

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**For immediate release**

### **Examining intersections between art and architecture in Southeast Asia**

*Following on from its earlier, highly acclaimed exhibition *Awakenings: Art in Society in Asia 1960s–1990s*, National Gallery Singapore’s latest exhibition explores the experimental art forms that emerged during the late 1960s to the late 1980s in response to rapid urban development.*

**Singapore, 7 November 2019** – The late 1960s to late 1980s was a period of rapid social and economic change in Southeast Asia. The logic of developmentalism, which linked economic growth to massive state-led infrastructure projects, transformed cities like Singapore, Bangkok and Manila into modern metropolises. This spurred critical responses by artists and architects alike, who offered varying perspectives towards this new vision of modern urban life. These perspectives are the focus of the latest exhibition by National Gallery Singapore: ***Suddenly Turning Visible: Art and Architecture in Southeast Asia (1969–1989)*** which runs from 19 November 2019 to 15 March 2020.

The exhibition’s title, “Suddenly Turning Visible”, references a phrase coined by Filipino artist Raymundo Albano to describe the transformation of Manila’s urban landscape as a tangible manifestation of the city’s aspirations. It is an apt description of the significant shift in the history of art in Southeast Asia which arose in response to this development, namely interdisciplinary, experimental and conceptual art. The exhibition explores this shift through a comparative survey of three influential art institutions - the Alpha Gallery (Singapore, est. 1971), Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) (Manila, est. 1969), and Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art (BIMA) (Bangkok, est. 1974) - and the artistic practices that they supported and generated.

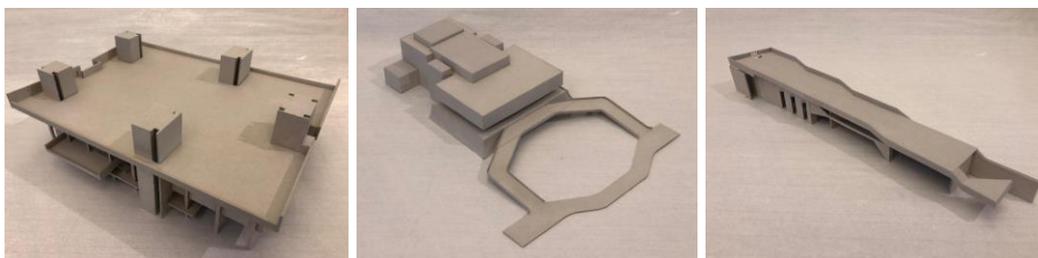
Dr Eugene Tan, Director of National Gallery Singapore, says, “*Suddenly Turning Visible* presents critical insights on Southeast Asia through the eyes of artists during a period of significant ideological and geopolitical change in terms of discourse and action. Particularly, art histories were examined beyond national boundaries, and measured contributions made by Southeast Asian practitioners to global debates on conceptualism. This spirit of experimentation, innovation and disruption still resonates today, and should be uncovered by a wider audience.”

### Architects with an affinity for art

The exhibition opens with a spotlight on the architects behind the three institutions that embodied this desire for progress: Leandro V. Locsin, architect of the CCP; Mom Luang Tridhosyuth Devakul, who designed BIMA; and Lim Chong Keat, co-founder of Alpha Gallery and architect of the Singapore Conference Hall and Trade Union House.

In designing these purpose-built art spaces, these three architects were informed by international design movements such as Brutalism and the Bauhaus, which expressed the values of democracy, equality and progress promoted by the new social order. They integrated art and architecture by inviting local artists to create works for their buildings. Lim Chong Keat, for example, commissioned Khoo Sui Hoe to create a painting that would welcome audiences into the Singapore Conference Hall and Trade Union House. The resulting work was *Children of the Sun*, a monumental 2.4m-tall painting that demonstrates Khoo's dynamic figurative style during the early years of his practice. This would mark one of the earliest instances in Singapore where art was integrated directly into the design of a building, blazing the trail for future generations of local architects who continue to incorporate art within their work today. *Children of the Sun* will be shown alongside Filipino artist Hernando Ocampo's *Genesis*, which was woven into an intricately patterned curtain for the CCP's Main Theatre. Together, these works exemplify the close relationship between art and architecture that continues to be relevant in the present day.

To bring the work of these three architects to life, Singapore artist Michael Lee has been commissioned to create new sculptural models of the CCP, BIMA and the Singapore Conference Hall, which are accompanied by views of their current sites via Google Earth Flythrough.



(From left) Sculptural models by Michael Lee of Singapore Conference Hall, CCP, and BIMA

## Experimentation and critical responses

The period saw artists freely reinventing international art movements such as abstraction, realism and conceptualism while creating a dialogue with folk and vernacular traditions from across Southeast Asia. *Suddenly Turning Visible* presents over 50 artworks across the Ngee Ann Kongsi and Koh Seow Chuan Concourse Galleries at the basement of National Gallery Singapore.

