

**Presentation by Mrs Rosa Daniel¹, Chief Executive Officer, National Arts Council
at IPS-SAM Spotlight on Cultural Policy Series Five: Roundtable on
Whither Arts Funding: Priorities, Values and Control
on Friday, 2 March 2018, 9am, Glass Hall, Singapore Art Museum**

Opening

Thank you for inviting me to join you at this Roundtable today. My Ministry's Parliamentary Secretary, Mr Baey Yam Keng, told me he enjoyed being a panellist at the last session on cultural leadership² and found the exchanges most useful. I was therefore happy to agree when Tarn How invited me to this session.

2 This morning, I am sharing a public sector perspective – from the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, or MCCY, in short, and NAC – on what we observe and our initial thinking about “Strategic Priorities for the Arts Sector (FY18-25)”. This has been done in consultation with our cultural institution partners and I've also had the opportunity to reach out to some in our arts community to validate assumptions and to seek views on whether or not we have correctly framed our preliminary thinking on where our priorities and challenges in the next five to eight years should be.

Arts Policy and Funding Directions

3 Let me start with a stock take of the arts over the last 50 years. Our cultural policies through the years have, to our minds, been shaped by the needs of Singaporeans as perceived at that time, the arts community, and aspirations of the government of the day.

4 In the 50s and 60s, the arts were seen as contributing to nation building. Then came the decades where the arts scene thrived with the growth of many independent arts groups, paving the way in 1989 when the Report of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts set out the arts and heritage blueprints. The Advisory Council set out recommendations on how the arts and heritage could move forward. In 1991 and 1993 respectively, two institutions, NAC and National Heritage Board (NHB) were set up and that signalled the government's commitment to deepen arts and heritage development. In the next couple of decades, the arts was also recognised for its value in enhancing Singapore's attractiveness as a global city and to profile ourselves internationally, while at the same time, our arts scene continued to grow in diversity and vibrancy.

5 2012 was a milestone when NAC was moved from then-MICA to come under a new Ministry – MCCY. The Arts and Culture Strategic Review (ACSR) was a game changer for the arts sector. It resulted in the injection of about \$300million to the culture sector. The Cultural Matching Fund (CMF) of \$200million was further introduced in 2013 in another strong signal of the significantly enhanced state funding for the arts. In 2016, government funding to the

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² Parliamentary Secretary Baey Yam Keng attended the IPS-SAM Spotlight on Cultural Policy Series Four: The Future of Cultural Leadership in Singapore on 27 October 2017.

arts and heritage sector amounted to about \$430 million³ in total, comprising both operating and developmental expenditure.

6 This funding for arts development through the ACSR and CMF has been in addition to infrastructural investments into the arts. Government committed about \$530 million towards the establishment of the National Gallery and about \$50 million towards the revamp of the National Museum and the Asian Civilisations Museum. These efforts have ensured the preservation of our cultural infrastructure, many of which are monuments and require careful maintenance.

7 In 2017, there were further announcements of infrastructural investments. In the coming years, the culture sector can look forward to several development projects such as the estimated \$90million refurbishment of the Singapore Art Museum (SAM), and \$30million development of Esplanade's waterfront theatre. The latter addresses a gap in the ecosystem, as there is a shortage of mid-sized venues.

8 How has the sustained funding support been disbursed? Similar to countries like the United Kingdom and France, much of that support goes to the operations of cultural institutions so that they can attain the quality standards of world-class museums and theatres. Funding support has also enabled the School of the Arts (SOTA) to be a flourishing arts school. As I mentioned, there is the constant need to upgrade and maintain cultural infrastructure. Government funding also drives national level programming such as during SG50, or during the many cultural festivals. Whether it's funding for the arts institutions, or funding that is undertaken by MCCY through NAC or NHB and the cultural institutions for broad-based national programming, ultimately, the benefits cascade to the arts community through arts creation, activation of precincts, and growth of audiences.

9 MCCY maintains stringent oversight on prudence and value for money. So our institutions are expected to be lean and efficient outfits, working on the basis of maximum resources channelled back to benefit artists and arts groups in arts creation, and to grow our audiences. Many, including The Esplanade, National Gallery and SAM, also raise funds to supplement the funding they receive from the government.

