

# Pandemic inspires visual arts project

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The Covid-19 pandemic has inspired new programmes at two of Singapore's museums.

The National Gallery Singapore (NGS) and Singapore Art Museum's (SAM) Proposals For Novel Ways Of Being is the first major institutional response to the pandemic.

This visual arts initiative brings together 170 artists under 12 institutions, independent art spaces and collectives for a series of shows that will kick off next month and run into February next year.

Dr Eugene Tan, 48, director of both NGS and SAM, says the idea was born early this year as Singapore headed into the circuit breaker period: "Other countries were already in lockdown and we started to see the impact on the art world with museums closing and art fairs getting cancelled. We realised the impact this was going to have on our arts community and culture workers."

The result was the Proposals initiative, for which NGS and SAM approached "as many institutions we could think of" in the visual arts community.

While Dr Tan declines to reveal the budget for this ambitious outreach project, he emphasises that all artists involved would be paid a fee.

"There's also fees set aside for production of the exhibitions and artworks, but these are kept to a minimum because the real objective is to support artists, to provide them with a platform to express their perspectives about the current situation."

Independent arts spaces involved will also be supported by NGS and SAM while the larger institutions partnering in the initiative will draw from their own budgets.

Over at the National Museum of Singapore (NMS), a new show opening at the end of next month will tell the story of public health crises in Singapore from the 19th century to the present.

NMS director Chung May Khuen, 45, says the pandemic pushed the museum staff to rethink their programmes.

She says: "We started thinking about what else we could do to provide Singaporeans with information about pandemics. We realised we do have a collection at the National Museum that could tell the history of infectious diseases in Singapore."

She adds: "The history of infectious diseases from the 19th century is quite reassuring. It tells our audience that while Covid-19 is new, the situation of pandemics is not. That's where we come in as a museum. It's not just about looking at the past history, the milestones, but about making real connections with our visitors and to assure them we will survive."

Both these programmes were put together at lightning speed by museum standards, with concepts



proposed early this year and the shows coming online from next month. Usually, museum calendars are worked out at least a year, if not two, in advance.

These new programmes are being coordinated and staged in under five months.

Covid-19 and the shutdown, Ms Chung says, have challenged museums' conception of their role as social spaces.

While local institutions have followed the international trend of going digital with their content, Ms Chung professes her wariness of putting everything online.

For NMS, the approach now is to regard digital and real life exhibitions as complementary.

Ms Chung says: "We want to make sure that the digital and physical experiences relate to each other. Any digital project should tie back to our National Collection. That's what makes us unusual. The mission is to tell the story of Singapore."

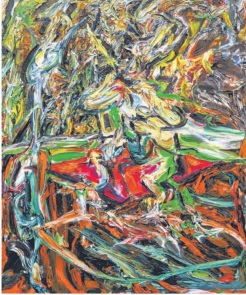
Both NMS and NGS have a renewed focus on home-grown content, given the travel restrictions imposed in the wake of the pandemic which has superced plans for imported shows.

**SUPPORTING ARTISTS WHILE SHOWCASING COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE TO CRISIS**  
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**It's our responsibility to also see how we could support artists during this time, and to use the resources that we have, and the spaces as well.**

**DR EUGENE TAN**, director of both National Gallery Singapore and Singapore Art Museum, which are rolling out arts initiative Proposals For Novel Ways Of Being, the first major institutional response to the Covid-19 pandemic

National Gallery Singapore and Singapore Art Museum spearhead an art initiative that brings together 170 artists under 12 institutions, independent art spaces and collectives for a series of programmes that will kick off next month



Artist Ruben Pang's A Face In The Rain (above) will be featured in a show titled The Fabric Of Sympathy and artist Genevieve Chua's Edge Control #42, Second Nature (left) will be presented at STPI - Creative Workshop And Gallery's Strange Forms Of Life.

