

Full Report on the IPS-NGS-SAM Roundtable on
Art in the Time of Pandemic II:
Keeping the Arts Afloat
(part of the IPS-NGS-SAM Spotlight on Cultural Policy Series)



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Cover photo:

Invisible Habitudes by T.H.E. Dance Company. Photo by Mr Bernie Ng, courtesy of Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay.

Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	9
Speaker 1: Rosa Daniel	11
Speaker 2: Nicholas Chee.....	18
Speaker 3: Terence Tan.....	21
Speaker 4: Noorlinah Mohamed.....	25
Speaker 5: Ng Joon Kiat	28
Speaker 6: Billy Soh	30
Speaker 7: Angela Liong	32
Discussion	36
About the Speakers.....	44

Executive Summary

Like most other sectors of the economy, the arts sector has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many artists and arts companies have seen their incomes plunge with the suspension of performances, exhibitions, and closure of venues.

Safe management measures in studios and rehearsals and other spaces also mean that artists have been unable to create work or are forced to put in place workarounds that have affected their art-making.

This is a report of a roundtable discussion organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) in collaboration with National Gallery Singapore (NGS) and the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) on 8 July 2020. Titled, “Art in the Time of Pandemic II: Keeping the Arts Afloat”, the roundtable looked at the impact of government measures introduced during Phase Two of the post-circuit breaker¹ to help artists cope during the difficult period.

Over 80 artists and arts groups, freelancers, educators, and policymakers attended the roundtable. The presenters and participants discussed a range of issues, including the challenges they were facing, the ways they had tried to overcome them, and the extent to which existing policies had addressed some of the challenges. They also put forward recommendations to policymakers on how similar crises in the future can be tackled and how the arts sector can better protect itself during such circumstances.

The seven presenters were:

1. Mrs Rosa Daniel, Deputy Secretary (Culture) of the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) and Chief Executive Officer of the National Arts Council (NAC)
2. Mr Nicholas Chee, Founder and Managing Director of Sinema Media Pte Ltd
3. Mr Terence Tan, Founding Director of Artsolute
4. Dr Noorlinah Mohamed, Artistic Director of Not Ordinary Work (N.O.W.)
5. Mr Ng Joon Kiat, visual artist (joint presentation)
6. Mr Billy Soh, multidisciplinary artist (joint presentation)

¹ Phase Two of the post-circuit breaker lasted from 19 June 2020 to 27 December 2020 (both dates inclusive). At time of this publication, Singapore has already started to ease some of its existing restrictions such as allowing up to 500 people to attend live events if vaccinated. For more information, visit <https://www.gov.sg/article/updates-to-singapores-covid-19-measures-from-19-august-2021>.

7. Ms Angela Liong, Artistic Director of The Arts Fission Company Ltd

The presentations were followed by a half-hour discussion with all participants, moderated by Mr Kok Heng Leun, Artistic Director of Drama Box Ltd.

Navigating changes in the arts together

Mrs Rosa Daniel, Deputy Secretary (Culture) of the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) and Chief Executive Officer of the National Arts Council (NAC), spoke about the existing support measures available to the arts community. She explained that the NAC was already meeting different artists and arts companies from as early as February 2020 to learn about the challenges that they were facing. It also conducted an online survey involving over 2,000 respondents on how the pandemic had affected the earnings and commercial engagements of Self-Employed Persons (SEPs) and freelance artists in the first quarter of 2020. Such early ground sensing and data collection were extremely important for the NAC as they helped to raise a strong case to the Ministry of Finance (MOF) to provide urgent support to the arts sector, she said. Mrs Daniel added that the NAC has been closely monitoring and keeping updated on the latest strategies and relief measures that were being introduced by governments globally. This was to help consider how some of them can be adapted into the Singapore context. Moving forward, she said that the NAC would continue to focus on three key areas to help the arts sector: first, to sustain livelihoods through retraining and upskilling; second, to ensure sustainability by optimising resources and diversifying sources of income; and third, to promote innovation by harnessing science and technology to transform operations and programme designs.

Preparing for a post-pandemic future

Mr Nicholas Chee, Founder and Managing Director of Sinema Media Pte Ltd, a consultancy and project management company focusing on film and media initiatives, spoke about a Facebook group he set up called “COVID-19 Creative/Cultural Professionals & Freelancers Support”. The group was set up for members of the creative industry to connect with one another and also to collectively engage with the relevant government bodies. Based on his interactions with the group members, he identified two problems that policymakers and artists should address in the post-pandemic period. The first was the lack of basic business and administrative knowledge and skills among artists. He suggested providing more courses and training in these areas. The second was the lack of proper differentiation between trained professionals, semi-professionals, and advanced hobbyists. He said that such lack of differentiation can create large price fluctuations in the market, and this is a problem especially for trained and professional artists who do not get paid a reasonable price for their work.

To manage this, he suggested creating a unified professional body to represent and protect the interests of trained and accredited professionals.

Being a bigger advocate for the arts community

Mr Terence Tan, Founding Director of Artsolute, a non-profit agency that promotes social and community development, spoke about the impact of digitalisation in Singapore. He recognised that while digitalisation has made the arts more inclusive and accessible to certain communities such as the disabled, it has caused others like the digitally disadvantaged to lose out. Mr Tan acknowledged that the grants rolled out by the NAC were helpful in addressing some of the needs of the arts community. However, he pointed out that some groups may not be able to capitalise on these grants. For example, some older artists may not understand what the grants entail and therefore, may not apply for them. On the other hand, some newer or younger artists may not even be aware that they qualify for such grants. Therefore, it is essential to design some form of guidance when rolling out assistance schemes. Moving forward, he said that it was important for artists to upgrade their skills, interact more with one another and continue remaining resilient. He also stressed that the NAC should be a bigger advocate for the arts community, especially in this period of hardship and uncertainty.

Incorporating the “element of care” in policymaking

Dr Noorlinah Mohamed, Artistic Director of Not Ordinary Work (N.O.W), an interdisciplinary festival focusing on women creators, thinkers, and change-makers, said policymakers needed to think about how they could include the element of care in the assistance schemes that they provided. She said they needed to better understand what the true needs of artists were when designing support packages or assistance schemes. For example, she said the “Capability Development Scheme for the Arts” (CDSA)² which aimed at helping artists upgrade their skills during the “downtime” of the pandemic was not very useful because it did not guarantee artists that they would be reimbursed after attending the training programmes. She also added that policymakers needed to get more feedback on the policies that they rolled out for art groups across various disciplines. She also stressed that given the possibility that the pandemic will last for some time, they should start thinking about developing more concrete long-term policies and support systems to help sustain the arts community in the future.

Considerations for policymakers in the event of a return to circuit breaker

Visual artist Mr Ng Joon Kiat and multidisciplinary artist Mr Billy Soh talked about how their own work practices were affected by the safe management measures. Mr Ng said visual artists like himself would mostly work alone or in very small groups in studios. Therefore, they generally posed a low risk of being infected by the virus. Yet, he was

² The Capability Development Scheme for the Arts (CDSA) was a time-limited scheme that was launched on 16 March 2020 to help arts self-employed persons and employees of arts organisations to upskill and grow their capabilities through training programmes that take place in Singapore. It is no longer available at the time of this publication.

puzzled as to why the government did not allow them to return to their studios during Phase One³ of the post-circuit breaker. If there was a return to Phase One, he said the government should allow visual artists to return to their studios with safety measures put in place. Mr Ng added that the government has to place fewer restrictions on artistic creation and instead, work together with artists in a way that will enable them to gain more control of their work. On the topic of assistance funds and grants, he said more support has to be given to visual artists because they often tend to be overlooked.

Mr Soh echoed Mr Ng's sentiments on the importance of the physical workplace, especially so for artists and practitioners like him who may not have the most conducive space to work from home.

Being ready for diverse scenarios and making exceptions

Ms Angela Liong, Artistic Director of The Arts Fission Company Ltd, a contemporary dance company, said the current pandemic was a reminder of how fragile the arts environment could be. She said it was very important for artists and arts groups to be ready to meet diverse scenarios — such as having to temporarily suspend work or making adjustments to current practices. Policymakers on the other hand, needed to understand the challenges artists and arts groups faced and be willing to provide certain exemptions when possible. She also said it was very challenging for artists and arts practitioners to ask for such exemptions because there was no clear guidance on which ministry or organisation was the main point of contact. In a stressful time like this, she said it was important for policymakers to work even more closely with the arts community and establish a unified body for better communication. Ms Liong added that art forms like dance require continuous technical maintenance and therefore, it is extremely important that they be given the flexibility to practise in the physical space in the present moment.

Discussion

In the discussion after the presentations, the following points were raised:

1. The NAC said it would continue to focus on three key areas that will help the arts community cope with the pandemic in the current moment, and equip it with the necessary skills to prepare for the future as well. The three key areas are sustaining livelihoods through retraining and upskilling; ensuring sustainability by optimising resources and diversifying income; and promoting innovation by harnessing on science and technology.
2. Safe management measures during Phase One of the post-circuit breaker caused many artists and arts groups to suffer heavy income losses. In the event of a return to Phase One, policymakers should consider providing exemptions to certain artists and groups who work alone or in small groups.

³ Phase One of the post-circuit breaker lasted from 2 June 2020 to 18 June 2020 (both dates inclusive).

3. Some artists and arts groups that engage in commercial or entertainment-related work may not directly fall under the purview of the NAC and therefore, may be excluded from some assistance schemes. Suggested solutions to help such “porous groups” included establishing an inter-sector, inter-agency, or a professional body in order to have some form of recognition.
4. The current situation has made it extremely challenging to continue with international engagements and collaborations. However, artists and arts groups could tap existing resources and funding from the government to explore more virtual possibilities such as designing online tours and webinars.
5. Policymakers should engage in more consultations and discussions with artists, freelancers, and arts groups, to know what is happening on the ground in order to design policies and assistance schemes that are relevant.

Introduction

The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), together with National Gallery Singapore (NGS) and the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) organised an online roundtable discussion on 8 July 2020 to look at how existing policies by the government have helped the arts sector stay afloat during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they can be improved further to help artists across different disciplines.

