

Lasalle College of the Arts appoints first Singapore-born president

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Local art school Lasalle College of the Arts has appointed the first Singapore-born president in its 41-year history.

Dr Venka Purushothaman, 61, in February succeeded British national Professor Steve Dixon, 69, in the post. He will be its seventh president – a promotion from his prior roles as deputy president and provost.

The school in 2021 became a founding member of Singapore's first arts university, University of the Arts Singapore, an alliance between Lasalle and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts that enrolled its first cohort in 2024.

The only other Singaporean who had been at the helm was Lasalle founder Brother Joseph McNally. A sculptor born in Ireland, he had become a citizen by the time he retired. He died in 2002 at the age of 79.



Dr Venka Purushothaman will be Lasalle's seventh president. PHOTO: LASALLE COLLEGE OF THE ARTS

An internationally recognised academic, arts and cultural leader, Dr Purushothaman is a veteran in the scene, having worked in Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, National Arts Council Singapore and the Victorian Arts Centre in Melbourne, Australia.

He is a firm believer in arts and culture's potential to not just respond to, but also lead societal change. He told The Straits Times of his dream for Lasalle: "It is a simple one: to be a future-facing institution

that is audacious in its imagination and courageous in its purpose.

"Simple does not mean easy. But in Lasalle's 41-year history, every challenge is an invitation for us to be creative."

This means not being resistant to technology, and one of his priorities is to modernise how the school and students work through digital transformation. He also wants to develop Lasalle and Singapore's identity as a global intellectual hub for the arts.

Prof Dixon, who is stepping down after 14 years, will continue as Senior Fellow in the college.

His tenure saw Lasalle earn significant recognition, including becoming the first home-grown institution to be awarded the EduTrust Star, Singapore's highest mark of quality for private education, in 2014 and 2019. It also debuted on the QS World University Rankings in 2020, and has since become South-east Asia's highest-ranked specialist arts institution for performing arts and art and design.