, the three key strategic thrusts — how we want the arts to continue to inspire people; to connect with the community; and how we want people to have a sense of pride and believe in the arts that can be shared (not just within Singapore but) beyond Singapore and internationally — are aligned with what people want. But when narrowed down to the specific priorities, many of us may have different perspectives. This is something that we want to continue to look at.

To contextualise things, Our SG Arts Plan was not drafted in a vacuum. We took a long and hard look at the previous arts and culture policies — a point mentioned by many speakers — and Our SG Arts Plan references all those plans, going all the way back to the Report of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts (ACCA) in 1989 to the most recent Arts and Culture Strategic Report (ACSR) in 2012, which is still ongoing. Launched in 2012, the ACSR maps our vision for the arts all the way to 2025, and we have taken note of some of the things we set out to do in 2012 and assessing how far we have come since then. In general, looking at the direction we are headed towards, I think we are on the way there. However, there are certain targets that we have yet to reach. For example, the ACSR made a bold statement that 8 in 10 Singaporeans will attend at least one arts event once a year. Our statistics show that we are inching there, with an upward trend, but we are not quite there yet — perhaps in a couple of years. Thus, part of Our SG Arts Plan is also to continue working towards this goal.

One of the things that was very clear to NAC was that while each sector faces its own challenges and needs and gaps, largely, consumption of the arts has gone up. Supply has also gone up in the last decade with the injection of funding. Furthermore, more people aspire to be in the arts as compared to 30 or 40 years ago. More people are going to arts schools, graduating from arts schools and wanting to work in the arts sector and to create art. This is very clear with the setting up of SOTA. While consumption has gone up, it is also clear to us that demand has not quite caught up yet. However, what is helpful to our work moving forward is that the general sense of the importance of the arts is there. More people feel that the arts is important in helping us understand each other more, and giving us a sense of who we are as well as a sense of belonging.

But if we take a deeper dive, interest in the arts is still not high. While 54 per cent of Singaporeans have attended at least one arts and culture event in the past one year, only 37 per cent of Singaporeans expressed interest in the arts. This is quite stark for us because it means that if we continue to have more supply of the arts when demand is unable to keep up, it will lead to a major problem that every speaker has spoken about earlier — the problem of sustainability. Thus, if we want the arts to be sustainable and we want our artists to be supported, it cannot simply be by putting in more funding from one source and this is something we are trying to address moving forward.

While we have broad priority areas in Our SG Arts Plan, we also realised that it was important to do a stock take of each art form, whether it is the literary arts, the performing arts — which includes theatre, music, traditional arts groups, etc. — or the visual arts. While each art form has its own specific challenges, at the ecosystem-level, the same issue of supply outstripping demand remains. How do art creations get out there and how are they consumed?” People are not paying for ticketed events even though more people have been attending free events. Looking at the visual arts sector for instance, the number of collectors is not growing. So, if artists keep making more artworks but no one is buying or consuming them, what would happen to the livelihoods of artists? Furthermore, freelancers in arts community often do not have any CPF contributions or medical coverage as they age, which makes the livelihood of these artists a worrying issue in the long run. Thus, one concrete thing about Our SG Arts Plan was to address the issue of freelancers in the community and we are determined to work with the community to see how we can do that. Setting up the resource centre for freelancers is one example. Furthermore, NAC acknowledges that it does not have all the answers, and we are thus setting up the centre in collaboration with people who have had experience in the community for a long time to help us shape the centre.

Another thing we want to work on is audience development. But what do we mean by “audience development”? Audience development in what way and how do we grow our audiences? Again, our research shows that we cannot simply have a broad strategy that cuts across art forms because growing audiences is a lot more complex than that. In music for example, our 2017 National Music Consumption Survey found that the way people consume the arts has been changing tremendously, especially with the advancements in technology. Again, NAC does not have all the answers to questions like, “What are people interested in?” and “How can we get people interested?” In other words, we cannot do this alone and have to work with

artists. We do not think the traditional mode of artists creating artworks without considering the audience in the creation process (where connecting with the audience is seen as secondary to creation) will work moving forward. But at the same time, we do want to support artistic creation and excellence. Over the years, there have been more arts groups and artists who are growing and developing their craft. How do we support these artists as their career and practice develop? Because if we do not, how do we then expect our artists to strive for excellence and to create artworks that all of us can identify with and can be proud of to share with the rest of the world? Thus, capability development is important to us. But again, what does “capability development” mean for each sector of the arts?

In terms of driving consumption, NAC sees itself as playing a key role in bridging the conversation between artists and other government agencies because NAC has limited resources to drive consumption alone. Part of Our SG Arts Plan involves working with other government agencies — whether it is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or NParks that is offering spaces, or the People’s Association — to help them understand how they can work with artists to meet their agenda and also help them understand how we drive the arts. Finally, we also work closely with our regulatory counterpart, the Infocomm Media Development Authority, to further deck out this conversation.