10 How does Singapore compare with other countries in arts funding? We took a look at some jurisdictions, benchmarking ourselves to England, Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong. The data used for norming was arts funding per capita, derived from published statistics of the respective countries. Singapore currently stands at about \$77 per capita, England at \$14.70, Australia at \$35.15, New Zealand at \$8.60 and Hong Kong at \$69⁴. So our closest

³ Singapore Cultural Statistics 2017

⁴ Information sourced from:

- World Bank; Department of Culture, Media and Sports Annual Report 2015-6; Arts Council England Annual Report 2015/6
- World Bank, Australia Bureau of Statistics Department of Communications and the Arts AR 2015/6 , Australia Council for the Arts Annual Report 2015/6
- World Bank, Ministry for Culture and Heritage AR 2015/6 Creative New Zealand Annual Report 2015/6
- World Bank, Hong Kong Home Affairs Bureau, Census and Statistics Bureau Hong Kong
- World Bank, Ministry of Finance Budget Book, Singapore Cultural Statistics 2017, Internal sources

comparison is Hong Kong. This is interesting and relevant because going forward, arts sector development must adopt an external perspective on other comparative or competitor cities. NAC will continue to make the case that Singapore should not be lagging behind in state support for the arts.

11 I am happy to let you know that the budget for arts and heritage will be sustained in the next 5 years, at more or less the same levels as the past 5 years. This allows us to build on what we have done in the last five years – to consolidate some of those gains and push on. When we meet our international counterparts, they tell me that here in Singapore, we are in a very fortunate position, compared with so many countries which face budget cuts and withdrawal of state support for the arts. But we also know that it is sometimes when there is shortage of resources that there is innovation and improvement. In this, we still have much to learn from our arts council counterparts overseas. For instance, in the areas of raising alternative funding, better processes and better planning of where resources go. Our counterparts are innovative because of leaner times, and Singapore should adopt best practices while also seeking to be equally innovative even if we are well resourced.

Stock Take of Current Landscape

12 I have given you a picture of where arts funding is, and it is generally a highly positive picture at present. Our conversations with all of you will help us, because while these are our observations from available data, they need to be validated with the experiences of the arts community.

13 What is the current situation with regard to audiences? Over the last 5 years, Singaporeans have responded well to the arts, with 73% of Singaporeans agreeing that the arts and culture improve the quality of life for everyone⁵. 78% attended at least one arts and culture event, and 79% think that the arts scene has become more vibrant in the last five years⁶. This data is reported from the 2015 National Population Survey of the Arts, published biennially. The year 2015 saw a spike because of the SG50 celebrations, many of which were cultural in nature. But dipstick data in 2016 and 2017 also indicate generally an uptrend when compared against 2011 figures.

14 There are today 38,000 arts activities a year⁷, and audiences are now spoiled for choice on arts activities, particularly during the major festivals in the annual calendar. There are nearly 6,000 registered arts organisations and societies, again spanning all art forms⁸ (some 3,000 in Performing Arts, 1,200 in Visual Arts, 900 in Literary Arts, 450 in Craft and Traditional Arts and Craft, and Others at around 130⁹). The Arts and Cultural Employment Study 2016 estimated there are more than 25,000 employed in the arts¹⁰, a 4% point increase from 2012. In another survey by NAC, with data based on about 1,000 respondents¹¹, nearly half of those

⁵ Population Survey on the Arts 2011/2013/2015

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Singapore Cultural Statistics 2017

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Excludes figures from the Creative sector

¹¹ 2016 Arts and Culture Employment Survey

said they are in a freelance nature of employment. All in all, the picture on the supply slide shows there is a real blossoming of the arts in the last five years. For a very small country like Singapore, there is a great diversity of art forms, and a good representation of quality in each of the genres.

15 The less positive data is that our audiences may not have naturally kept pace. This is also helpful for NAC to validate with our arts community whether these same trends are observed. Our data shows that while about 8 in 10 Singaporeans attended the arts in 2015, only 4 in 10 said they were interested in the arts¹². We recognise that this is critical data, so in the years ahead, NAC will delve deeper into this and collaborate with more partners to do research. We need to harness the energies of the academic community as well as arts practitioners, to get a better understanding of audience expectations and experiences. At least 4 in 10 said they're at least interested in the arts, so the following questions are natural: Were they there on their own accord, or was it by chance? What was the quality of their experience? All of these are questions need to be answered if we wish to grow new audiences and better engage existing audiences.

16 In the performing arts, we see an interesting phenomenon where ticketed attendances have declined, and non-ticketed attendance have gone up. These trends need deeper analysis and attention to suitable responses. While NAC and the arts community have a view on arts excellence, we also need to be aware of what our audiences think are quality experiences. When they pay for even nominal sums to watch performances or exhibitions, it signals that our audiences recognise the value of the arts.

17 We also see the same pattern of audiences lagging behind creation in visual and literary arts. Both have registered around 15% increase in attendance¹³. While this is positive, the increase lags well behind burgeoning of activities at about 45%. The National Literary Reading and Writing Survey has also indicated the need to do more as only 44% have read at least one literary book¹⁴. We are in a situation of over-supply where demand is not keeping up. And the answer to building a sustainable arts sector over the long term is not for government funding to prop up both demand and supply, but that we also have to foster arts creation that meets the needs and expectations of audiences.