The roundtable discussion was held via Zoom webinar and examined the following issues and questions:

- What are the short-term and long-term implications of safe management measures on artists and arts practitioners and their work?
- What are the existing policies implemented by the government to help artists and arts groups across different disciplines and how effective have they been?
- How can policymakers, artists and arts groups work together to improve on existing policies or create new policies that will help them to cope with the rapidly changing pandemic situation?
- How prepared are artists and arts groups to manage another pandemic or other similar challenges in the future?

Over 80 artists, arts practitioners, freelancers, educators, and policymakers attended the roundtable discussion. The roundtable was chaired by Mr Kok Heng Leun, Artistic Director of Drama Box Ltd.

In his opening remarks, Dr Eugene Tan, Director of National Gallery Singapore (NGS) and the Singapore Art Museum (SAM), talked about how the pandemic has created various debates on the value of art and artistic labour. He alluded to an earlier controversy regarding a survey conducted by *The Straits Times*, which reported that the role of artists was regarded as “non-essential” by many Singaporeans during the pandemic.⁴ Dr Tan said that it is important to rethink the ways in which artistic value and labour is measured in the current neoliberal economy in which we are operating. This is where the role of the government is crucial in supporting the work of artists and changing people’s perspectives on the value of artists in society.

⁴ To read more about the survey conducted by *The Straits Times*, visit <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/manpower/8-in-10-singaporeans-willing-to-pay-more-for-essential-services>.

Seven speakers delivered their presentations in the following order:

1. Mrs Rosa Daniel, Deputy Secretary (Culture) of the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) and Chief Executive Officer of the National Arts Council (NAC)
2. Mr Nicholas Chee, Founder and Managing Director of Sinema Media Pte Ltd
3. Mr Terence Tan, Founding Director of Artsolute
4. Dr Noorlinah Mohamed, Artistic Director of Not Ordinary Work (N.O.W.)
5. Mr Ng Joon Kiat, visual artist (joint presentation)
6. Mr Billy Soh, multidisciplinary artist (joint presentation)
7. Ms Angela Liong, Artistic Director of The Arts Fission Company Ltd

The presentations were followed by an hour-long discussion session that was opened to all participants and moderated by Mr Kok.

Speaker 1: Rosa Daniel, Deputy Secretary (Culture) Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) and Chief Executive Officer National Arts Council (NAC)

Introduction

I thank IPS for inviting me to speak at this seminar. It is a topic that is front and centre in all our minds since the COVID situation first unfolded. Five months in and we are told that we are just seeing the end of the beginning.

Dislocation, Destruction and Disruption

This is a time characterised by dislocation of businesses, destruction of value, and disruption of lives. Not just here but all over the world. And for a country like Singapore — so open and global — this means the double whammy of weathering both domestic and international impact.

COVID-19 Disruption

This set of sobering data comes from a UNESCO report, titled “Culture, Cities and the COVID-19 Pandemic” which carried findings on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the culture sector worldwide, affecting as many as 5.4 per cent of the global workforce or some 30 million jobs worldwide.

Much ink has been spilt in Singapore and elsewhere on sustainability of the arts with closure of arts venues, lost jobs and cancelled projects.

Economic Impact

Here in Singapore, the NAC has been closely monitoring the impact of COVID-19 on our major companies and arts charities that make detailed information available to us. Many made early representations to the NAC and the Ministry on the serious fallout from closure of venues and operations.

The NAC also ran an online survey at the end of March to understand the impact on our freelancers and arts self-employed persons. Out of over 2,000 survey respondents, 54 per cent of them had reported to have lost more than half of their income from January to March 2020, compared with the year before — and were expecting their total income this year to decrease by 70 per cent. Among the respondents, 91 per cent were affected by project cancellations, and 75 per cent of this group did not receive compensation.

This early data gathering and ground sensing enabled the NAC to put up a convincing and robust case to the Ministry of Finance for the urgent need to shore up the arts sector. We are running the next survey for freelancers, and it is not clear whether the situation has worsened since, or whether freelancers have since found new opportunities in the past few months.

COVID-19 Support

Many countries have rolled out government support packages for the arts sector. The UK government has made the much-awaited announcement that about £1.5 billion, or S\$2 billion, will be given out. The package covers support for heritage and cultural institutions, leaving out support for freelancers.

Singapore's model is closer to France and Germany where the key cultural venues and institutions are largely already operating on state funding.

Budgets

We have and will continue to do detailed scanning of other countries. These include Hong Kong, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Taiwan, and Malaysia. We study the measures that can be applied and adapted to our context.

As we all know, there have been four budgets within 100 days. The NAC has put in much effort to ensure that the arts sector would benefit from the relief measures.

Like all other sectors, the arts sector was given wage support under the Job Support Scheme (JSS)⁵ for companies and the Self-Employed Person Income Relief Scheme (SIRS), for freelancers and technical crew. This was provided with the focus on sustaining jobs and livelihoods.

To defray operational costs, a venue hire subsidy was announced in March 2020 before the circuit breaker. Now that we are in Phase Two,⁶ and with work resuming in the arts sector the subsidy has increased from 30 to 80 per cent for the duration of Phase Two for a range of venues to facilitate a wide diversity of works.

Arts and Culture Resilience Package (ACRP)

The Ministry of Finance approved the Arts and Culture Resilience Package (ACRP) of S\$55 million which speaks very well of how, together, we have convinced funders of the value of the arts and the critical importance of sustaining our sector. This sum is over and above the annual budget provisions for the culture sector, which funds our key institutions and venues, as well as arts companies and artists through state grants.

So far, the ACRP has been targeted towards two critical areas to supplement the broad-based national wage and rental support schemes.

- 1) Training and skills upgrading — We have many training opportunities and also invited arts leaders to be trainers. Priority areas include digital technology for art-making and outreach, audience engagement, entrepreneurship and organisation capabilities.

⁵ For more details on the latest Jobs Support Scheme, visit <https://www.nac.gov.sg/whatwedo/support/sustaining-the-arts-during-covid-19/acrp.html>.

⁶ At time of this publication, Singapore has already started to ease some of its existing restrictions such as allowing up to 500 people to attend live events if vaccinated; some Arts and Culture Resilience Package time-limited grants are no longer applicable.

- 2) Digitalisation— The NAC was among the first public agencies to set this up as we knew it was a mission-critical task for the arts sector. We have already supported many ground-up projects as well as a large volume of work with key partners like media and domain platforms. We target to generate at least 3,000 jobs and opportunities as soon as possible. As we resume operations safely in Phase Two, the well-being of our artists and audiences remains the priority and there is still a great push needed towards digitalisation.

The application timelines have been extended so that more can benefit from these schemes. Our processing time was shortened, and funds disbursement was frontloaded to speed up the funding flow to arts groups and artists. I have to point out that these matters are not taken lightly by the NAC as a public institution. Many of my colleagues worked tirelessly to ensure that processes are formally documented and approved by the Board Audit Committee so that we are not found wanting by the Auditor-General's Office for compliance later on.

Pre-COVID Time

It may be hard to remember a world pre-COVID-19. But the 2019 Population Survey on the Arts will be very reassuring for many of us, especially after the *Straits Times* survey recently that disappointed many of us — when 71 per cent out of about 1,000 Singaporeans surveyed indicated the arts as “non-essential”.

The NAC's Population Survey on the Arts will put out robust and comprehensive data to the contrary. In 2019, there was the possible Bicentennial Year effect akin to what we saw in 2015 when there was increased cultural programming. Nonetheless this shows that in the right circumstances, the arts and culture have flourished.

2019 Population Survey on the Arts — Perceptions and Engagement

Perceptions of the value of arts and culture improved, with more Singaporeans recognising the impact of the arts on the quality of life and our sense of identity.

Greater appreciation of the arts and acknowledgement of opportunities for emerging artists affirm a healthy ecosystem and growth manifested in:

- (i) greater engagement in terms of physical attendance at arts events; and
- (ii) higher digital consumption of the arts, particularly for the Literary Arts, followed by Music and Theatre



Performance at Gillman Barracks, as part of *Art After Dark: Singapore Art Week 2019*. Photo courtesy of the NAC.

2019 Population Survey on the Arts — Drivers, Barriers, Challenges

Many Singaporeans cited “supporting friends and family” as the top reason for attending arts events and this validates our belief that the arts bring people together; conversely, barriers to the arts include perceived relevance and the lack of awareness of arts events.

The survey shows positive trends, but we are cognisant of the challenges ahead: how can the arts interest audiences as we face stiff competition from other leisure activities? How can we entice Singaporeans to visit arts venues and attend arts events and performances, alongside their exercise routines, and other online entertainment options and Netflix?

Looking ahead: Challenges and Opportunities

With the COVID-19 situation, these challenges have become even more pertinent. At the NAC, we expect that this will be a period of belt-tightening and consolidation across the scene in the next couple of years.

But we must have optimism and confidence that we can emerge stronger together. With disruption and destruction also come new opportunities to innovate and create new value.

As Ms Goh Swee Chen, Chair of the NAC, expressed in her opinion piece published on 1 July 2020: with a deeper appreciation of the arts comes the broadening of minds and outlooks. How can we capitalise on this?

Over the past month, the NAC has worked closely with the Ministry and also other cultural institutions to review our strategies and priorities, as articulated in Our SG Arts Plan, which continue to chart our work until 2022. We realise that in the next one to two years, we will have to pivot our plans towards three critical areas.

First is protecting livelihoods through sustaining jobs and supporting the arts community in upskilling and re-skilling. We will stay focused on sustaining support for our major companies who together with the state cultural institutions undertake the bulk of cultural activities that in turn create work and income for the larger arts community. We will actively commission work, and also provide traineeship opportunities as part of the SG United movement. We continue to support capability development, paying both for those who step up as trainers and for those who want to be trained. We will participate in national efforts to re-skill arts practitioners for suitable jobs in the months ahead.

Second, we will support arts groups in defraying operational costs of using arts spaces. This will be through greater affordability of subsidised arts venues, rental support, and optimisation of tenanted spaces to share costs and increase access. We will also support arts groups to step up and do better at advocating for the arts to secure donations and sponsorships by linking the arts to worthy corporate social responsibility (CSR) causes.

Third, like all other sectors, we have to innovate and harness science and technology. We have to ensure we keep artists and audiences safe, enhance audience experiences to compete with so many attractive offerings, and transform our businesses and practices so as to get more out of our limited resources. The NAC will be co-investing with several partners on smart arts centres and venues. We are also looking into how we can better support the arts community to leverage technology and tap creative solutions. This is difficult to do individually, but as domain clusters, it is possible to identify challenges and joint solutions. This could be the game changer that brings the arts community closer together. We are already seeing this happening — with collegial sharing of resources and good practices. Together, we must build critical skillsets, stay nimble and work together to find the solutions to new challenges.