In conclusion, NAC is open and prepared to work with the community over the next five years to operationalise Our SG Arts Plan, and we know that it is important for many of the things said today to manifest in the actual implementation so that people can feel an impact.

Discussion

Strengthening NAC's role in leading and championing the arts in Singapore

A participant who identified as a person with disability pointed out that the word “disability” was only mentioned four times in the entire masterplan, and questioned how disability and disabled artists are positioned in Our SG Arts Plan. She said disabled artists need additional support compared to non-disabled artists, and asked how NAC is committed to the capability development of disabled artists. She added that many disabled artists are also freelancers because disabled people face additional difficulties in finding full-time employment, and that disabled artists are even more vulnerable to the exploitation mentioned by Ms Ditzig. She questioned how NAC intends to work with other government agencies to address the broader issue of arts and disability, as well as other related issues such as helping disabled artists towards disability-led arts practices.

In response, Mr Paul Tan said this speaks to the larger issue regarding the role of the arts in society and how we value art. He stressed that NAC's role goes beyond just serving the arts community, but also advocating to other government agencies (who have resources and different agenda) that there is a fundamental good in the arts for Singaporeans and society. He stressed that Our SG Arts Plan will also serve as a document to help other government agencies appreciate what the arts can do. In response to Mr Paul Tan's comments, one participant said while Our SG Arts Plan does serve as document to communicate the value of arts to other government agencies in hopes that they would “loosen their purse strings”, he also expressed great concern towards the rhetoric and language used, in particular, an instrumentalist attitude towards the arts where the arts is always in service of something, be it inspiring people, connecting communities or positioning Singapore globally.

On a related note, the participant also responded to Dr Purushothaman's point that the “bureaucratic axis” and “creative axis” tend to be at odds. He disagreed with this idea, citing the German state funding system of the arts, where many cutting-edge theatre companies are almost 100 per cent state-funded. He explained that this was because of a prevailing discourse of respecting the autonomy of art and artists, as Germany has had a history (during Nazi Germany) where the arts was instrumentalised for propaganda. He added that Singapore has a similar history as

well, and that the state should not interfere and use the arts for its own agenda, but instead respect the sovereignty of the arts.

Mr Tan Tarn How pointed out that NAC's role as a champion of the arts does not solely mean engaging in activities such as putting out more programmes or disbursing more funding. On top of that, a champion of the arts has to articulate the value of the arts in society — what the arts is fundamentally about (and not); what the arts serves beyond the instrumental; and how the arts is a fundamental part of life, existence and being human. He added that NAC must be the first government agency to articulate these values, which would then allow NAC to justify the amount of funding dedicated to the arts (rather than relying on indicators like number of events and activities). Finally, Mr Tan Tarn How stressed that NAC needs to articulate these values clearly in order for other government agencies, as well as the arts community, to have a discussion about whether they agree or disagree with these values, and the absence of such an articulation is glaring.

In response to Mr Tan Tarn How's comments, Mr Low agreed that NAC can and should articulate such values of the arts. However, he pointed out that different people could have different perspectives of what these values are or should be. For instance, while NAC's surveys found that (1) 74 per cent of Singaporeans said the arts and culture improve the quality of their lives; (2) 78 per cent of Singaporeans said they were proud of Singapore arts and culture; and (3) 89 per cent of Singaporeans said art helps them understand different backgrounds and culture. Some may not even consider the kind of art these people are consuming as "art" because it is seen as an instrumentalised form of art. But does this mean we should not take into consideration the views of these Singaporeans? Mr Low added that the tension between the instrumental and the intrinsic value of the arts is and will be an ongoing argument, but felt that there can be a meeting point, and that the instrumental and intrinsic values of the arts are not necessarily at opposite ends of the spectrum. Instead, Mr Low urged for a broader and more inclusive understanding of the value of the arts moving forward, and stressed the importance of having a space to continue engaging in such discussions.

Increasing our focus on growing audiences

A participant from the visual arts sector said while she was happy to see that one of the priorities of Our SG Arts Plan is growing paid audiences, she questioned if it was

counterintuitive that there was also a strong focus on supporting big events and shows that are free and non-ticketed. She added that the key point in questioning if this direction was counterintuitive is to be mindful of the risks when developing ways to grow audiences. For instance, while competition can be a good motivation for all the players to do better, it is also important to think about how the ecosystem can work closely together to turn threats and risks into opportunities.¹

Another participant from the literary arts scene pointed out that while a lot has been said about creating a community of critical writers and ecosystem that supports them, another fundamental problem is that people are not reading reviews. He asked what the arts community, as well as NAC, could do to cultivate readers and grow the audience of critical writing, especially in way that breaks down the vocabulary of privilege that often surrounds critical writing.

