

Lasalle, Nafa arts educators in the spotlight

Three Tanjong Pagar Distripark galleries are exhibiting the works of educators from the two art schools

Clement Yong

By sheer coincidence, three private art galleries at Tanjong Pagar Distripark are focusing on the practices of arts educators at two prominent art schools in Singapore – Lasalle College of the Arts (Lasalle) and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa).

39+ Art Space, which usually focuses on showcasing internationally established artists, opened Thinking About Abstraction, Part II on Aug 18.

The exhibition, curated by Edinburgh-born art historian Charles Merewether, is the gallery's first show featuring exclusively Singapore artists since it was set up in January 2022.

Five of the nine artists are Lasalle educators, including senior fellow Milenko Prvacki and lecturer Jeremy Sharma.

Says gallery executive Catherine Low: "They just happen to be part of the faculty, but we thought they show the quality and vibrancy of abstract art."

The exhibition opened to a full house and "put 39+ Art Space on the map", she adds.

Dr Merewether is the former director of the Biennale of Sydney and Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, and lived in Singapore in the early 2000s.

In addition to Prvacki and Sharma, the other Lasalle educators exhibited are Hazel Lim, Adeline Kueh and Ian Woo, their works spanning woven chromatic paper expressions, screenprint on fabric and acrylic on linen mesh-ups.

To expand the range of abstract representations, Dr Merewether also included works by non-Lasalle artists, such as Aki Hassan's airy steel sculptures and Wei Long Tay's microscopic prints of film.

Ms Low says of Aki, born in 1995 and the youngest of the nine: "Through these sculptures that are intertwined but not really touching – sometimes leaning against

the wall – the artist navigates queerness, dependency and intimacy. It is very aesthetic and quiet, and it feels hopeful."

Confirmed names for Thinking About Abstraction, Part II, slated to open on Oct 6, include Jane Lee, Kanchana Gupta, Luke Heng and Genevieve Chua.

Over at Art Agenda, the gallery has chosen to go back to Lasalle founder Brother Joseph McNally in a more intimate exhibition, which pairs his works with those of 20th-century Singaporean sculptor Shui Titi Sing.

Being Made: Brother Joseph McNally & Shui Titi Sing, which opened on Aug 10, arranges eight sculptures by each artist in a curated and naturally lit indoor Japanese garden space.

Shui's works are often representations of rustic South-east Asian scenes in teak, a contrast to McNally's more intuitive carvings.

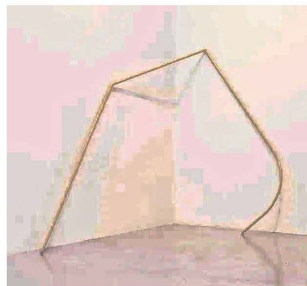
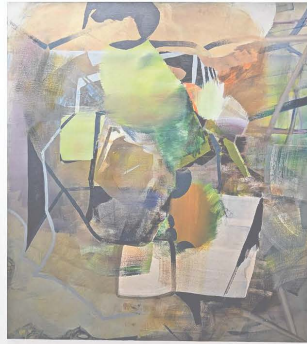
Brother McNally was expansive in his use of materials, although he was also fond of bog wood, some of which have been smoothed over with resin to generate an almost extra-terrestrial feel.

Art Agenda founder Wang Zhenng says the gallery hired scenographer Gagandeep Singh Sidha to create a space using green tiles, steel cylinders and mirrors so the sculptures of the two late masters can be harmonised.

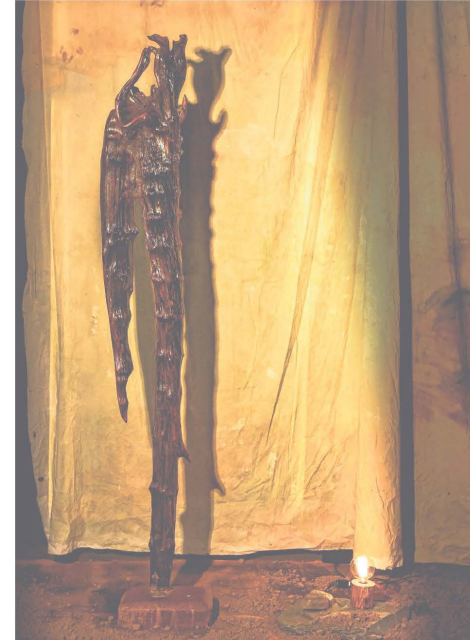
"This took a long time because they don't all sit naturally next to each other," he says. "The brown and black palette, the soiled mirrors that distort the lights – all of these are meant to complement the wood and emphasise its material quality."