Embracing Digitalisation

Nothing replaces live experiences, but there is a need to embrace digitalisation; our cultural institutions, national companies and Major Companies and Seed Grant companies have been taking the lead in many of the digital efforts since February:

- (i) Participating in the #SGCultureAnywhere campaign and the A-List.sg as a one-stop integrated platform that profile the best of Singapore's digital arts and culture offerings
- (ii) Piloting with SISTIC Live a new streaming platform for audiences to stream past and present productions on their devices, with easily purchasable tickets via contactless payment
- (iii) Adapting archival content to enhance audience experiences
- (iv) Leveraging Giving.Sg to raise awareness and donations



Masthead of A-List.Sg, a one-stop integrated platform that profiles the best of Singapore's digital arts and culture offerings as part of the #SGCultureAnywhere campaign. Photo courtesy of the NAC.

With digital experiences, how can we further monetise our offerings? How should we plan for future seasons and price our tickets? This will require all of us to think creatively, experiment and share best practices with one another.

The NAC will also be working on how we can support digital solutions for the business processes of Major Companies and Seed Grant companies and arts organisations in the months to come. There would be possibilities for aggregated platforms or cluster solutioning for corporate functions and shared services.

Technology and Innovation

Beyond digitalisation, we must also look towards technology and innovation to develop our practice.

Looking at programme design, how can we innovate to blend the physical and digital components to create a coherent arts experience for our audiences?

An example of science/technology in the arts is *DigiMuse Presents 2019: Randy Chan's "Sonic Womb"* as an interactive and immersive installation where a series of sensors track the real-time movements outside of the structure, to create a textured soundscape mimicking the way a foetus experiences sound within the womb.

As we prepare to move into the gradual re-opening of the arts sector, the NAC will also work with arts organisations and relevant government agencies to explore innovative ideas. For instance, deploying contactless and automated processes, specialised equipment, and scientific approaches. For example:

- In early May, SPOT, a four-legged robot made its debut as a safe-distancing ambassador in Bishan-Ang Mo Kio park; to estimate the number of visitors and broadcast a message reminding visitors to observe safe-distancing measures

- A company based in Buffalo, New York, developed drones to clean spaces such as Broadway-sized theatres, which not only saves time and resources, but reduces the need for human exposure when cleaning is done before and after performances
- Contactless temperature scanners

We would very much welcome your suggestions and more importantly support the efforts of the arts community to come together to collectively build some of these platforms.

Concluding Remarks

The arts bring people together and it should also build us up as an arts community.

It is through our collective efforts that we can reach new audiences and patrons for the arts. And create new ways of experiencing the arts. Together, we can weather this storm.

Speaker 2: Nicholas Chee, Founder and Managing Director, Sinema Media Pte Ltd

Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Tarn How, IPS, NGS, and SAM for inviting me to speak today. This is quite a big honour because I do not consider myself as being part of the arts industry per se, because my work lies more in media and a little bit of design which leans towards the commercial side. But I guess I am here because I want to share with everyone what has happened in the past five months since the setting up of the “COVID-19 Creative/Cultural Professionals & Freelancers Support Group”. I will also share two ideas that I think is essential for us to look at for a post-pandemic creative and cultural industry.

So, it has been a very interesting five months with a lot of discussions happening. I have also gotten a lot of opportunities to speak with a lot of individuals who are a little bit shy to post on the main forum and instead, they would privately message me. I think it had started to look like a meet-the-people session in some sense. But I am very grateful to have made a lot of friends across the sub-sectors and one of the key things that I had discovered was that when we reference who is a creative or cultural Self-Employed Person (SEP), there is no definite list of checkboxes which we can tick off from. This possibly explains why a lot of them had many issues when applying for the Self-Employed Person Income Relief Scheme (SIRS). This may also be because in the last 10 years, there have not been enough data captured on how one is considered to be a creative or arts freelancer.

I just want to share some numbers. Forgive me for not having any slides because I did not want to make this too technical. I just want to share very quickly that out of the 8,300 members that we have had over the span of five months in our group, 10 per cent are in the age group of 18 to 24. This represents somewhat of a school-leaving cohort, and I understand also that the class of 2020 is under a lot of stress as this is not the best time to graduate. But also, at the same time, we are seeing a lot of people, such as freelancers, who are thinking of returning to school. Next, 45 per cent are between the age group of 25 to 34; that is actually a very large number. And 30 per cent are from the age group of 35 to 44. So, between the ages of 25 to 44 years old, 75 per cent are actually creative and cultural freelancers. This is just based on the 8,300-member sample size. What we can derive from this is that the typical lifespan of a functional or the most productive creative is from the age of 25 to 44. This represents almost about 20 years of a useful lifespan. Interestingly, we see that the numbers sort of dip because one would imagine that the people on Facebook are of an older age, and the younger ones are on Instagram. The even younger ones are on TikTok — I think we all know that. Also, 12 per cent of the members are between the age group of 45 to 54. So, having this information, a lot of questions have come to my head. They relate to how these people decide to become freelancers.

I have been invited to schools to speak and share with students and I realise that a lot of them actually want to become freelancers before they graduate. This means that the traditional employment pathway — getting a job after graduation, working for a few years

and later on deciding to strike out on their own by becoming a freelancer, starting a business, etc. — is no longer the case. With this in mind, the next question that I have is: Why is it then that so many are unprepared or underprepared to deal with the business or administrative side?

I ran a basic bookkeeping class for free. I thought we would have about 10 or 12 people who would actually want to sign up. But it turned out that there were over 100 attendees. It was a 90-minute class where I thought them all about the basics of a legal structure, from just a person doing trade work to a sole proprietor, and how to do a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) or even manage a private limited company. This is the lifespan that I personally went through, from an independent and individual freelancer to a company owner now and also working with other freelancers. So, the lack of business and administrative skills is something that I think can be augmented. Maybe schools could run more modules for students on how to become small business owners. I think that is essential.

The next thing that I discovered is that there is literally no differentiation between a trained professional, or one who is a semi-professional, and some sort of an advanced hobbyist who is starting to offer maybe wedding photography services on weekends. This is also quite a big worry because what this does is that it creates some sort of an imbalance in terms of price, and I will come to that afterwards. Finally, I would also like to note that organisations like the Arts Resource Hub (ARH) have been very important. It is a pity because the Facebook group straddles across the multi-disciplines. But ARH focuses very much on just the artist. So, I would think that there is an opportunity for ARH to grow to cover the other sectors as well as to have other agencies to be involved in ARH's development. This is because I think it would be a waste of resources to try and create another one for the media and another one for design and so on. So, my recommendation is to possibly look at a unified body to represent professionals. In this case, when I say professionals, I mean being trained, accredited, and deriving 70 per cent of income from the trade or craft of work for creatives and SEPs. This is what I think we need to do in the first part when coming out of the pandemic.

Next, the second part, to add on to what Rosa had mentioned about how the government can help to revitalise the arts sector — is very much on the business side of things. One of my biggest personal frustrations is with the GeBIZ procurement system where the buying is a little strange for me as a creative service provider. It always seems that there is a lean towards buying the cheapest service. I think that this is because there is no real line to define what is professional or what a professional line of cost should be. One of the examples I have with GeBIZ recently is that there was a 36 times difference in bidding. There was a S\$72,000 bid versus a S\$2,000 bid for the same type of work which finally, of course, as you guessed, was not awarded to the S\$2,000 but to a S\$4,000 job. That for me is really interesting because if a company can quote for the service for S\$72,000 and another can quote for S\$2,000, the government procurement officer would be very confused. So, there should be something like a professional guide price. I do not want to go into price-fixing. The Competition and Consumer Commission of Singapore (CCCS) is very big on price-fixing and things like that. But a guide price is very important because it allows us to differentiate who is a

professional, who is a semi-professional or a hobbyist. In this case, the photography market is very susceptible to these kinds of price fluctuations.

The last recommendation is for the government to really look at what is the market and international rate around the world and basically pay about 10 per cent more so that companies can have excess resources to actually grow and hire more people. The topic on GeBIZ is a bit stressful for me as we have been on the receiving end of the GeBIZ problem for the longest time.

So, this is what I have to share about the post-pandemic future, which is really about having a professional body moving forward as well as revisiting government procurement for creative services. Thank you.

Speaker 3: Terence Tan, Founding Director, Artsolute

Hi, I am Terence from Artsolute, and we started this informal group called SupportMADEinSG. It started with a couple of online surveys and some townhall meetings; after that we were thinking about the possibility of a physical petition. Originally, we were working with the “COVID-19 Creative/Cultural Professionals & Freelancers Support Group” started by Nicholas Chee, but we had to move on because the views in the ecology had grown, and we had other greater issues as a whole.



Mr Terence Tan carrying out a community survey with residents of Pulau Ubin.
Photo courtesy of Mr Terence Tan.

We held surveys in February and April 2020 and have looked at the variety of issues affecting independent artists, freelancers and so on. Naturally, financial circumstances have changed. One situation we looked out for was the well-being of artists. Being a

colleague of many artists out there, my biggest concern was for those who had trouble keeping a roof over their heads or had dependents that needed additional care. I was concerned about how resilient they were (in this crisis), and were they able to continue working in the arts?

Shortly after, the National Arts Council (NAC) rolled out financial packages to support the community, as the Fortitude Budget was presented by Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat. So, we asked ourselves what else we could do on a qualitative level. SupportMADEinSG held video interviews with artists of diverse fields such as Alfian Sa'at, Grace Leong from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA), and dance artists from Scratch Marks. We identified which areas needed further support and dialogue. Based on this, we reflected on topics such as sustainability, audience development, artistic development and most of all, our identity.

My view is that there are pros and cons to this situation. We have come together with greater solidarity now, as artists are getting to know and meet one another a lot more online, and I think this is great. Also, digitalisation has given us some sense of convenience, though it does require a lot of adjustment. We also need to ask ourselves what we lose in the digitalisation process in terms of tourism, travel, crew, equipment, etc. The economic impact of the arts has been lost so what would be the reasons to support the arts? Of course, there are advantages to digitalisation such as the disabled having some access. But we have also lost the sense of having essential and sacred spaces for multi-dimensional presentations among artists. For the digitally disadvantaged, we need to ask what do they lose? What about arts education and community arts? What do we gain and lose when the arts come from the screen?