In response, Mr Low said while many galleries and museums give free entry to Singapore citizens, they also do charge a fee for special exhibitions. Pertaining to the visual arts in particular, Mr Low gave credit to successful programmes, e.g., OH! Open House's walking tours that have managed to appeal to audiences despite being ticketed because audiences recognise that these programmes are specially curated to allow them to see artworks in a unique context. However, he felt that the same effect would not be achieved if national galleries and museums started to charge fees. He said the broader issue is about how visual artists can be supported as revenue sources for them are limited, especially when the number of collectors of visual artworks is not high. Mr Low added that another issue to grapple with is whether free events end up "cannibalising" ticketed shows. While there is certainly a risk of that, Singapore has not yet reached a point where having free events will dramatically reduce the number of paying audiences, he said. Furthermore, there is still a need for free events in order to grow audiences. With that, the next step is to learn more about how to convert audiences who attend free events to paying audiences.

Responding to the issue of growing audiences, one participant said perhaps the problem is not one that can be solved by pumping more money into the sector because the underlying issue is about state regulation. He said in an authoritarian society like Singapore, Our SG Arts Plan cannot be seen in isolation from the draconian laws on freedom of expression. He felt that perhaps Singaporeans are not consuming the arts because they feel that the artwork is not what the artist *wants* to say, but is instead what the artist is *allowed* to say. If the underlying problem of

¹ This comment was given by a participant after the roundtable discussion.

producing compromised and diminished art is not solved, no amount of money or policymaking will be able solve the issue of growing audiences.

Mr Tan Tarn How pointed out that the issue of audience development is not a new one. For instance, the RCPs stated that while the number of performances had doubled within 10 years, the number of audiences only grew by a quarter. He asked whether this suggests a problem of artists, policymakers or Singaporeans in general. He added that there is a research gap in understanding whether people who attend community arts programmes are becoming paying consumers of the arts. Another participant agreed with Mr Tan Tarn How and said more needs to be done to understand the fundamental problem before simply articulating “growing audiences” as a solution.

In response, Mr Paul Tan said NAC does have data on consumption, apart from the number of ticketed audiences. For instance, NAC has a sense of how many people purchase Singapore literature; what Singaporeans borrow from the national libraries; the state of book sales in Singapore; what kinds of audiences attend free shows etc. However, one salient issue that emerges across different art forms is that supply has outstripped demand, and this is something NAC needs to address. NAC is also trying to do more research to understand the fundamental problem in growing audiences. One example is a behavioural insights study that tries to understand what nudges should be put in place to encourage someone to participate in the arts or purchase tickets. Mr Low added that based on NAC’s surveys, the top reason that hinders Singaporeans from attending arts events is the lack of time, but more research is being done — in terms of studying the different archetypes of audiences — to address this problem.

Increasing sector-wide support for freelance arts professionals

A participant who had been working with NAC on the development on the resource centre for freelancers shed some light about what the centre hopes to be about. He said consultation had been done with about 400 individuals in the arts community, primarily artists who were self-employed, ranging across sectors and disciplines, as well as from mature artists to graduating arts students. A proposal containing recommendations for NAC has since been submitted to NAC, which NAC will deliberate on to determine which areas should be prioritised and rolled out first.

The resource centre aims to reach out to artists as people who are trying to create art; as people who are trying to exist in artmaking. Thus, it aims to address fundamental issues faced by arts freelancers, such as issues relating to contracts and where they can seek help if their hirers do not pay them. The centre also aims to create an awareness of the rights of the individual arts freelancers by providing workshops on how to negotiate a contract, for instance. One example is a possible partnership with the Singapore Mediation Centre, where in cases where there is a need for mediation, the resource centre will play the role of the middleman and also cover the cost of the mediation process.

The centre also aims to advocate to hirers of self-employed artists about CPF contributions and issues relating to the exploitation of arts freelancers. However, some people who are exploiting freelancers are actually in the arts sector themselves, so a lot more advocacy work needs to be done in this aspect as well. The centre will also aim to provide legal advice by partnering with the Law Society for pro-bono legal services. It also plans to start a benevolent fund for arts freelancers as many of them do not have comprehensive insurance plans. In the meantime, there have also been discussions with insurance providers to design more economical and attractive insurance products for arts freelancers. Lastly, the centre aims to provide opportunities for arts freelancers by creating new programmes and a portal for local and international opportunities for the arts community.

In response, a participant questioned if the issues faced by freelancers were unique to the arts sector compared to that of freelancers in other industries. He asked if the setting up of such a resource centre for freelancers should be handled by the Ministry of Manpower instead, and wondered if delegating the task to NAC was taking up bandwidth that could have been used to expand on other aspects instead.

Taking Singapore's arts beyond our shores

A participant from the literary arts asked if the insistence on a certain articulation of the “national” or how artists represent Singapore’s “national” image might impact Singapore’s chances of successfully internationalising its art. He gave his previous experience of working with an international translation journal founded by Singaporeans, where the journal faced challenges when applying for funding from NAC because the international label of the journal made it not “Singaporean enough” to be qualified as work that NAC wants to promote with a Singapore grant. This was

despite the fact that the editor of the journal was Singaporean. He added that while he understood the impetus to set aside grant money to support recognisably Singaporean work, he raised the question of whether there is an over-emphasis that prevents successful internationalising. He also pointed out many local migrant-driven initiatives were in fact very “international” — such as the Global Migrant Festival — but did not qualify for state support.