The exhibition is timed for Brother McNally's birth centenary that Lasalle is currently commemorating through exhibitions and activities. Born on Aug 10, 1923, in Ireland, he founded St Patrick's Arts Centre, now known as Lasalle, here in 1984.

Shui is also an educator, and taught art and Chinese language at



Lasalle educators Ian Woo's Brain Is A Scroll (top) and Hazel Lim's A Sweep Of Gray (above) at 39+ Art Space's show, Thinking About Abstraction. Works by non-Lasalle artists, such as Aki Hassan's steel sculptures (right), are also represented. PHOTOS: 39+ ART SPACE



A sculpture by Lasalle founder Brother Joseph McNally at Art Agenda's Being Made: Brother Joseph McNally & Shui Titi Sing. PHOTO: ART AGENDA

Catholic High School from 1948 to 1977.

"It's not that you need a reason to exhibit an important artist, but when there is an opportunity to participate, we might as well use it," Mr Wang says of the show.

Gajah Gallery has also planned a major survey of 16 Lasalle and Nafa artists that was supposed to open in September but has been postponed to November.

Its working title, Which Is Which?, is indicative of curator John Tungs's desire to interrogate the similarities and differences among the artists who have passed through the two art schools with their distinctive pedagogies and philosophies.

His curatorial statement includes a quote by Brother McNally from

1997: "Nanyang, needless to say, did not want to give up its identity and lose the name, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. Neither would Lasalle have been willing to give up its approach to the arts, because it hadn't been tested sufficiently."

From 2024, the two schools will form an alliance to start a new university called University of the Arts Singapore (UAS). They will continue to remain distinct entities, with students receiving degrees from the university displaying credits along the lines of UAS-Nafa or UAS-Lasalle.

Artists who will be exhibited in Which Is Which? include sculptor Ng Eng Teng, performance artists Lee Wen and S. Chandrasekaran, Chinese ink painter Chua Ek Kay and emerging recent graduates like

Mahalakshmi Kannappan, whose tactile charcoal on wood abstractions bear similarities to Jane Lee's three-dimensional layering.

Mr Tungs says: "Although both Nafa and Lasalle were founded some 50 years apart, both institutions have since been regarded as seminal in establishing lasting legacies within Singapore's art history."

"The precise attributes and nuances constituting their distinctiveness are often the subject of conversation, speculation and debate. The outcomes of these differences have never been specifically explored within an exhibition format."

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<p>THINKING ABOUT ABSTRACTION</p> <p>WHERE 39+ Art Space, 03-01 Tanjong Pagar Distripark, 29 Keppel Road</p> <p>WHEN 18 Oct 1 Tuesday to Friday, 1am to 7pm; weekends, noon to 6pm; closed on Mondays</p> <p>ADMISSION Free</p> <p>INFO 39+plus.com</p>	<p>BEING MADE: BROTHER JOSEPH MCNALLY & SHUI TITI SING</p> <p>WHERE Art Agenda, 02-01 Tanjong Pagar Distripark, 29 Keppel Road</p> <p>WHEN 18 Sept 30, Wednesdays to Fridays, 1 to 6pm; weekends, 1am to 6pm; closed on Mondays and Tuesdays</p> <p>ADMISSION Free</p> <p>INFO 203sgf7fw</p>	<p>WHICH IS WHICH?</p> <p>WHERE Gajah Gallery, 02-04 Tanjong Pagar Distripark, 29 Keppel Road</p> <p>WHEN November, more details to come</p> <p>ADMISSION Free</p> <p>INFO gajahgallery.com</p>
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