Based on conversations with Singapore's artists, the key element of the arts as a social need is personal interaction. There is a personal need that calls people to the arts when parts of ourselves are not fulfilled by life's realities. Artists look for that too. We have a lot to learn now in terms of the process and progress we can get from the international programmes out there. That is great. But what about our local programmes and cultures? Hence, we need to ask what Singapore is during this COVID-19 situation and what artists can do. We need to think about what we lose with digital dialogue and overexposure.

Next, I will speak about national grants. The NAC's grants have been rolled out pretty efficiently in my opinion. But it does not necessarily reach out to everyone for different reasons. Sometimes an older artist cannot understand what is going on. Or maybe it's a young street artist who doesn't not know they qualify, as they have just started out; they have never asked or received a grant before. Perhaps in some cases, the digitalisation package may not be relevant. It's the same issue with some skills retraining programmes. Some artists may not know what courses to take or why they should take them. For the digitalisation grants, G-rated programmes without advisory content are required, which may not be relevant when artists wish to discuss certain topics. And of course, there are those who are more familiar with NAC's *modus*

operandi — but what about those daunted by the application procedure? They can always consider alternative incomes and alternative savings, take their own creative directions, and spend their time earning money on their own.

The other issue of Phase Two (for artists) is venue access. We are really thankful that the NAC has opened up the possibility for artists to go back to their workspaces. I know that Ivan Heng, Billy, and Joon Kiat had to negotiate for this. I don't understand why the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI), or the Ministry of Health (MOH) has distinguished the arts from sports and other manufacturing activities.

As Nicholas had shared earlier, we artists may also lack sufficient managerial, bookkeeping, and other skills. We have got a lot to learn, and it is perfectly a good time to sit back, reflect, and think about the skills we need. But it is a steep learning curve, not just for artists but the Council too. It is definitely a first time for everyone, and I thank Rosa and the NAC team for all their patience. They have been amazing.

At the end of the day, what we really should talk about is trust. The Council and artists have to learn to work with and trust one another. This “essential-or-not” survey has ruined the moment, making it hard for artists to believe in themselves or in the NAC for a while. Sixty artists even came together to put a letter to Rosa and Paul Tan as we were hoping for a greater stand from the NAC, to highlight the flaws of the survey published by the press. When we exclude many other facets of living through this crisis — identity and social cohesion — from what is essential, we take out the soul and mission of the arts as well. Therefore, we believe that the NAC has to take a bigger stand and be a bigger advocate for artists. I think that is important.

We have received a reply from Rosa, but more can be done. With the letters by Professor Tommy Koh and Ms Goh Swee Chen to *The Straits Times*, we can put the past behind and relook at what the NAC is to us artists. I hope the Council will see itself more as an advocate in this pandemic situation, and work on its relationship with artists and the public. And of course, all of us need to develop the relationship between artists and the public by having more relevant programmes and publicly accessible activities. I believe that as the civic sector has faced problems speaking up for artists, a civil society has risen, and the NAC will have to engage with it.

As Nicholas mentioned earlier, the Arts Resource Hub should do more for creatives as a whole, which includes helping artists develop their skills in company management or personal finances management. The NAC could also consider hiring and working with artists for some of their publicity material. This would help the NAC's outreach remain relevant for artists.

Some final thoughts. Another area to consider is multi-disciplinary development, as our surveys have shown that it is the multi-disciplinary artists who have managed to cope with the pandemic better. With a wider range of skills to tap on, they can redesign their work. The NAC could also look at greater inter-ministerial development with MOE, MOH, MTI and so forth. As they rebuild the city, we could do with clients from the government

to support us. The National Jobs Council and The Future Economy Council could therefore involve the arts to a larger extent.

So, what is next? For now, Artsolute and the SupportMADEinSG group have taken a break from the surveys because things have gotten really bad, and also because of the election fever. We will probably take it up again in July and think about the wellbeing and resilience of artists. Thank you.

Speaker 4: Dr Noorlinah Mohamed, Artistic Director, Not Ordinary Work (N.O.W.)

Thank you very much for having me here this morning. I am here today without any presentation slides, but I will provide a reflection on the ground as an independent artist working during COVID-19. When I say working, it does not necessarily mean earning. So, there are two very different things that we need to understand regarding what work is, its value and how it generates livelihoods. There are many people out there working and creating for the sake of mental health issues and for surviving as a community that moves forward during a pandemic that is completely unexpected. Therefore, the kind of work that requires financial support in generating solidarity, thinking, making, and working together, is also something that is not considered in many of the policies being put forward either by the NAC or even beyond. The NAC is just one of the entities overseeing the notion of funding.

What I would really like to speak about is the philosophy and the aesthetics of care. I would like to generate a conversation on how care could frame some of the ideas put forward by the NAC because it is the only national arts body available for the creative industry. I know that within the creative industry, there are other sub-sectors, such as multimedia. Now, communication is part of this notion of care. I would like to talk about how the policies are communicated and how, borrowing Rosa Daniel's own words "working together, emerging stronger" as a community can be achieved.

Let me give you a response anecdotally from the ground comprising of a variety of freelancers and non-freelancers. This means that they are artists or creators. I would like to use the word creators rather than artists because these anecdotal comments do not just come from people in the arts, which we understand as dance, music, literary arts, and the usual brand of silo-ed organisational categories available in the NAC portal. They also include other creators like Nicholas Chee's work because I believe that at the start of the pandemic, he was one of the very few people who came up with the Facebook group to support creatives, and I immediately jumped on the bandwagon to figure out the ways in which we could work together to move forward.

When the "Capability Development Scheme for the Arts" (CDSA)⁷ was rolled out, there was a townhall meeting where some independent artists were asked to give their comments. At the start, the comments were that it was difficult to go for upgrading courses when they thought the particular courses they were going for would help them to survive the pandemic. However, it is actually about the issue of livelihood and survivability, and the notion of how artists can move forward creatively.

⁷ The Capability Development Scheme for the Arts (CDSA) was a time-limited scheme that was launched on 16 March 2020 to help arts self-employed persons and employees of arts organisations to upskill and grow their capabilities through training programmes that take place in Singapore. It is no longer available at the time of this publication.

I think there is a disconnect when it comes to administrative thinking and subsequently, coming up with policies, bailouts, or support packages as well as the communities that these policies and packages are supposed to serve. Under the philosophy of care in medical sciences, there is a notion of “What is the medication?” Here of course, this is the support system for the arts community. How then do you know what medication should be provided for the patient? In order to know the proper medication, you would need to have a proper diagnosis and then you should have proper testing. Now, I use these terms because I am a caregiver myself. I am also an artist. So, I marry these two into the thinking of how I create my work after the circuit breaker and my experience with the Singapore International Film of Arts (SIFA).

Care is such an important tool, and it brings in the notion of mental health as well in the community. So, the CDSA, while well intentioned, fails in certain ways because the communication element of it is lacking. For example, in the issue of livelihood versus skills upgrading, the community feels that while it undergoes skills upgrading, it is not even able to get a guarantee that reimbursement will be provided. There is no assurance of a safety net for these people who would then like to partake in the support that the NAC rolls out. For this reason alone, the “working together, emerging stronger” has flaws. When the feedback provided has become something of great blockage and the ground has the sentiment that communication is just one-way and not two, then we will feel lost. There is a great sense of being lost currently on the ground. If not for the solidarity that is coming from ground-up initiatives, there will be a great sense of disarray. If not for groups started by people like Nicholas Chee and Terence Tan, who just happen to be here and therefore I am naming them, there would not be an ability to move forward. If not for the support that fellow arts groups are giving each other by sharing resources, they would not be able to move ahead with the digitalisation of their work.

Now I will come to the second initiative, which is the “Digital Presentation Grant for the Arts” (DPG)⁸ rolled out by the NAC. It goes back to the issue of product versus process, and I think this a longstanding debate and communication issue between creatives and the administrative sector represented by the organisation. The digitalisation process is not something that can be switched on overnight. There is a process to learn for the arts groups and creatives in general. One of the good models which is already in existence is the “Creation Grant” (formerly known as the “Arts Creation Fund”). I welcomed it when the NAC rolled it out some years back. I think in 2013; I was one of the few artists who applied for it. In the “Creation Grant”, we can look at it as a laboratory of experimenting and working with the process of creating a new form. However, the “Digital Presentation Grant for the Arts” (DPG) looked at the digital products, the digital form, and the digital media during the COVID-19 period. Now this in itself is an issue because such an initiative seemed to be a stop-guard measure for this period of time. But surprisingly and ironically, the words used in this framework are “capacity” and

⁸ The Digital Presentation Grant for the Arts (DPG) was a time-limited scheme that was launched on 14 April 2020 to support efforts by artists and arts organisations to present their work in digital format via digital mediums during the COVID-19 period. It is no longer available at the time of this publication.

“development”. How then do such grants deepen the work for the future beyond COVID-19? I think these short-term measures are well and good for the first month, but I feel that we have to consider the path for having more longer-term measures. This is because the DPG mainly looked at how materials are hired and rented. However, this does not increase the capacity of the artists or groups of creatives working with digitalisation. Being digital goes beyond the material. It goes into the thinking and capacity to create means as a development of experimentation. Rental of equipment costs far too much and perhaps we have to increase the capacity within these groups that want to move forward and forge ahead beyond COVID-19.

We cannot just think as an organisation, as a community, or as an ecosystem for just the next four months ahead. Instead, we need to start thinking for the entire year ahead. This is because, as shown in the reports by the World Health Organisation, the pandemic will not cease soon. There are also reports that there is now an outbreak of a bubonic plague in China. So, there is a resulting medical condition during this period of time, which may last for a few years. About 100 years ago, there was the Spanish flu, which stayed for a very long time.

So, I seek an understanding through these questions. How can the element of care be included in policymaking? How can you support us with care? If the framework of such support is still hinging upon product, then we are in a limited scope of development because everything goes back to the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). This is not sustainable for moving ahead and moving forward to “sustain” and “survive”. These are words that came out from the NAC’s presentation earlier. I have a lot more to say but the time for my presentation is over. I hope that we can continue having this conversation during the discussion segment because I would really like to come back to the last slide of the NAC’s presentation on “working together” and “emerging stronger”. How does that dialogue reverberate and get implemented on the ground? How can we see actual changes, actual collaboration, and actual working together between the administrative and creatives? Thank you, everybody.