In response, Mr Paul Tan said NAC tries to be as open as possible in terms of what they can support, but from a national funder’s perspective, there will always be certain priorities. Addressing the case of the international translation journal specifically, Mr Paul Tan said NAC struggled with that decision because the benefit to Singapore’s scene was not clear and it was an entity that was not even based in Singapore. However, Mr Paul Tan also clarified that if a project can help build capacity or capability in Singapore artists, NAC should support it regardless of whether it is based locally or abroad. He added that NAC is always looking for residencies that help support artists develop their craft and practice. Addressing the point about supporting artworks for migrant communities, Mr Paul Tan said one of MCCY’s values is to engender a caring Singapore, and that includes looking after and recognising people who work in Singapore even if they are not citizens. Hence, even though NAC does not directly provide funding in such instances, there has been indirect funding — for instance, through SingLit Station, Youth Poet Ambassador, or the South Asian exhibitions at the Asian Civilisation Museum that targets people from migrant communities. He acknowledged that perhaps more can be done and that this is something NAC and the entire arts community can do together moving forward.

Measuring the success of the arts

Addressing the statistics that NAC mentioned in their response, one participant questioned the devices that have been used to measure the success of the arts, as that has become the basis of creating many policy papers over the years. He asked if a different way of formulating measurement in a way that is more consultative with artists themselves was possible. He added that in theatre for instance, artists are already thinking beyond the event and challenging the form of the art itself. Thus, he questioned how success can be critically measured as the art form evolves, and how can this be done without privileging quantity? He also pointed out that while the statistics shows a huge jump in arts and culture consumption between 2013 and

2015, this was largely because of the SG50 celebrations. One would expect a similarly unsustainable trend in 2019 due to the Bicentennial celebrations. “What will happen when these numbers drop,” he asked.

In response, Mr Low said the issue of measuring success in the arts is and will continue to be a challenge. First, NAC operates under a larger national context where MCCY has to account for certain outcomes in line with the national agenda. Right or wrong, basic quantitative indicators like audience numbers and event numbers will always be an indicator. However, he acknowledged that such indicators do not shed light on the level of engagement with the arts, and that more has to be done to critically measure the level of engagement with the arts on a deeper level. Mr Low added that other arts councils around the world are grappling with the same issues, especially for those who have to ensure and secure funding. Furthermore, to unlock private funding from patrons and corporations, there is often a need for such language as private sponsor and donors tend to look for numbers that they can understand. In short, some indicators are essential, but at the same time, more has to be done go beyond these indicators.

Mr Paul Tan added that there is indeed a role for NAC to articulate the qualitative aspects of the arts, and that NAC certainly tries to do so. He pointed out that if this were not the case, it would not be possible to justify the funding of the Venice Biennale, which was not about the number of people visiting the artwork, but about how the work says something about the place of visual arts in Singapore, as well as the national representation of Singapore on the international stage. He gave assurance that NAC does look beyond quantitative indicators, and urged artists to see numbers as proxy rather than an endgame, because funders, as well as NAC’s funders, often need the assurance of numbers. He stressed that NAC will continue to articulate the broader picture of what the arts can do in a qualitative manner.

In terms of measuring the success of the arts, Mr Tan Tarn How said consumption patterns have changed over the years and that the number of ticketed audiences is but only one measurement. He pointed out that other forms of measurements, such as “how many Singaporeans buy local books”; “how many Singaporeans purchase photographs and paintings”; “how many Singaporeans pay for content streaming services” — need to be captured as well for a better understanding. Finally, he said just like how NAC has KPIs for artists to measure the success of their work, KPIs should be imposed on NAC as well. In response, Mr Paul Tan said NAC is measured against many KPIs. In fact, many of the KPIs that NAC imposes on artists and arts

groups are the same KPIs that are accrued to NAC itself (e.g., visitor attendance and interest). He also mentioned that there is an increasing focus on looking at the level of volunteerism in the arts because the spirit that drives volunteerism is a sense of ownership. If Singaporeans believe in the arts then they should be stepping up. While NAC can advocate for the arts, any amount of advocacy will simply fall on deaf ears if people do not have interest in the arts to begin with. However, Mr Paul Tan believed that society can and will change over time, and that the arts can help society change. He stressed that this is also why arts education is critical; as more people get to experience the arts at a personal level — even if it might be instrumentalised — the more likely the conversation about the importance of the arts can take place.

Arts education

Professor Wee said while the emphasis on education in Our SG Arts Plan is wonderful, he questioned how and to what extent the Ministry of Education (MOE) was going to work with NAC on this. In terms of introducing more Singapore literature in school curriculums for instance, based on his experience, teachers may be the ones resisting the introduction for Singapore literature in the curriculum, and not the Ministry of Education. He asked what NAC could do about this.