18 So in the next 5 to 8 years, the challenge is to do more in audience development even as we continue to support arts excellence and creation. We must deepen appreciation and broaden outreach. NAC is of the view that there is still a critical need to do more for access to the arts across forms, language and traditions, go deeper beyond generalisations.

19 To move into the next phase, we need to delve into the dynamics of what is happening in each art form – for visual arts, performing arts (which is broken down into theatre dance and music), literary arts. Each genre faces very different challenges which require detailed analysis. The vernacular medium, for instance, is a special challenge which requires specific strategies in response. We also face stiff competition from other lifestyle and entertainment offerings, and so it is crucial to sustain interest for the arts among Singaporeans.

¹² Population Survey on the Arts 2015

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ National Literary Reading and Writing Survey 2015

20 Singapore will be a Smart Nation, and we need to make sense of what this means for us in the arts sector. How does technology change the way that we consume and create the arts? Is it going to be a threat to us, as some of us may think? In my five years with the National Heritage Board, we have had long discussions about what it means when we put our collections online. Does it bring more visitors to our museums, or does it cannibalise physical reach? If we adopt the right strategies, technology is powerful and can transform the arts. We should leverage technology and what it can do for us. NAC is keen to work closely with the arts community to do this.

21 Another area where more can be done is to deepen research and understanding of our cultural heritage and distinctive Singapore content. This is important not simply because we want to compare well with other cities. If we don't understand what we are about and who we are, it will be challenging for us to stay a cohesive nation and society.

22 Singapore is multi-lingual and multi-cultural, with a rich heritage tracing back to different roots. What does that mean for us, and how does that express itself in the visual, performing and literary art forms? We have to invest in time and resources to enhance understanding of our cultural heritage and distinctive Singapore content, as well as the documentation and transmission of our cultural heritage.

23 More can also be done to profile Singapore's arts and artists internationally, including capitalising on opportunities in Southeast Asia and the region. We also want to tap our rich networks to bring thought leaders, arts advocates and decision makers to Singapore so that they have a first-hand experience of our vibrant arts scene.

24 On another front, we see that in a diverse society, there can be different expectations. There are artists, audiences, founders, patronage and regulators. All are stakeholders invested in the arts sector, and they have different expectations as well as concerns. So how can the arts anchor us through bringing together diverse stakeholders and communities? Where there are differences, how can the arts facilitate and bridge through dialogues and conversations?

NAC's Strategic Priorities and Values

25 In this operating context that I have just outlined, I will move on to share NAC's strategic priorities and values. We have today also the leaders from our other cultural institutions who could share their perspectives, as they too are significant funders of the arts because their resources ultimately are channelled to the arts community.

26 NAC has refreshed its mission and vision in response to the observations we have of the current landscape. This is available on NAC's website. Our mission was previously about nurturing arts creation, but now we have also included the need to grow the appreciation of arts, as we recognise the critical need to bring along Singaporeans, as audiences, participants and supporters of the arts. It acknowledges the critical need for NAC to do more about audience development, in order to support and serve the arts community.

27 Our vision is to be home to diverse and distinctive arts. We want to inspire our people by continuing to support a pipeline of artistic talent to create excellent arts experience, especially our young talents. We want to continue supporting arts excellence, so that our people are inspired by our artists. We also see the arts connecting our diverse communities - communities of practice, communities by geographical location, communities by genre, by artform, by interest, and so forth.

28 In positioning ourselves globally, we recognise too that this is increasingly important. As we achieve greater excellence, we want our artists to go beyond Singapore. We want many of our arts groups to be profiled internationally, and we need to access key conversations in the international landscape. While presenting venues are important, thought leadership is also significant for Singapore's arts development. We want Singapore to be among the leaders who shape dialogues and discourse in the arts, especially for the region.

NAC's Values

29 IPS has posed the question of what "values" apply in arts funding. NAC is a statutory board of MCCY which is a ministry set up to ensure social cohesion and community bonding. NAC is guided by the Public Service values of Integrity, Service and Excellence, as well as MCCY's values of Care, Cohesion and Confidence. As a statutory board of MCCY, how should we respond? How do we play that role that serves the arts community, and at the same time, contributes to MCCY's objectives? We are also a fully-funded statutory board, and we do not generate monies. Like all the MCCY cultural institutions, NAC funding comes with targets and deliverables from MCCY which NAC has to meet every year to receive continued support. And we know that to do so, it is necessary that we work with the private sector and also with the arts community.

30 My colleagues and I believe we can contribute deeply through the arts. On the value of Care, we interpret it as caring for our arts community. We care about their career, their aspirations, growth, artistic and professional development. We want to maintain artistic excellence and reach out to the artistic community. We care also about how our audience experience and respond to the arts, seeking to deepen the emotional and intellectual connections with them.