## Upcoming shows

### PROPOSALS FOR NOVEL WAYS OF BEING

**What:** Time Passes (by Singapore Art Museum)  
**Where:** National Gallery Singapore, 1 St Andrew's Road  
**When:** Sept 4 to Feb 21, 2021  
**Admission:** Free for Singaporeans and permanent residents  
**Info:** www.nationalgallery.sg

**What:** The Fabric Of Sympathy  
**Where:** Institute Of Contemporary Arts Singapore, Lasalle College of the Arts, 1 McNally Street  
**When:** Early September  
**Admission:** Free  
**Info:** www.lasalle.edu.sg/institute-of-contemporary-arts-sg

**What:** Strange Forms Of Life  
**Where:** STPI - Creative Workshop And Gallery, 41 Robertson Quay  
**When:** Dec 5 to Jan 31, 2021  
**Admission:** Free  
**Info:** www.stpi.com.sg

**What:** Enmoving  
**Where:** Grey Projects, 6B Kim Tian Road, Kai Fook Mansion  
**When:** December  
**Admission:** Free  
**Info:** www.greyprojects.org

### PUBLIC HEALTH IN SINGAPORE

**Where:** National Museum of Singapore, 93 Stamford Road  
**When:** End August  
**Admission:** Free for Singaporeans and permanent residents  
**Info:** www.nhb.gov.sg/nationalmuseum

PHOTOS: LASALLE COLLEGE OF THE ARTS; NG SOR LIAN, ST FILE, STPI - CREATIVE WORKSHOP AND GALLERY

## Supporting artists while showcasing community's response to crisis

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NGS has already cancelled one blockbuster show, Matisse & Picasso: Friends, Rivals, a partnership with the National Gallery of Australia which was to have opened in May.

Dr Tan says while there was the option of just waiting to resume such programming, the NGS as one of the biggest arts institutions in Singapore had a duty to the community: "It's our responsibility to also see how we could support artists during this time, and to use the resources that we have, and the spaces as well."

### SUPPORT APPRECIATED BY VISUAL ARTS COMMUNITY

The visual arts community welcomed this initiative as a way of both supporting the livelihoods of artists, giving them work at a time when galleries and shows have

been closed, as well as showcasing the community's artistic response to the crisis.

President of Lasalle College of the Arts, Professor Steve Dixon, 63, says: "The role of art in this pandemic became a question that was very much on the forefront of our minds as an institution. It was important to us that our students' work should engage with wider conversations about navigating uncertainty and our common humanity in a time of crisis."

Lasalle's Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore is presenting a group exhibition titled The Fabric Of Sympathy, curated by Luke Heng, artist and alumnus of its MA Fine Arts programme, in his first curatorial outing.

Nine artists, all alumni of the art school, will be featured, including Liyana Ali, Ruben Pang and Jodi Tan.

Heng, 33, says: "Their works reveal forms of how we can make

sense of our life amid uncertainties and observe ways where art can comfort and make life meaningful. It's a call to treat things with care and sympathy."

Mr Jason Wee, 41, director of Grey Projects, says the NGS funding has been a godsend: "I have a little less anxiety about what to do for the rest of the year, and can now guarantee programming with artists, writers, curators and other folks into July 2021. Previously, that horizon would have been a steep hill to climb."

He is currently working on a penpal project, in which artists Daryl Q Yam, Rizman Putra and Michelle Lim will correspond with students and senior citizens, as well as a photography exhibition, Enmoving, by Ng Hui Hsien, which will open in December.

Mr Wee adds that the collaborative nature of the project has also offered him time to think about the many artists and other art workers



Artist Han Sai Por's Penetration will be presented at Strange Forms Of Life, which will showcase works by eight home-grown artists. PHOTO: STPI - CREATIVE WORKSHOP AND GALLERY

who are not as lucky to be approached by NGS, and "how I may be able to do something in turn to create structures for peer expressions of need and support, to offer even urgent or emergency assistance if required".

STPI - Creative Workshop And Gallery is presenting a show curated by Singaporean artist Guo-Liang Tan, titled Strange Forms Of Life, which will showcase works by eight home-grown artists. STPI gallery director Rita Targui, 50, says: "Living in unprecedented

times, it is crucial for institutions in Singapore to unite and provide meaningful opportunities for those whose livelihoods are deeply intertwined with the arts.

"Not only does the Proposals For Novel Ways Of Being initiative allow STPI gallery to collaborate closely with and show our support towards the local arts community, but it also highlights how contemporary art empowers us in this time of flux."

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