Another participant pointed out that the course of education is often a teleological track even though it should ideally involve adaption and exaptation. For instance, the current crises in the fin-tech industry have prompted organisations and companies to locate expertise in unconventional areas and enculturate people with requisite dispositions to meet these challenges. Thus, he wondered if arts education in Singapore should similarly consider such alternatives decidedly niche areas and specialisations in order to negotiate and navigate change.²

In response, Mr Low said the issue of the importance of introducing arts education at a young age has been raised repeatedly in many consultation sessions. Education is also often seen as an antidote to everything that is not happening right — whether the problem is poor social integration or people not returning trays in hawker centres — which puts MOE under some pressure in that aspect. NAC wants students to have more exposure to the arts as early as possible. One example of helping young Singaporeans understand artists and their artworks is by ensuring

² This comment was given by a participant after the roundtable discussion.

that such content gets introduced into the school curriculum. On top of that, students go out to the galleries to get an authentic experience of looking at artworks beyond the textbooks. This is one example of progress made by working with MOE, the Singapore Art Museum and the National Gallery, which is not done in an ad-hoc but systematic manner and on a cohort basis. As for promoting Singapore literature, NAC has been pushing Singapore literature not just into the curriculum, but making the books available in the school libraries as well.

Sustainability of the arts

One participant spoke about the issue of sustainability. He said the first few years after an artist graduates from art school are the most critical period for artists to grow and figure out if they are able to sustain themselves in the industry. He felt that more support could be provided to artists during this period of time by, for example, offering more incubation programmes and spaces. Drawing from his own experience, he said more partnerships could be built with institutions or corporates to offer such incubation programmes to arts students and recent graduates. He stressed that sustainability should not solely come from selling artworks, but also through other avenues like the ones he mentioned as well.

Another participant observed that graduates from classical conservatories have had to work in country, popular culture and jazz ensembles or even do club or hotel lounge work, evidently pointing to an economy where demand and supply are at odds. He asked what are the linkages between specialised or specialist training and employment opportunities, and what is the relationship between the Ministry of Manpower and the NAC in coming up with the employment terms and conditions in the arts.³

Dr Purushothaman pointed out that NAC is an important part of the sustainability of the arts ecosystem as well. Looking back at history, there was a point in time where Singapore had a Ministry of Culture that eventually shrunk into a department within the Ministry of Community Development. Thus, it is important that the arts community works together to ensure the sustainability of NAC, which is vital to the future of the arts ecosystem.

³ This comment was given by a participant after the roundtable discussion.

Homogeneity, diversity and alternatives

In response to Dr Purushothaman's presentation, Mr Paul Tan said he does not think that Our SG Arts Plan promotes cultural homogeneity or offers a "cookie-cutter" approach to what a national arts and culture should be. He stressed that NAC recognises that diversity in terms of art-making is a strength for Singapore, but pointed out that sometimes, diversity can also mean contestation. Thus, it is important for this to be openly acknowledged, and that NAC is committed to creating a space for open discussion about this. However, he also urged members of the arts community to recognise that NAC operates within a particular context, within which certain negotiations may be challenging.

One participant however, said Our SG Arts Plan as the de facto national arts plan leaves no space in the Singapore arts scene for another alternative plan. As such, it falls woefully short of ambition as any national arts plan should focus, first and foremost, on improving the sector's creative and innovative potential. He added that Our SG Arts Plan does not articulate the strategies and approaches that would support and develop artistic practice and knowledge, and lacks important details of implementation that would have demonstrated deep knowledge and experience in the various modes of art-making. Instead, the plan merely enables bureaucrats, civil servants and the government establishment to "speak art" in a quasi-coherent and intelligent fashion, but confusing the corporatisation of artistic work and practice with the professionalisation of such pursuits. He concluded that Our SG Arts Plan essentially increases the corporate burden on artists instead of proposing alternative models of management of art-making, and does not go far enough to make a real difference to art-making in Singapore.

Another participant also pointed out that there were certain things missing from Our SG Arts Plan, which included issues like cultural democracy, social freedom and political participation.

About the Speakers

Chong Gua Khee / 张月崎 works primarily as an independent theatre director and performance-maker in Singapore. She also takes on facilitation and dramaturgical work that spans disciplines such as dance and visual arts.

Gua Khee's interest is in co-creating socially engaged bodies of performances that invite people to care deeply for themselves, each other, and society at large. Her pieces unabashedly complicate narratives, but they always centre hope, humour, and collective action. In practice, this translates to her attending to the ecologies of conversations within and around issues, and experimenting with ways to cultivate and nurture them.