31 Cohesion to us is about strengthening of bonds, by telling stories through authentic voices that anchor us into our cultural heritage, arts and traditions. As for Confidence in the nation, the arts, very much like sports, is a wonderful way in which people can take pride in distinctive Singapore content, to be appreciated both by ourselves and international audiences.

NAC's Policy Levers

32 I have shared our strategic priorities and the values that guide our work. IPS posed the question about "control". I interpret "control" to mean our policy levers. Both our parent ministry MCCY, and ourselves as NAC, take the view that as custodian and steward of public funds, it is our responsibility to know where resources are channelled. We have two policy levers. First is the mandate and trust vested in the Ministry and NAC by the government to

be sector lead for the arts. Second, we have resources that have been provided to us for this task. Let me elaborate.

33 First of all, we see ourselves as champion and advocate for the arts, and this is our language. NAC is not a regulatory agency – we do not have the legislation or constitution to set out regulations, to license or to police and enforce. There are, and will continue to be, difficult conversations. NAC has a role in supporting the arts community, and facilitating dialogues with regulatory agencies to smoothen and expedite processes like Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), and National Environment Agency (NEA).

34 As a statutory board, we have the ability to co-shape desired outcomes by working with other government agencies. The other agencies have levers that can help us propel the arts forward. For instance, we seek to anchor arts education in schools and tertiary institutions with Ministry of Education (MOE), and to activate community spaces with land agencies like Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), National Parks Board (NParks) and Housing & Development Board (HDB).

35 We also work closely with the economic agencies, such as Economic Development Board Singapore (EDB) and Singapore Tourism Board (STB), for our internationalisation efforts. These agencies have an international and economic focus, and can help advance the arts to harness international networks, in their language. But if we do not present our arguments convincingly in a win-win manner which also meets their objectives, then it is difficult to harness such partnerships. It is the role of NAC to reach out to other partner agencies.

36 We also hope to lead the way forward in doing what other arts councils do well, and that is to diversify funding. Currently, we are in a good situation where the state is the key funder, but this poses both advantages and disadvantages. There is certainty of sustained funding, as we have seen. But NAC as a public sector agency must also fund based on its strategic priorities. There is need to find other funders who identify with other causes, and NAC can also support the arts community in this. A good start was with the launch of the \$200million Cultural Matching Fund in 2013 as I mentioned earlier. The arts and heritage sectors are among only a few that have this dollar-to-dollar support from government. NAC has to work closely with the arts community so that collectively we can tap into greater private patronage of the arts.

37 In the next 3 to 5 years, NAC's funding resources will be largely channelled towards broad-based support working with partner public sector agencies to nurture a facilitative environment for the arts to flourish. Our cultural institutions join NAC in funding up a vibrant arts scene. Their support enhances the support that is made available through NAC funding. NAC and its company the Arts House Limited will work very closely with the other MCCY cultural institutions to reap synergies and complementarity. We will also continue to provide direct grants and will prioritise support for those applications which meet our vision of inspiring our people, connecting communities and positioning Singapore globally.

38 We will work with the arts community to identify and shift our support towards addressing gaps and strengthening our ecosystem. We hope to raise capabilities within the arts community in various domains — not only in practice and arts creation development, but in other areas such as research, market and audience development. Priority will be given to fill gap areas, while ensuring that the overall arts scene thrives based on available resources to ensure all parts of the ecosystem are functioning, as well as the ways in which the arts contribute to MCCY’s objectives.

39 I believe we all share the aspirations for a nation of people who care for each other, with a culture of giving and contribution in all different ways. We also want a cohesive society who are comfortable with who we are. And I’m very sure that we want to be a nation proud of Singapore and our arts.

40 I spoke earlier about the critical need for us to build new audiences. We will deploy different strategies to do that – through bridging, intermediaries, education, outreach, and so forth. We want to sharpen our focus towards creating more opportunities for our arts and culture icons and works to be appreciated by audiences and critics — both at home and on the international stage. We will support our arts community to develop a stronger body of distinctive Singapore works, and look at how we can further establish our wealth of Singapore talent as leaders in thinking, as well as practice, especially within our region.

41 Essentially, we hope to nurture diverse skill sets within the arts community. As we move forward, we see the need and criticality for our arts community to step up into the roles that they would do better than a state agency. NAC’s role is to raise capabilities. Just as other sectors are asking, we too must ask ourselves if we are going to have a “future ready” arts sector. What will that look like and what sorts of different skill sets are needed? NAC is committed to working with the arts community to ensure that we are not left behind.

Conclusion

42 I would like to again thank Tarn How and IPS for inviting me today. As I said at the start, we are at a very exciting time for NAC, as we shape our directions going forward with inputs from the diverse stakeholders of the culture sector. Thank you.

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