The artworks at the Ngee Ann Kongsi Concourse Gallery highlight the evolution in form and medium of art. They are complemented by a rich selection of archival documents, photographs and publications, illustrating the pioneering role of Alpha Gallery, CCP and BIMA as vital platforms for artistic expression and discourse.

Important works in this section include Thai artist Panya Vijnthanasarn's *Struggle*, which incorporates Buddhist iconography traditionally used in Thai mural painting with abstract geometric forms; Filipino artist David Medalla's *Kumbum* series of collaged placards, which document the social upheaval and economic inequality of the post-War period; and the mural-sized painting *Flight to Freedom* by Filipino artist Pacita Abad, which illustrates the plight of Cambodian refugees escaping into Thailand during the Vietnamese intervention in 1979.

*Suddenly Turning Visible* also features several major works which have been reconstructed and restaged specially for the exhibition. One of the iconic experimental works being restaged is the large-scale performance *Cassettes 100* by Filipino composer and ethnomusicologist José Maceda. Originally presented at the CCP in 1971, it comprises 100 participants moving through the space while playing recordings of indigenous Filipino instruments and voices from cassette players. *Cassettes 100* will be staged in Singapore for the first time in a one-time-only performance at the Gallery on 23 November at 3pm.



(From Left) Performance of José Maceda's *Cassettes 100* at the CCP in 1971 (image courtesy of the UC Center of Ethnomusicology), and *Struggle* by Panya Vijnthanasarn

Apart from restaging *Cassettes 100*, the exhibition also showcases four reconstructed works in the Koh Seow Chuan Concourse Gallery that shed light on social concerns in each city during this period.

Former CCP director Raymundo Albano's *Step on the Sand and Make Footprints* was first presented at the 1964 Tokyo Print Biennale. It invites visitors to step into the artwork and leave their footprints in the sand, referencing the abundant sand found around the city due to construction work. Alongside this iconic work are two installations previously shown at BIMA: *Sickness Age* by Vasan Sitthiket, which comprises three coffins bearing the names of Thatcher, Reagan and Gorbachev, who were at the centre of global geopolitics at the time; and Kamol Phaosavasdi's provocative *Song for the Dead Art Exhibition*, which features a wall filled with pages torn from postmodern manifestos and essays, challenging the dominance of painting as the preferred artistic medium in Thailand.



*Exhibition view of Song for the Dead Art Exhibition, and Sickness Age as originally exhibited at the Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art*

The final reconstructed work is *State of the Nation* by Manila-based social realist collective KAISAHAN. This banner-sized painting illustrates the social injustices and human suffering arising from the declaration of martial law in the Philippines by Ferdinand Marcos. The work recalls the murals and posters that the group created for the protest movement in Manila during this turbulent period.

*Suddenly Turning Visible* is curated by Gallery curators Cheng Jia Yun, Joleen Loh, Seng Yu Jin and Shabbir Hussain Mustafa. For more information about the exhibition, please visit: [www.nationalgallery.sg/suddenlyturningvisible](http://www.nationalgallery.sg/suddenlyturningvisible)

- End -

**For media enquiries, please contact**

**Tate Anzur**

Keith Kay

DID: 6568 9157

[keith.kay@tateanzur.com](mailto:keith.kay@tateanzur.com)

**National Gallery Singapore**

Zachary Wickeremasuriya

DID: 6990 9464

[zachary.w@nationalgallery.sg](mailto:zachary.w@nationalgallery.sg)

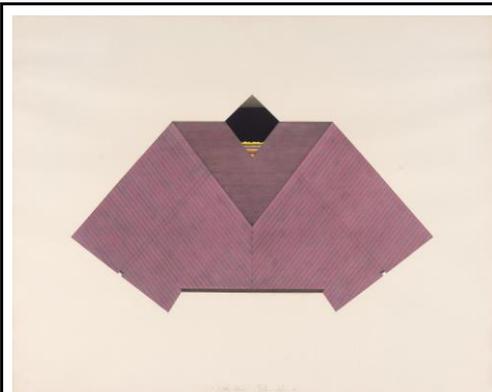
**About National Gallery Singapore**

National Gallery Singapore is a leading visual arts institution which oversees the world's largest public collection of Singapore and Southeast Asian modern art. Situated at the birthplace of modern Singapore, in the heart of the Civic District, the Gallery is housed in two national monuments - City Hall and former Supreme Court - that have been beautifully restored and transformed into this exciting 64,000 square metre venue. Reflecting Singapore's unique heritage and geographical location, the Gallery aims to be a progressive museum that creates dialogues between the art of Singapore, Southeast Asia and the world to foster and inspire a creative and inclusive society. This is reflected in our collaborative research, education, long-term and special exhibitions, and innovative programming. The Gallery also works with international museums such as Centre Pompidou, Musée d'Orsay, Tate Britain, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (MOMAT) and National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA), to jointly present Southeast Asian art in the global context, positioning Singapore as a key node in the global visual arts scene.