Gua Khee graduated from the University of British Columbia, Canada, with a Psychology (Honours) and Theatre (Major) degree. Her recent projects include the musical *Island Song* (director), participatory performance *LAST DANCE* (creative team), theatre piece *Tortoise Tales* under Silver Arts Festival 2018 (co-playwright and director), and the performance *HOT POT TALK: Theatre & the Arts* (producer and director). She has been an Associate Member of Dance Nucleus since 2018.

Kathleen DITZIG is a Researcher and Curator, born and based in Singapore. As an arts researcher, she interrogates and attempts to historically contextualise various contemporary forms and networks of cultural production. Ms Ditzig's art historical research on Southeast Asia has been published in *Southeast of Now* (NUS Press, 2017), as well as presented at international academic conferences and platforms, and published in three different languages. Her writing has also been published in magazines including *Artforum*, *Art Agenda* and *Flash Art*, and in books including *Perhaps it is High Time for a Xeno-Architecture to Match* (Sternberg, 2018).

Ms Ditzig's curatorial practice has previously involved the development of artist residencies, publications and exhibitions for museums, as well as independent exhibitions for emerging artists. Her ongoing independent curatorial projects, such as *offshoreart.co* (developed with Robin Lynch and Debbie Ding), have been presented on international platforms including the Berlin Biennale. Ms Ditzig also works with Vanessa Ban on External Assessment Summer School, the first independent art and design "school" in Singapore.

Terence HO is Nominated Member of Parliament and an Executive Director of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (SCO). He was the first local arts company Executive Director to be awarded the Singapore Tote Board Scholarship to attend “Strategic Management for Non-profit Leaders” in Harvard Business School in 2010. Under the support of the SCO, he attended the Executive Programme for Chief Executive Officers at the Tsinghua University School of Economics and Management, in China in April 2015.

Mr Ho has served as Chairman, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts Music Curriculum Advisory Committee; Vice President, Singapore Chinese Music Federation; on the National Arts Council (NAC) seed and major grant assessment panel and the NAC arts scholarship assessment panel; and Advisor for the Singapore Chin Kang Huay Kuan Youth Division. He won the First Prize in the erhu senior category in the 1985 National Music Competition and was then invited by the Singapore Youth Orchestra (SYO) to tour United Kingdom (UK) as a soloist.

Mr Ho also played the cello with the Conway Civic Orchestra during his college education in the United States. Mr Ho is an active participant and speaker to many arts management conferences, lectures, workshops, orchestra management meetings and arts market overseas. He has presented papers and attended conferences in numerous countries including the United States, UK, China, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Hungary, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and Korea.

LOW Eng Teong was trained as a Visual Artist and graduated from art colleges in New Zealand and Australia. He holds a Masters in Art and Art Education from Teachers College, Columbia University. Mr Low joined the education service in 1995 and served as a teacher, senior curriculum specialist and vice principal. He was the principal of Victoria School from 2006 to 2011 where he led the school to transform teaching and learning through the Teaching for Understanding pedagogy. In 2012, he was tasked to setup the Arts Education Branch in the Ministry of Education where he led reviews in integrating the arts curriculum and co-curriculum.

In 2015, Mr Low was seconded to the National Arts Council as Director, Visual Arts Development where he oversaw the review of the visual arts sectoral plan and the management of Gillman Barracks visual arts precinct. He is currently the Assistant Chief Executive for the Sector Development Group overseeing the Literary, Visual and Performing Arts sectors, an appointment he held since 2017.

Charmaine POH is a Chinese Singaporean artist. Her practice combines photography with research, text, video, and installation, focusing on issues of memory, gender, youth, and solitude in the Asian context. Often working with the form of narrative portraiture, she considers the performance of self and the layers of identity we build. She works with communities in a collaborative process that holds space for introspection, intimacy, and sharing. She is interested in the stories that make us who we are.

Ms Poh has showcased her work through platforms such as M1 Singapore Fringe Festival, the Singapore International Photography Festival, Objectifs Centre for Photography and Filmmaking, The Taipei Arts Festival, Photoville, and The New York Times. Her work has been supported by institutions such as the National Arts Council, Exactly Foundation, and the Global Gender Parity Initiative. She graduated from Tufts University with a Bachelor in International Relations, and is currently pursuing a Master in Visual and Media Anthropology at the Freie Universität Berlin.

TAN Tarn How is Adjunct Senior Research Fellow in the Institute of Policy Studies. His research areas are in arts and cultural policy and media and internet policy.

Paul TAN has served as Deputy Chief Executive Officer at the National Arts Council (NAC), a statutory board under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth since June 2014. Today, the NAC champions the arts by nurturing creative excellence and supporting broad audience engagement. Through comprehensive support from grants and partnerships to industry facilitation and arts housing, the NAC ensures that the arts inspire Singaporeans, connect communities and position Singapore internationally.