Speaker 5: Ng Joon Kiat, Visual Artist (Joint Presentation)

Good morning to Ms Rosa, her team, friends in the arts, and the audience. I would like to thank Tarn How for having me on this roundtable. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the NAC for letting visual artists return to their studios in Phase Two.

For this presentation, I will quickly give a sense of my situation and then get to my points after which I will pass the time to Mr Billy Soh. I was scheduled to travel when COVID-19 happened. I work alone most of the time. I jump into this matter on how visual artists were not allowed to operate in Phase One. We do not have a strong representation. Therefore, I gathered a small group of visual artists in the hope that we can raise some of our concerns. The NAC had kindly reached out to us. The visual arts team from the NAC and my side started working on sampling case studies for visual artists who wanted to go back to work. Mr Billy Soh and Ms Jennifer Teo kindly helped to collate, organise, and offer lots of support, while Mr Terence Tan, who is also one of the speakers for this roundtable, together with many others, generously helped to provide advice due to my lack of experience in mediating between artists and the government. I thank all of you for this *kampung* spirit. Today, my sharing is just based on this experience. I do not represent everyone in the visual arts. I represent myself in this profession with some experience.

The first point I would like to suggest on how the government can help artists is to create a SSIC code for visual arts creation. There is a similar code in the United Kingdom called the Standard Industrial Classification of Economic Activities (SIC) code — artistic creation under 90030. I believe this will help the government to understand what artists really do in general. When all visual artists were not allowed to resume work during Phase One and the national directive specifically mentioned visual artist studios and galleries as part of the restrictions, I could not help but wonder if the government had mistakenly thought that visual artists' studios operate like retail businesses. How do visual artists who work alone in studios constitute as a high-infection risk? Even for visual artists who share studios, they can take turns to go back to their studios. Therefore, having a SSIC code for artistic creation at this time can help artists with studios to set up a company for contact-tracing purposes and help to let the government identify and understand us better. We are not invisible.

The second point is that the COVID-19 assistance funds for visual artists need more diverse reach. Presently, the assistance grants for visual artists during this period give priority to already supported educators under the Arts Education Programme (AEP) and artists who are already on government arts platforms. But the vibrancy of the art scene is also shared with visual artists who do not operate within this parameter. In fact, private art spaces and initiatives meet the need for critical experimentations and artistic risks.

The third point is to enable rather than tell visual artists how and what to create. It is important to say that arts policy in Singapore is heavily centralised and it can develop the tendency to control artistic creation among other things. Further to this difficult situation, when introducing digitalisation, it is important to still remember material-based practices, which reflect human's innate needs for touch, feel and make. Also, for older visual artists, their non-digital art practices of their generation have made crucial contributions to Singapore, and we must not forget them. Frankly, no one is sure which of the current art practices will make its mark in a few hundred years' time. So, I hope we leave some room for enabling and not interfering with art practices.

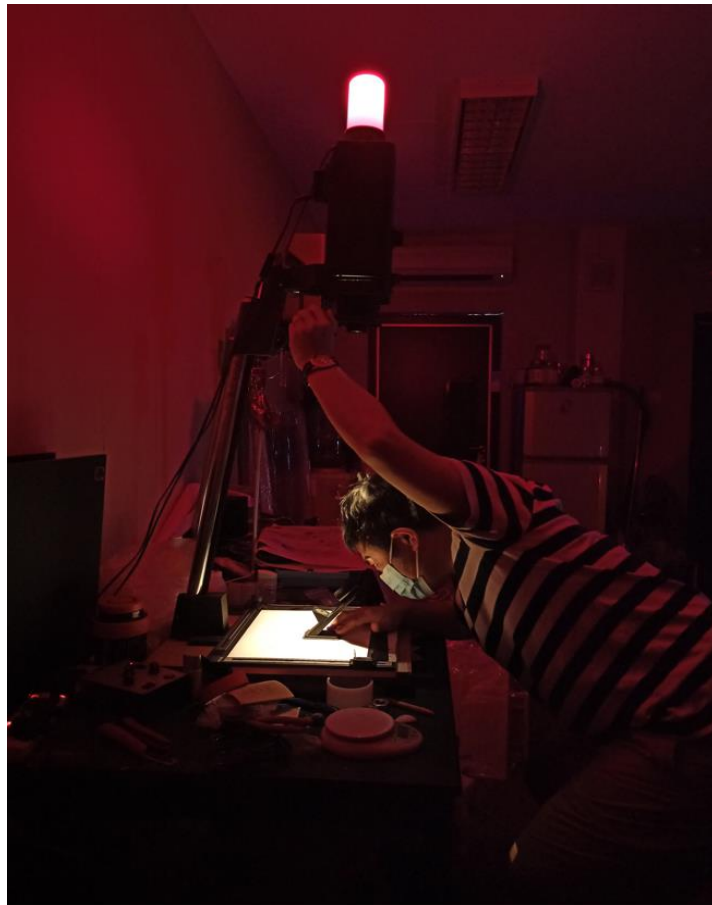
For the last point, if Singapore reverts to Phase One, we must look at the feasibility of letting some visual artists go back to their studios for work. In my own findings through writing case studies, I realised that visual artists not only make art in studio, but some also do other jobs like designing, preparing for art classes, and working on commissions to supplement income. So, when they are not allowed back, we are potentially looking at two to three sources of income being lost. This is a very painful hit. Also, I noted that many visual artists want to cooperate and work within the safety measure perimeter set out by the government. I will now pass the time to Mr Billy Soh who will speak more on this matter. Thank you.



Searching for the arts – a bridge to nowhere, barriers, construction site, state of things as such. Photo courtesy of Mr Ng Joon Kiat.

Speaker 6: Billy Soh, Multidisciplinary Artist (Joint Presentation)

Hi, everyone. Thank you for having me. Thank you to the NAC for opening the studios again. I am certainly glad to be back here again. I will give a brief introduction of what I do. I am a part-time educator at Very Special Arts. I am also a darkroom practitioner, so I need a very specific kind of working environment. During the circuit breaker I was not able to do anything, and even when it opened up to Phase One, I was not able to return until Phase Two. I am very glad that Phase Two began two odd weeks after Phase One. Thank you to the NAC and Arts House Limited (AHL) for taking care of us. I want to talk about what can be done if Phase One or if the circuit breaker comes back. For me, working in the studio is very important. I will speak for myself first but of course, there are some people whom I know personally who are very keen to take on the responsibility of having a safe workplace for themselves.



Depiction of a darkroom working environment. Photo courtesy of Mr Billy Soh.

However, for some of them, I know that they do not have the SafeEntry application that will allow them to check in and check out when they enter or leave their workspaces. In the event of a return to Phase One, could there be a possibility of allowing these groups to come back to their studios for work through a card access or something? This is because I am aware that the Goodman Arts Centre (GAC) has a side-gate shut off time at 7pm. Of course, we could exit after 7pm.

So now the practices that I have implemented for myself here are having a water management and waste management system. My studio is currently only being accessed by myself. Of course, I would like to open this space back to the other two to three people who also use the facilities over here. So, I would be very, very happy to work with the NAC to come up with guidelines and suggestions.

Also, another point is that I am very worried about what will happen if we were to go back to Phase One where schools and workplaces would be closed. I wonder whether we would be able to come back to get our work done as it is quite difficult for me to work at home as there are currently six people, including myself, living with me. So, the workplace is a very important and actually a reasonably safe space to work, to get all the basic things done and generate income. I will end here and pass the time back to the moderator. Thank you.

Speaker 7: Angela Liong, Artistic Director, The Arts Fission Company Ltd

Good morning, everybody. Thank you very much for having me. I am going to cut to the chase. From listening to all the other speakers so far, I think it is very clear that when it comes to practising the arts, diverse scenarios and exceptions are actually the norm. In that sense, each group — whether you are independent artist, part of a collective or a company — has a slightly different challenge to overcome. Particularly, I think that during this COVID-19 crisis, it really floored us, and I am constantly being reminded of how fragile our practising arts environment really is. This is because a lot of these problems — such as with space, expectations of the general public, funds, audience development, and perceptions of the arts — are really things that we have been carrying all along in our practice. I am going to come back to talk about the diverse scenarios and exceptions. I am also going to be quite selfish and talk about dance specifically. My idea is that by sharing a very specific and almost personal experience, it could help to throw a contrasting light on the very macro picture that we got from the earlier presentation by Rosa and the other speakers. So, I am going to focus on a very specific experience here.

When it comes to certain kinds of practices and industries, I understand that no relief scheme can provide a complete and comprehensive assistance for all. But it is important to highlight that for some industries, certain prior conditions have to be put in place first before we are able to resume work. In this instance, of course, I am talking about dance and in a way, also sports. For example, you can imagine that without a swimming pool, you cannot benchmark a swimmer's skills and speed. Likewise, for dancers like us, space is such an integral element because it enables human touch and interactions to take place. So, suddenly, under the new safety measures, everything that we do now becomes non-compliant and that is very difficult. Even though we are allowed to go back to work, and like what Noorlinah had pointed out earlier in her presentation, working is different from actually generating income on a specific project. So, in this case, if we are not able to really maximise the practice, then there is only so much I can do to tell the dancers to stay at home and provide them with creative ideas to explore and experiment with. However, it is ultimately important to come back and reclaim — if we can say that — the shared spaces so that we can maximise the practice of what we are trained for.

I am now going to share some slides with you. I do not have much text on the slides as I want to give you some eye relief. But I do have some words to highlight how space is important to dance practitioners and, in this case, I will be referring to the safe-distancing measures. The first picture [slide four of presentation deck] shows you how the physical space is important for dancers in close range. The second picture [slide five of presentation deck] is based on a very important community programme, which involved visiting the elderly in different homes and senior activity centres. We also work with children in many other outreach programmes as seen from these pictures [slide six and slide seven of presentation deck]. Such outreach programmes bring in important revenue for us to sustain our professional operations and practices. So then,

in the case of the pandemic, as the elderly and children are identified as being vulnerable to the spread of the virus, it means that we are unable to continue or proceed with our activities even if we are ready. You can see from these slides that because our creative arts practice involves close-range interactions, the physical intimate space becomes a very, very important issue for us.



