

Tuesday at Ipster Cafe: A poetic response to the three points of Amanda Chong

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AT THE “Singapore Perspectives” conference organised by the Institute of Policy Studies, 27-year-old lawyer-poet Amanda Chong accused the development of our arts infrastructure as (and here I begin to quote the Mothership article):

“... a branding exercise grounded in the desire to transform ourselves so we might be attractive to the world’, citing our beautiful galleries and museums as well as the government’s annual \$700 million expenditure on the arts.

‘If we continue this trajectory of pursuing a global city built from the outside in while opening our doors wide to the world, we are ultimately closing the doors on ourselves... Singapore’s arts scene is important for our own sake. The arts should not just or even primarily be an instrument of the State to attract global talent.”

In doing so, she drew the ire of Tommy Koh, but made a strong and strident argument for art for art’s sake. She made three points to back this up. I feel the need to further expand on the three points of her argument, as it seems inadequate to me. In the spirit of “Cabinet Battle” from [Hamilton](#), I have crafted my retorts in a hip-hop beat:

1. The arts teaches us to be more mindful of dissenting views that exist, and enrich our understanding of the truth.

The arts assists the state to be more mindful of those
who must persist in making noise, who try to oppose;
it gathers them in easily-observable groups
so everywhere they feasibly go, Big Brother snoops.
Dissenting views enrich the few with faux independence,
so call a poetry reading and just take the attendance!

2. The arts helps us to see other members of our society as equals and as humans, not as objects to be dealt with.

The arts helps us to see other society members
as inspiration for our literary adventures;
Prostitutes or prisoners or even the Prime Minister
are equal opportunity protagonists in literature!
They won’t object to be subjected to our prolificity,
from nothing, we make something, we’re increasing productivity!
Human interest stories might be individually worthless;

we can monetise them if we just put the right word first!

3. The arts can contribute to the national conversation about our future in a meaningful way.

The arts can contribute to conversation.sg,
by making richer countries think that we are so edgy.
Unlike third world regimes that can be much more demanding
we never censor arts, we only pull back our funding!
If liberals want to gibber about freedom and passion
the free grants that we give will be our kneejerk reaction!

So what is wrong, Amanda Chong, with art not for art's sake?
Observe the upward market curve that all of us partake.
We started with a junket to take part in this whole damn response
to marketing a market and its artificial Renaissance:
if foreign talent is inherently arts-obsessed,
why can't our parent-state apparent fake its interest?
So Amanda, I contend there's nought to contend with,
its fine to sell your soul but please just make it expensive!

P/S: (She plays the part of starving artist slightly too well:
please give her book a look at the attached [URL](#).)