In 2019, the Gallery was the only museum in Southeast Asia that received a ranking in The Art Newspaper's annual global survey of attendance at art museums, taking 32nd place. It was the first museum in Asia to receive the Children in Museums Award by the European Museum Academy and Hands On! International Association of Children in Museums in 2018. The Gallery also won the awards for "Best Theme Attraction" at TTG Travel Awards 2017, "Best Attraction Experience", "Breakthrough Contribution to Tourism" and "Best Customer Service (Attractions)" at the prestigious Singapore Tourism Awards in 2016 for its role in adding to the vibrancy of Singapore's tourism landscape.

## Annex A: Exhibition Highlights

	<p><b>Khoo Sui Hoe (b. 1939, Malaysia)</b> <i>Children of the Sun</i></p> <p>1965 Oil on canvas</p> <p>Acquired with the support of an individual in honour of the memory of the late June Tan Poh Hah, and the support of Soo Khim, Daniel Teo and Heritage Research Sdn Bhd, Penang Collection of National Gallery Singapore</p> <p>This painting is closely intertwined with Singapore's architectural history. It was commissioned in 1965 for the Singapore Conference Hall by Lim Chong Keat—the building's architect and co-founder of Alpha Gallery—and was Singapore's largest and most significant public painting commission at the time.</p>
	<p><b>Hernando Ocampo (b. 1911, Philippines; d. 1978, Philippines)</b> <i>Genesis</i></p> <p>1968 Oil on canvas Private collection</p> <p><i>Genesis</i> is representative of Hernando's abstract compositions, which draw inspiration from Philippine flora and fauna as well as science fiction writing. This painting served as the basis for the design of the spectacular curtain in the Cultural Center of the Philippines' Main Theatre, and exemplifies the close relationship between art and architecture in the 1960s and 1970s.</p>
	<p><b>David Medalla (b. 1942, Philippines)</b> <i>Kumbum</i></p> <p>1971–1972 Newspaper clippings and ink on mounting boards Image courtesy of the artist and Adam Nankervis</p> <p><i>Kumbum</i> is a Tibetan word that means “one hundred thousand images.” It is a fitting title for this work comprising over 100 collages of newspaper and magazine clippings that trace the social contradictions and economic inequalities of the post-war period.</p>



**Ithipol Thangchalok (b. 1946, Thailand)**

*Static Shape*

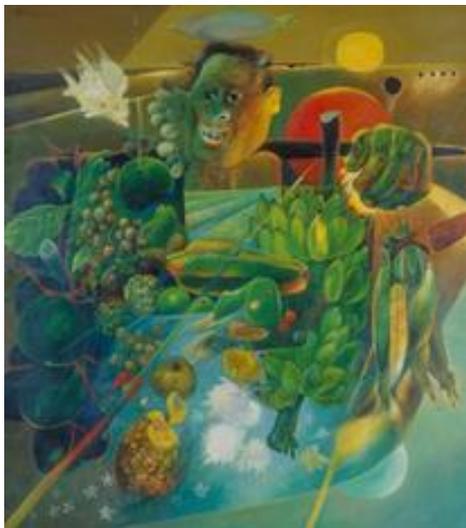
1974

Etching on paper

Gift of United World College of South East Asia

Collection of National Gallery Singapore

*Static Shape* represents Ithipol Thangchalok's early explorations in printmaking while he studied in the United States. The precise geometric form in this work reflects Ithipol's expression of hard-edge abstraction, a style that came to the fore in the late 1950s and 1960s.



**Pratuang Emjaroen (b. 1935, Thailand)**

*The Orchardman's Smile*

1976

Oil on canvas

Collection of National Gallery Singapore

This beaming man with a bountiful harvest belies a more sinister reality, suggested by the four black dots in the upper right corner of the painting that symbolise bullet holes. This work was displayed in the third Dharma Group exhibition at the Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art (BIMA) in 1976, alongside other works addressing poverty and injustice in Thailand.



**Imelda Cajipe-Endaya (b. 1949, Philippines)**

*Saan Ka Nanggaling, Saan Ka Darating (Where Did You Come From, Where Are You Headed?)*

1979

Photoengraving, etching and collagraphy on paper

Collection of National Gallery Singapore

This print is from Imelda Cajipe-Endaya's *Ninuno* (Ancestors) series, which explores the complex history behind Philippine cultural identity. Here, she uses images of ancient Filipinos gleaned from colonial sources to comment on the country's tribal roots.