Till 2017, Mr Tan had oversight on the development of the various arts sectors — performing, visual and literary arts — as well as the capability development team. He currently supervises corporate services, while supporting the Chief Executive on delivering the strategic outcomes of the organisation, aligned to its mission of making the arts integral to the lives of all Singaporeans. With previous experience in tourism, marketing and journalism, Mr Tan joined the NAC in 2011 as the Festival Director of the Singapore Writers Festival and Director, Literary Arts, and helmed four editions of the successful literary festival. He has also published five collections of poetry.

TAN Peng Sing is the guitarist of M1LDL1FE and the Founder of an independent digital label, working closely with homegrown songwriters to ensure their music is heard in today's competitive media landscape. Outside of the industry, Mr Tan has also conducted historical and ethnographic research on the commercialisation of Singapore's contemporary English music scene between 1990s to 2017.

VENKA Purushothaman is an art writer, academic, and arts and cultural manager. Currently Provost at LASALLE College of the Arts, he holds a PhD in Cultural Policy and Asian Cultural Studies from The University of Melbourne. Dr Venka has researched and published extensively on contemporary art, cultural policy and festival cultures. His books on culture include *Making Visible the Invisible: Three Decades of the Singapore Arts Festival* (2007) and *Narratives: Notes on a Cultural Journey, Cultural Medallion Recipients, 1979–2002* (2002). He has published numerous artist monographs including *The Art of Sukumar Bose: Reflections on South and Southeast Asia* (2013), which was awarded the 2015 ICAS Book Prize (Best Art Book Accolade) by the International Congress of Asian Scholars.

Prior to academia, Dr Venka worked with various cultural organisations including the Esplanade-Theatres on the Bay, National Arts Council, and Victorian Arts Centre, Melbourne; and for arts events such as WOMAD Singapore and the Singapore Arts Festival. Today, he serves as an expert on many professional committees and has chaired important panels on arts funding, cultural awards and those dedicated to developing youths. Dr Venka is a member, Association of International Art Critics (France); Fellow, Royal Society of the Arts, United Kingdom (UK); University Fellow, Musashino Art University (Japan); and McNally Fellow, Ireland Fund-LASALLE (Ireland/Singapore). He is also a member of the Higher Education Academy, UK Strategy Group for Global Teaching Excellence.

C J WEE Wan-ling is Professor of English at the Nanyang Technological University. He was previously a Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (now the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute), and has held Visiting Fellowships at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, India and the Society for the Humanities, Cornell University, among other institutions. Wee is the author of *The Asian Modern: Culture, Capitalist Development, Singapore* (2007) and the editor of *The*

Complete Works of Kuo Pao Kun, vol. 4: Plays in English (2012). His research interests are in literature and the contemporary arts.

Appendix

Our SG Arts Plan (2018-2022)

Our SG Arts Plan (2018–2022) maps the National Arts Council’s (NAC) priorities over the next five years to bring Singapore’s arts development to new heights. This blueprint follows on earlier masterplans, namely the 1989 Report of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts, the Renaissance City Plans of the 2000s, and the 2012 Arts and Culture Strategic Review, which have laid strong foundations in deepening Singapore’s national identity, and in promoting bonds of trust and respect between communities. Through the newly unveiled arts plan, NAC aims to continue to champion the creation and appreciation of the arts as an integral part of people’s lives. This mission is aligned with the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY)’s desired outcomes and will lead us to NAC’s vision for Singapore:

“Home to diverse and distinctive arts that inspire our people, connect our communities and position Singapore globally”.

NAC has identified three strategic thrusts for the arts to enliven and excite Singaporeans, bring people together, and reflect what Singapore represents to a global community.

Inspire Our People

Outcome:

Singaporeans are empowered to create, present and appreciate excellent art.

Connect Our Communities

Outcome:

Diverse communities come together to enjoy and support the arts.

Position Singapore globally

Outcome:

Arts and culture icons and works are appreciated by audiences and critics at home and abroad.

Guided by these three strategic thrusts, NAC has defined eight priorities that will guide future arts and culture initiatives.

Strengthening NAC’s role in leading and championing the arts in Singapore

- Work with cultural institutions to develop arts ecosystems across forms, languages and traditions.
- Champion the diversity of arts practices and perspectives.
- Engage the public, private and people sectors to increase contributions towards the arts.

Increasing our focus on growing audiences

- Audience development must cater to the needs of varying demographics.
- Increase inclusivity and access to the arts through research and data analytics.
- Grow paying audiences to foster sustainability of the arts sector.

Building diverse capabilities in the arts sector

- Strengthen competencies in arts management, research, audience development etc. on top of supporting capability development in art-making.
- Help arts organisations improve their management and governance capabilities, be financially sound, and adopt good hiring practices.

Increasing sector-wide support for freelance arts professionals

- Strengthen sector-wide support for individual practitioners and freelancers.
- Establish resource centre that provides services, information, and learning and development opportunities for freelance arts professionals.

Utilising digital technology to improve art-making and outreach efforts

- Support the arts community to use technology to create, distribute and market the arts effectively.
- Work with cultural institutions to use technology to enhance audience experiences and create new entry points for audiences.