A group of dancers from The Arts Fission Company Ltd during a performance item. Picture courtesy of The Arts Fission Company Ltd.

In the final slide [slide eight], you can see a dancer literally standing at the edge of a rooftop and this image very much sums up our feelings right now — being isolated, at the end, not ready to jump but still really, really pressed and pushed to the brink.

Here, in relation to the schemes by the NAC, I wish to say that all relief schemes are designed to help us. However, they are not standalone entities. I am now going to share my company's experience in trying to utilise the "Digital Presentation Grant for the Arts" (DPG).⁹ In this case, I think that it is great to lay out a grant scheme; but on the other hand, right now, we are coming into many key technical problems and hurdles. This is because there is a difference between digitalisation and going into film production. Therefore, what we want to do in this moment is to explore the film medium first and address the digital component. Of course, now we can have a working team with five or fewer crew members. However, in order not to compromise the creative element in

⁹ The Digital Presentation Grant for the Arts (DPG) was a time-limited scheme that was launched on 14 April 2020 to support efforts by artists and arts organisations to present their work in digital format via digital mediums during the COVID-19 period. It is no longer available at the time of this publication.

my practice, I need at least a minimum of 13 crew members, inclusive of performers and production members. Otherwise, it will be a very different thing. I know right now we may sound like we just want to break all the existing rules and ask for all the exceptions. However, I did mention at the start that exceptions and diverse scenarios are the norm for us. We are all doing different things and therefore you cannot have a “one-size-fits-all policy”. You are going to have a very boring arts ecology here, if so.

Coming back to my point, up till now we have been very fortunate as we were awarded the grant. But the thing is that right now we are scratching our heads trying to find out if we can have more than five performers in a space. We then need to ask for exemptions, and this is the catch in here. Everything is so new. We have problems trying to find out where this so-called exemption department or division is. We have no idea whether it is under the NAC, the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY), or another ministry. So, when we went online to check this out, we could not even proceed with a single application. We tried to contact our sector manager, and even she was at a loss, due to no fault on her own, on how she could enable us to have that connection. Therefore, what I am saying is I think that setting up a grant or help scheme is one thing — but there is also a need, especially in this extraordinary time of crisis to lay out the roadmap a bit more than the usual. In the past, you can set up a scheme or grant and say, “You guys can use this and do something with it.” However, at this moment, we are really crippled. Although, we have gotten the grant, we are not able to return to work or proceed with our projects.

I think during such a period of crisis, timing is extremely important. If we lose the timing, a lot of the creative intensity will be gone into thin air. So, in that sense I think for any help, assistance or relief schemes, policymakers should find out from practitioners themselves in order to develop more viable roadmaps and routes for us to go through. Whether we can get through the exemption is a different story. I am not saying that we should flaunt the safety measures. What I am trying to say is that all of these measures are being done according to a certain kind of development. This is why we have Phase One, Phase Two, and so forth. As I mentioned earlier, no policy can be entirely comprehensive to address all the issues. But we do need that one individual platform where we can go to, and in a sense if it is an official body, it would really help to alleviate unnecessary stress that we face. It would be greatly appreciated if arts practitioners could have that one individual or one platform to point them to the direction that they need to meet their needs.

Again, for some of us, everything that is being practised is very organic and integrated. Therefore, if I face a delay from one area, it will cause a domino effect. Timing is of essence here.

There is also another grant called the “Capability Development Scheme for Arts” (CDSA).¹⁰ Again, it was implemented with good intentions. However, we need to also look back on this. For some art practices that require many years of devoted training, it is important to have continuous technical maintenance. This could be for all arts

¹⁰ The Capability Development Scheme for the Arts (CDSA) was a time-limited scheme that was launched on 16 March 2020 to help arts self-employed persons and employees of arts organisations to upskill and grow their capabilities through training programmes that take place in Singapore. It is no longer available at the time of this publication.

practitioners but especially so for dancers who are not given the permission and flexibility to practise and use the physical space. We then cannot do our physical training and at the same time, it is not exactly relevant to ask us to take the so-called “down time” to go for online courses to seek other training. Again, I am sure that you would have heard the old saying, “If a pianist does not practise one day, he knows it; two days, the critics know it; three days, the public knows it.” Therefore, without breaking any safety measures or rules, I am asking if there could be specific attention to look into ways in which arts practitioners can present their predicament to policymakers such as through a dialogue and see what are the ways they can maximise the different situations and allow them to practise, and very importantly, maintain their art in top form. This is because by the time everything subsides and if the body and technical prowess are not ready, it would jeopardise our craft and entire art. So, in that sense, when we talk about “down time” and improving ourselves by taking courses, I think that for the performing artists, there is only one upgrade. It is to focus solely on your own discipline’s practice. This does not mean that your discipline should take over your whole life. But for the majority of your working and training times, physical practice should become a very important component that will enable you to sustain, protect and guard your artistic livelihood. Thank you.

Discussion

Key priorities for the NAC

Pointing out to the possibility that the pandemic will continue for a few more months or even years, a participant asked about the NAC's long-term policies, in particular its strategy to ensure that the arts sector is equipped with the necessary resources to sustain itself.

Mrs Rosa Daniel responded that the current "Our SG Arts Plan" has already rolled out the strategic roadmap for the arts sector from 2018 to 2022. She said that the three key objectives such as sustaining livelihoods through retraining and upskilling; ensuring sustainability by optimising resources and diversifying income; and promoting innovation by harnessing on science and technology are still relevant for the present moment and will continue to be so for the future. She also added that the NAC would continue to look at developing long-term measures to transform the arts sector and ensure that it is well equipped to handle future challenges. She also reminded participants about the "Arts and Culture Strategic Review" (ACSR) launched in 2010, which outlined the roadmap for the arts sector till 2025. She said that although the NAC has been introducing various measures in the current period to help cushion the impact of the pandemic, it has and will continue to plan for the future as well.

Advocating for the arts

Mrs Daniel agreed with Mr Terence Tan's point in his earlier presentation that the NAC must be a stronger advocate for the arts. As a statutory board, the NAC has always strived to champion for the arts sector, she said. Over the years, it has been actively involved in advocating to a myriad of stakeholders such as the different government bodies, the corporate sector as well as various funding sources like the Tote Board. For example, she said that recently, the NAC worked closely together with 33 arts groups and successfully raised over S\$140,000 through the giving.sg portal. Mrs Daniel said that this was a very encouraging step for the NAC, and that it would continue to look for more ways to tap on funds and resources from key stakeholders. She said that apart from putting forth a cause that resonates with people, advocacy work also involves carrying out robust research such as the ["2019 Population Survey on the Arts"](#) which showed that many Singaporeans actually value the arts sector greatly. On top of this, Mrs Daniel also said that the NAC works very closely with the media by having regular interactions and meetings. This is to ensure that it presents a right narrative of the arts sector, its value, and developments to the public. She reiterated Mr Terence Tan's earlier point in his presentation that members of the arts community need to also build stronger community support as they move towards recovery in the post-pandemic period.

Strengthening communication links between artists and policymakers

On Mr Nicholas Chee's point in his earlier presentation on having a more structured and organised administration for the arts, Mrs Daniel pointed out that until 2012, the Media, Arts, Design and Entertainment (i.e., M.A.D.E.) sectors were effectively under

the care of the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA). While there was a closer nexus between design, library sciences, film, media and the arts then, the shift to the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) has created new opportunities in engaging youths and working with community organisations to build social capital.

On Dr Noorlinah Mohamed's call for stronger communication links between the arts community and policymakers, Mrs Daniel agreed that this is something policymakers can work on. She explained that when the different policies were first announced, the NAC's key focus was on putting out information on the support measures in a way that could provide artists with an overview of all the help that was available. The safe management measures (SMMs) had to be as consistent and robust as possible. Therefore, it was difficult to design customised SMMs for the different arts disciplines. Mrs Daniel said the NAC would always be receptive towards receiving suggestions from the arts community and having more face-to-face engagements in order to move ahead. Participants were encouraged to actively share their inputs on any issues such as the SMMs, relief schemes or policy measures, which the NAC would carefully review and present to the government when applicable.

Expanding digital capabilities

On the topic of developing stronger capabilities, a participant observed that digital capabilities tend to be unevenly spread across different arts groups. Moreover, digitalisation often requires specialised skills and resources, which can be expensive for some. In line with this, the participant asked the NAC about some of the possible ways to address this problem.

Mrs Daniel said that the NAC recognises the gaps in digital capabilities and resources across the arts sector. As such, one of the key priorities articulated in the "Our SG Arts Plan" (2018–2022) is to support technology and innovation for art-making and outreach efforts. Digitalisation is a long journey that requires the arts community's commitment as artists incorporate digital technology to reimagine art practices. The NAC's grant schemes for research, creation, production, and presentation will include strong support for these upcoming digitalisation efforts. She also added that the regular commissions and festival platforms would provide additional opportunities for artists and arts companies to present new digital projects. In working with the other cultural institutions such as the Esplanade and the National Gallery Singapore (NGS), she said that the NAC also seeks to support innovative approaches for different art forms and audience segments.

To respond to the COVID-19 situation, special time-limited schemes were also introduced to fast-track grant support for digitalisation and capability development as part of the "Arts and Culture Resilience Package" (ACRP). For example, the "Digital Presentation Grant for the Arts" (DPG) was launched to support efforts by artists and arts organisations to present their work in digital form or via digital mediums. Artists and arts companies were encouraged to tap the DPG to cover additional costs for example, for the leasing of hardware and software, and hiring of relevant technical services required to carry out their projects. The "Capability Development Scheme for the Arts" (CDSA) was also created to help artists and arts companies to grow new capabilities

and to present quality works and programmes that engage audiences amid the virtual world.¹¹

Buying and maintaining good quality equipment can be costly, as are the structural modifications needed to fit spaces. The NAC will undertake long-term investment and maintenance to upgrade arts spaces and make these spaces available at affordable rates for the arts community. Given the potential prohibitive costs for arts groups to run and maintain spaces, the NAC will also consolidate sub-optimal and ageing arts spaces to focus on developing shared facilities to benefit more artists and groups.