Strengthening research in the arts sector

- Equip both NAC and the arts community with the capacity to gather and analyse data on audiences’ preferences and consumption patterns.
- Use data to advocate for the arts by demonstrating the multi-dimensional value of the arts to society.

Strengthening programme design to maximise the impact of the arts on society

- Strengthen programme design and prioritise resources to achieve artistic excellence and audience development.
- Harness the potential of the arts for community building across backgrounds and cultures.
- Bring the arts to under-reached segments of society.

Taking Singapore’s arts beyond our shores

- Singapore to play a greater role as a cultural focal point in Southeast Asia through strong partnerships with international festivals and other arts councils.
- Support the work of local artists and arts companies and present them at international platforms.
- Seek opportunities for arts community to contribute their expertise on the global stage through international residencies and attachments.

Our SG Arts Plan (2018-2022)

Literary Arts

Analysis of current state

Strengths

- More Singaporeans are reading literature – 44% of the population read at least one literary book in 2015.
- The literary scene has grown – there are more writers, a greater volume and diversity in literary content, and a healthy growth in the number of intermediaries from English and Chinese literary publishers.

Weaknesses

- Awareness and appreciation of Singapore literature is low – just one in 10 Singaporeans read Singapore literature.
- The decline in language proficiency in Chinese, Malay, and Tamil means there are fewer people who can read and write well in these languages.

Envisioned state and outcomes

Inspire Our People

- Nurture a pool of talent with emphasis on grooming talent writing in Chinese, Malay, and Tamil, and across genres and forms that would appeal to diverse readers.

Connect Our Communities

- Cultivate shared interest in and appreciation of Singapore literature through engaging forms such as multi-disciplinary adaptations and transmedia platforms.
- Nurture a love for literature and deepen public engagement of Singapore literature through platforms such as the Singapore Writers Festival and the development of a key literary centre.
- Encourage early exposure to and sustained interest in Singapore literature, within the literature curriculum and beyond, amongst children and youth.
- Leverage technology to create, digitise or adapt Singapore literature for targeted demographics.

Position Singapore Globally

- Establish Singapore as a key enabler of exchanges between the Southeast Asian literary communities.
- Encourage literary discourse on Singapore literature.

Performing Arts

Analysis of current state

Strengths

- Attendance and participation in the performing arts have improved since the last sectoral plan.
- National venues and platforms like Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay and the Singapore International Festival of Arts (SIFA) have built strong international networks to benefit Singaporean artists.

Weaknesses

- Critical writing about the arts is weak and there is little research and documentation of the history and development of the performing arts.
- The predominance of the English language over the Mother Tongue languages, along with uneven audience engagement efforts, have made it challenging for more people to connect with some art forms, especially those that require some language proficiency.
- The level of professionalism in arts management and instruction, succession planning and support for freelance performing arts practitioners needs to be strengthened.

Envisioned state and outcomes

Inspire Our People

- Raise the public visibility of the performing arts by working with the sector to create a national focal point in the cultural calendar.
- Build capabilities in gap areas such as the use of technology, arts education, fundraising, marketing, and arts management.

Connect Our Communities

- Strengthen the sector's understanding of audience segments and behaviours through research, and support the development of critical writing in and about the performing arts.
- Develop capabilities in areas such as audience engagement, facilitation, and content creation for specific audience segments.

Position Singapore Globally

- Strengthen the arts ecosystem through closer alignment with the performing arts institutions and strategic funding of initiatives and intermediaries.

Visual Arts

Analysis of current state

Strengths

- Audience growth for the visual arts has increased since 2011.
- Grant schemes provide flexibility for diverse artistic practices and programmes, and help develop the professional capabilities of arts practitioners.
- Arts housing support is also available to artists and arts organisations.

Weaknesses

- There are few grounds-up and privately funded initiatives due to the lack of suitable spaces and high costs.
- Visual arts appeal less to the 'Married with Kids' and 'Seniors' population segments.
- Artists, art galleries and art fairs find it difficult to be more self-sustaining as the market for buyers of Singapore art is relatively small.

Envisioned state and outcomes

Inspire Our People

- Our art institutions and intermediaries will contribute significantly towards a sustainable ecosystem.
- Ensuring our National Collection stands in good stead for current and future audiences.
- More support for development of contemporary art.
- More opportunities for artists to create and display their art.

Connect Our Communities

- Grow research on visual arts audience segments and behaviours.
- Reach under-reached segments of audiences through public art and accessible programmes.
- Heightening awareness of Singapore art in schools.
- Encouraging digitisation of research, knowledge and content to create new entry points.
- Develop capabilities of art galleries and privately funded art intermediaries to cultivate patronage and grow new collectors.

Position Singapore Globally

- Forge new partnerships to provide opportunities for Singapore artists to gain exposure and grow Singapore's reputation internationally.
- Continue to increase Singapore's international standing in visual arts.