Establishing more formal collaborations between the NAC and the television and film industry

A participant also asked if there could be more formal collaboration between the NAC and television and film producers to collaborate and support one another through avenues like joint grants. Mrs Daniel said that through the Digitalisation Fund, the NAC has been working with media channels such as Mediacorp to push out suitable free-to-watch arts and culture content, and national broadsheets to bring the arts to Singaporeans during the peak of COVID-19. Arts practitioners should take the opportunity to apply for other agencies' grants if they are eligible, as this will enlarge possible government support for their work.

Establishing an inter-sector/agency taskforce for stranded groups

A participant observed that there were artists who did commercial or entertainment-related work and hence did not fall under the purview of the NAC. He asked if it would be useful to form an inter-sector or inter-agency taskforce to help such artists whose work straddle between different art forms.

Mr Nicholas Chee agreed with the participant's observation and said that photographers and musicians usually face this problem of not knowing where they belonged. He said that often, photographers and musicians needed to engage in commercial or entertainment-related work, as they could not always practise their art. As a result, they are left stranded without a "parent" to guide them in times of difficulty. He said that the NAC, the Arts Resource Hub, and other relevant agencies have done a commendable job trying to accommodate such groups by being open to questions and providing the necessary guidance to them. He also talked about how other agencies like the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) has worked very closely with the Professional Photographers Association (PPA) to design suitable assistance schemes to help photographers during this period. He said it is a good time now to start some form of an inter-sector or inter-agency task force for such sub-sectors that fall "neither here nor there" under the NAC's purview. Mr Terence Tan also added that dance groups too face this problem of "being stranded without a "parent" and they should also be taken into consideration during such discussions. Referring to the point on setting up an inter-sector or inter-agency task force for such groups, he said that apart from the more "obvious" statutory boards like the NAC, others like the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and Ministry of Education (MOE) should also be involved in this process as the arts is a holistic sector.

¹¹ The applications for both the DPG and CDSA have closed; more details on the latest ACRP measures can be found at <https://www.nac.gov.sg/whatwedo/support/sustaining-the-arts-during-covid-19/acrp.html>.

Responding to this, Mrs Daniel said that there was no perfect configuration that could capture the diversity of the complex creative sector. Hence, she agreed that there was a need for platforms and channels to have robust discussions across agencies to ensure the work was aligned. She said that the NAC has stepped up to serve the larger creative industry's needs during COVID-19 and is in touch with Design Singapore (Dsg), Economic Development Board (EDB), Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and Infocomm Media Development. However, she said that the idea of setting up a taskforce may not be suitable during this period. Presently, agencies have been working closely together where possible, and policymakers will continue to engage with the arts community and other key stakeholders to explore new cross-sector solutions, including championing best practices for the engagement of freelancers and IP protection, she said.

Moving towards self-organised models and unionisation

On encouraging more advocacy and professionalism in the arts, a participant asked if having more self-organised models for collective actions such as a professional association, or even a step towards unionisation, would be a feasible strategy.

Mr Ng Joon Kiat agreed that having a professional body can help artists raise their concerns to the government more easily although he felt that not all artists might be keen on this as some might prefer to work alone. He said that there is the possibility of having some form of a unionisation if more shared concerns are raised by members of the arts community. This will help practitioners in many ways like raising the bar for artists and shaping future grants. However, he added that it is important that the NAC still continues to maintain customised channels for visual artists. This is because the visual arts often train artists to push through boundaries and look towards individualism, so reacting against a formalised group is common. Voices of minority artists are as important because the visual arts as a discipline puts a strong focus on exceptionalism.

He added that another important area would be how the government shapes a financial support policy for such a unified arts association. He said that the number of uncertainties for arts companies relying on the existing grant system in the last few years was quite discouraging. The arts sector might need the government to create a more stable financial support policy if such an association is eventually created, for all the arts companies. Informal advocacy groups for professionalism are still needed for many reasons, such as catering to the needs of new initiatives of artists and checking on such an association.

Continuing with international collaborations

A participant asked about the NAC's support for current and future international projects and collaborations involving Singapore artists. Mrs Daniel said international collaborations are extremely important for the local arts scene. However, the pandemic has made it difficult for artists and arts companies to travel overseas and participate in arts festivals and take up residencies. She assured that the NAC would continue to explore new possibilities, especially within the virtual realms, to tackle this. Apart from the NAC, she said that there were many other cultural institutions such as the Esplanade and National Gallery Singapore (NGS) that had been actively reaching out to their international network to resume many of the work that had already been planned. Currently, some of them were being carried out in the form of webinars, blended

exhibitions, and virtual performances. Mrs Daniel added that the NAC would also be exploring regional green lane arrangements, especially with priority countries that will benefit our artists. In the meantime, she urged all participants to keep their conversations and discussions with their international counterparts alive and reflect on new ways to continue with their collaborations and partnerships.

Innovating and co-creating solutions

On the topic of creating more productive conversations, a participant expressed frustration with the timbre of many conversations reinforcing the binary between the state (NAC) and artists. The participant asked how conversations could be framed in a way that moves beyond the minutiae and consider the reconstruction of what artists value in the wake of the pandemic. Another participant raised a similar question of how the NAC imagined going about co-creating solutions. Adding to this, another participant raised the question of how the arts community and policymakers could better address the disconnect and gaps in processes, needs and expectations so that policies can be implemented more seamlessly and with greater positive effects.

Mrs Daniel said that the NAC believes there are many players in a strong arts ecosystem, each with a crucial but different role to play. The NAC, as a government agency, must champion and advocate for the arts in securing funding and resources for the sector. She agreed a binary was not a helpful construct — many in the arts community have collaborated with the NAC and some have even worked in the NAC before. Similarly, many in the NAC continue with their practice today, even if not at a professional level. In these difficult times, the NAC's priority is to sustain and protect the livelihoods of artists and arts companies, to create work and income while defraying operational costs and attract more donations and sponsorships from corporates. She added that she hoped this challenging period would be an opportunity for the NAC and the arts community to work closely together, in framing and designing support measures. The NAC also seeks to leverage more technology companies and partner agencies in Singapore, to support artists and arts companies for the long term. Together with the cultural institutions, she said many key arts companies are well placed to be early adopters in piloting new approaches which can be deployed widely or scaled up if they are successful.

Since March 2020, the NAC has been regularly engaging close to 600 artists and arts companies to provide an open channel for feedback as the first step of working together. Engagement is a journey, and it is important to recognise that the community is large; and there are many more, especially the younger practitioners, that it needs to engage. The Arts Resource Hub also collaborates with artists where practitioners are invited to host live-stream sessions for their peers on relevant topics.

She added that an important stakeholder in the arts ecosystem is the audience. As seen in the latest results from the 2019 Population Survey on the Arts, more Singaporeans were found to appreciate the value of arts and culture and recognise how it improves the quality of life and our sense of identity. More work remains for the NAC to increase the level of interest in the arts among Singaporeans, but it cannot do this alone and wants to work with our diverse artists and arts groups to achieve this.

Responding to the question on co-creating solutions, Mr Nicholas Chee highlighted that there were many artists such as Mr Terence Tan who have been conducting research

and collecting data on how their respective sectors could move forward in the future. He suggested having some form of a grant that can be awarded to such artists who are independently trying to create solutions for the arts sector as a whole. He also emphasised that the efforts of such artists need to be recognised and they should be encouraged further to do more development research. Mr Terence Tan continued this discussion on co-creating solutions by calling for the NAC and policymakers to directly engage in conversations and consultations with artists and arts groups when designing future policies or assistance schemes. This is to ensure that they remain relevant to the people who are working on the ground.

Dr Noorlinah Mohamed added to this by emphasising that it is important for the arts community to start preparing for the future as well. Although it is important to talk about the ways in which the arts community can overcome present challenges, she noted that there were already many policies and assistance schemes put in place. It is time for the community to think about the next three to five years in terms of the type of working relationships they want to have as well as the types of assistance they wish to receive. She also stressed that such conversations had to include more artists and groups from different sectors within the arts, as well as administrators who are assigned to take care of their needs. Having these two groups present together is extremely important so that they can better understand the needs of one another. She also urged artists and arts groups to start initiating these conversations through avenues like townhall meetings, rather than waiting for the NAC to take the lead.

Ms Angela Liong agreed with creating more ground-up and organic conversations that include artists from various sectors so that not only policymakers but also artists themselves can understand the different needs of their community. She said that this would create a stronger foundation of solidarity and cooperation in the community.

Extending support schemes for more groups

Referring to Mrs Daniel's earlier presentation stating that about 140 artists and arts groups have benefitted from the training funds that have been rolled out so far, a participant asked about how the NAC planned to expand such funds so that the take-up numbers can be further improved.

Mrs Daniel said that while the take-up numbers of the "Capability Development Scheme for the Arts" (CDSA) could be better, the NAC understands the pressing need to sustain existing operations while adapting to more immediate demands. Regardless, it remains important for the NAC to help develop diverse capabilities in the arts sector given the challenging times ahead and the changes in the cultural landscape. She said that the NAC will commit to refining its regular grant schemes to better support artists in their training needs.¹²

Assisting intermediaries beyond nationalised institutions

Dr Noorlinah Mohamed said much of the existing funds and support were given to nationalised institutions such as the Esplanade and The Arts House (AHL) which made it easier for them to cope with the difficult situation as compared with other

¹² To enable more practitioners to tap the time-limited schemes, the application period for CDSA and DPG was extended to 14 September 2020, with the completion date for both schemes extended to 31 March 2021.

intermediaries that did not fall within the purview of the nationalised institutions. She said that intermediaries and arts organisations that fell beyond the list of state-supported organisations were required to pay for rent when rehearsing in places like the Goodman Arts Centre (GAC). She asked if any policies or support schemes could be put in place to assist such groups for the next six to eight months. While she acknowledged that there was the “Digital Presentation Grant for the Arts” (DPG) available, she noted that it was capped at S\$20,000 which might be insufficient for such groups to tide through.

Mrs Daniel explained that when the NAC was first rolling out its different policies, it was trying to experiment with what would work best for the different arts groups. Now that the existing policies are proving to be effective and useful, she assured that the NAC would look into extending its assistance schemes and even reviewing the quantum if necessary.

On the topic of spaces for artists and arts groups to use, Mrs Daniel shared that there was a whole range of spaces to support arts causes under the purview of different cultural institutions. This makes it easy to provide concessions such as lowering rental rates quickly when needed. She also added that there were existing policies such as the venue hire subsidy that artists and arts groups could tap to support their work as the pandemic situation starts improving.

Making arts spaces inclusive and accessible

Drawing on Ms Angela Liong’s presentation, a participant reiterated that the physical space was important for certain art forms like dance. The participant talked about how some dance groups have differently-abled members in their team. She said that the present limitations on the number of artists allowed in a physical space made things very difficult for such groups that have diverse members.

In response, Mrs Daniel agreed that the present limitations have created many challenges for such groups. However, she said artists needed to continue exploring ways to ensure that their practices remain inclusive and accessible to both performers and audiences. She encouraged artists to have practices such as having surtitling, close-captioning and sign language services so that they can cater to a wide range of audiences with different needs.

She also added that the Arts and Disability Forum held in October 2020 co-organised by the NAC and Very Special Arts (VSA) Singapore, also offered networking and capability development opportunities for artists within the field of arts and disability.

Role of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Some participants discussed the topic of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and asked if the NAC would be making any revisions to the output expectations for current and future grant recipients. In light of the difficult circumstances brought about by the pandemic, they also asked what were the KPIs that would be most relevant to the arts community at the present moment.

In response, Mrs Daniel said that the NAC has been working with all grant recipients across the general grant schemes and the Major Company and Seed Grant (MCSG) schemes since the onset of the pandemic — to take a customised approach in setting realistic KPIs. For example, general grant recipients have been allowed to make adjustments to their project scopes and completion timelines because COVID-19 affected the original plans. The NAC has also reassured MCSG companies that the KPIs will be relooked at the mid-year reporting mark in October 2020, while proceeding with the first disbursement of funding. This amounts to 80 per cent of the year's MCSG funding to tide them through this period. Since the introduction of the three tracks for Major Companies — Artmaking, Bridging and Intermediary — in FY2017, companies have been working with the NAC to craft customised KPIs in line with their core mission and aspirations. Doing away with multiple KPIs, it has sought to identify and narrow down meaningful targets relevant to areas of practice. Companies that focus on producing new, original works will be different to those that present arts education programmes. In light of the COVID-19 situation, the NAC encourages companies to look at different ways of engaging audiences through technology and digital means, as well as leveraging research and analytics to better understand audiences' changing consumption patterns.

Mrs Daniel also added that the NAC was aware the pandemic severely affected the ability of companies to meet their contractual obligations on KPIs. Therefore, it would assess each situation on a case-by-case basis according to the individual company's revised plans. She also said that the NAC believes there are alternate ways of evaluating the success of a project or a company's performance, and the need to take a holistic view considering the pandemic and economic downturn.

COVID-19 Guidelines

Referring to Ms Angela Liong's presentation on the current limit of five people gathering in a space, a participant asked if the NAC could revise the blanket rule for varying space size and differentiate indoor and outdoor spaces, especially for the space in the Goodman Arts Centre. Another participant also suggested that the NAC guidelines should differentiate between artists according to their needs and nature of work if Singapore returns to the first phase of the circuit breaker measures.

Mrs Daniel replied that in line with Ministry of Health's advisories, live performances are not permitted as large gatherings of people for a prolonged period of time increases the risk of transmission of the virus. All indoor and outdoor performance venues (e.g., theatres, concert halls, black boxes) therefore have to remain closed temporarily. She assured that the NAC would continue to provide guidance on safe management measures with the progressive resumption of other activities for arts and culture companies and practitioners in Phase Two. Moreover, it will continue to look for ways to support art-making, cultivation of audiences, and the professional upgrading of the arts community.¹³

¹³ For more information on the latest safe management measures for arts and culture stakeholders visit <https://www.nac.gov.sg/whatwedo/support/sustaining-the-arts-during-covid-19/Safe-Management-Measures-for-the-Arts-and-Culture-Sector.html>

About the Speakers

Nicholas CHEE is an award-winning film producer and photographer, as well as a consultant for film and media projects. In 2007, he co-founded Singapore's first independent community theatre Sinema Old School.

Mr Chee was an honouree in the prestigious Spirit of Enterprise Awards in 2009. In 2011, he started The Flying Kick Asia, an original and branded content production company with offices in Singapore, Kaohsiung, and Seoul.

In 2015, Mr Chee created *SCAPE's National Youth Film Awards and served as its Awards Director until 2018. He is currently the Festival Co-Director of the SeaShorts Film Festival.

Rosa DANIEL is the Deputy Secretary (Culture) in the Singapore Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, and the Chief Executive Officer of the National Arts Council. She was Chief Executive of the National Heritage Board from February 2013 to May 2017. Prior to joining the culture sector, Mrs Daniel held other senior appointments in the economic and social sectors.

KOK Heng Leun is a prominent figure in the Singapore arts scene, having built his artistic career as a theatre director, playwright, dramaturg, and educator. He is known for engaging the community on various issues through the arts, championing civic discourse across different segments of society.

Having begun his work in the theatre almost 30 years ago, some notable directorial works include *Drift*, *Trick or Threat*, *Manifesto*, and *Underclass*. His explorations with multi-disciplinary engaged arts have produced works like *Project Mending Sky* (2008, 2009 and 2012), a series on environmental issues; *Both Sides, Now* (2013, 2014 and 2017–2019), a project that seeks to normalise end-of-life conversations; and *It Won't Be Too Long*, which touched on the dynamics of space in Singapore. His most recent work *Tanah•Air 水•土: A Play In Two Parts* was about the dispossession of the indigenous Malays and Orang Seletar of Singapore.

His contributions to the arts have landed him awards from the Singapore National Arts Council — the Young Artist Award in 2000 and Cultural Fellowship in 2014. He also served as a Nominated Member of Parliament from 2016 to 2018, representing the arts sector.

Angela LIONG is a prolific dance-maker with a large body of work that has shaped the distinctive dance profile of Arts Fission since the company's inception in 1994. She often draws inspiration from literary classics and cultural sources for her dance works. She borrows form and methodology from other disciplines to create choreographic structures that engage with human expressions.

Referred by the *Arts Magazine* as "Singapore's shaman of dance" (Mar–Apr 1999 issue), Ms Liong has created many performances for unconventional public spaces in order to solicit place memory from the urban public through dance experience. Her dance works for Arts Fission have been presented regionally and internationally since the mid-2000s. The 1998 Southeast Asia haze crisis piqued Ms Liong's interest on the topical research of environmental changes that affect humanity from the perspective of arts and culture. She initiated in 2006 *Project LOCUST WRATH* — a climate change inspired performance series where together with her dancers, she embarks on annual cultural expedition to regional climate hot spots like Central Java. She attended arts, science and climate change conference all the way to Oslo, Norway and in 2008 was invited by Asia-Europe Foundation as advisor and facilitator in organising an exclusive workshop that involved a group of established artists and scientists from Europe and Asia. Ms Liong is the recipient of the 2009 Cultural Medallion and continues to create dance works with Arts Fission on diverse issues that affect life in Asia.

NG Joon Kiat started his art practice in the late 1990s and received a government scholarship to study in the United Kingdom. He taught art in tertiary institutions for about 10 years before becoming a full-time artist in 2012. He has had solo exhibitions in Singapore and Hong Kong. These included exhibitions at the National Museum of Singapore in 2007 and at the National Technology University's School of Art Design and Media Gallery in 2019.

He was one of 25 Asian artists selected to exhibit with Britain's Royal Academicians at Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore. His works have been featured at international biennales and major art fairs. He has been collected by the Aspen-re collection, the Magma collection, the Singapore Embassy in Berlin, and the National Gallery of Singapore. His work has been curated by Dr Charles Merewether and Feng Boyi and written on by T.K. Sabapathy.

He has helped the National Arts Council with bursary and scholarship interviews. He believes in the professionalisation of mid-career visual artists and developing a sustainable industry that does not rely on the NAC grants.

NOORLINAH Mohamed is an award-winning actress of stage, television, and film. As an actress, she has worked in Singapore as well as Asia, Europe, and the United States.

She is also a teaching artist, and a consultant in arts pedagogy. She is Artistic Director of Not Ordinary Work (N.O.W.) from 2019 to 2021, presented by T:>Works. N.O.W. is an interdisciplinary festival focusing on women creators, thinkers, and change-makers, and the “not ordinary” work they do.

She was the Director of The O.P.E.N., the pre-festival of ideas and public engagement initiative of the Singapore International Festival of Arts (2014–2017). Dr Noorlinah is a recipient of the JCCI Cultural Award (2008) and the *Women’s Weekly* Women of Our Time Award (2005) for her contributions to the arts. She has a PhD in Arts Education from the University of Warwick and is a graduate of the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University (Performance Studies) and National University of Singapore (Political Science and Sociology).

Billy SOH is a multi-disciplinary artist with many different areas of practices that range from photography to paper-making, sound and installation art. Clicking away behind the camera since the tender age of 14, he has always held that the camera could capture more than what the eyes could see, and that the mind could conjure up more than what the camera could capture, and thus has been extensively experimenting with darkroom-based camera-less imaging. Mr Soh currently chairs the Singapore Contemporary Young Artists, and is also a co-founder of the *playitforwardsg* initiative that place-makes public spaces for music-making through public piano installations.

Eugene TAN is Director of the National Gallery Singapore and Singapore Art Museum. His previous appointments include Programme Director at the Economic Development Board, where he oversaw the development of Gillman Barracks, and Director of the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore. He received his PhD in Art History from the University of Manchester. He is a member of the Bizot Group and also serves on the Boards of International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art (CIMAM), the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp and the International Advisory Committee of the Mori Art Museum.

TAN Tarn How is Adjunct Senior Research Fellow in the Institute of Policy Studies. He researches on arts and cultural policy.

Terence TAN is an advocate for the arts in and for Singapore. He has produced a few Singapore comedy shows, several puppet theatre exchanges, an ASEAN puppet festival, and is a budding painter. Mr Tan also established the non-profit agency Artsolute to promote the arts for social development and has used arts for relief and therapeutic work in Singapore and the Southeast Asian region. He now spends time on

Pulau Ubin, learning to paint whilst advocating for the village's sustainability. He is also a member of the international puppetry association, UNIMA, that helps develop relief programmes for communities and artists needing aid. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, he started gathering the views and challenges of artists and other members of the creative industries, and is presently sharing his findings to our new candidates via SupportMADEinSG and the Stronger for All civil society collective.