**Pacita Abad (b. 1946, Philippines; d. 2004, Philippines)**

*Flight to Freedom*

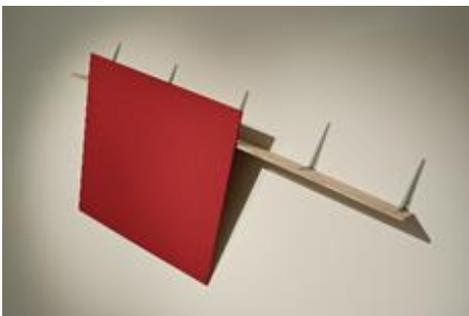
1980

Acrylic and oil on canvas

Collection of Pacita Abad Estate

Promised gift to National Gallery Singapore

This monumental painting captures the plight of Cambodian refugees who sought to cross the border into Thailand during the Vietnamese invasion. Pacita Abad witnessed this first-hand when she travelled to the border. Abad was part of a growing movement of artists in Southeast Asia engaging with global events.



**Roberto Chabet (b. 1937, Philippines; d. 2013, Philippines)**

*Tatlin and Co. (Russian Painting 4)*

1984, remade 2012

Plywood and metal brackets

Collection of National Gallery Singapore

This assemblage of manufactured materials, including plywood and brackets, is emblematic of the experimental practices that gained ground at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. Chabet was interested in critically reimagining the possibilities around everyday materials, with plywood boards his signature material.



**Vasan Sitthiket (b. 1957, Thailand)**

*Sickness Age*

1985, reconstructed 2019

Plywood and nails

Collection of the artist

When *Sickness Age* was displayed at the Bhirasri Institute of Modern Art in 1985, it comprised larger-than-life stick figures engaged in actions that spoke out against living in a time of excessive consumer culture. These figures were made of wood that the artist had scavenged, which he then assembled on site.

## Annex B: Complementary Programmes

### **Keynote Lecture: Lim Chong Keat on Art and Architecture**

Sun, 17 Nov 2019 | 3 – 4.30pm | City Hall Wing, Level B1, Ngee Ann Kongsi Auditorium | Free, registration required through [www.nationalgallery.sg](http://www.nationalgallery.sg)

Pioneering architect Datuk Seri Lim Chong Keat's work has shaped Singapore's built environment. Datuk Seri Lim sought to capture the totality of the environment in his designs, which drew on the Bauhaus movement and his careful study of Southeast Asia's built heritage. His monumental buildings, such as the Singapore Conference Hall and the Jurong Town Hall, inspired and blazed the trail for a whole new generation of architects. Together, Datuk Seri Lim and his students, which include veteran architects Tan Cheng Siong (Golden Mile Complex) and Tay Kheng Soon (Pearl Bank Apartments), have collectively developed a distinct language of tropical modernism.

Beyond architecture, Datuk Seri Lim staunchly supported the seminal Alpha Gallery. Established in 1971 on Alexandra Road as an artist cooperative, Alpha Gallery granted artists like Khoo Sui Hoe, Anthony Poon and Quek Wee Chew a vital platform for expression and growth. It championed experimental art, leaving a lasting impact on the visual arts ecology and also the fields of design, anthropology and systems theory.

In this keynote lecture for *Suddenly Turning Visible: Art and Architecture in Southeast Asia (1969–1989)*, hear Datuk Seri Lim weave together perspectives on Singapore's urban transformation.

### **Performance | Cassettes 100 by José Maceda**

Sat, 23 Nov 2019 | 3 – 5pm | Level 1, Padang Atrium | Free, registration required through [www.nationalgallery.sg](http://www.nationalgallery.sg)

The Singapore premiere of José Maceda's *Cassettes 100* (1971) will involve 100 performers roving the Gallery in a one-time-only showcase where ritual meets the avant-garde.

First presented at the Cultural Centre of the Philippines, the work has since been restaged in different parts of the world as a gathering of the local arts community, a showcase of bold experimentation, and an assertion of individualism, freedom and the Philippines' diverse cultural heritage.

The Singapore premiere will be directed by Dr Jonas Baes, choreographed by Elizabeth de Roza and filmed by Sherman Ong. It will feature the mass movement of 90 participants led by 10 artists and performers, playing pre-recorded tracks of instruments, voices and sounds indigenous to the Philippines in unison.

**Kindly note that *Cassettes 100* will only take place once. The performance will be followed by a post-show dialogue between director Dr Jonas Baes and curator Joleen Loh, also at the Padang Atrium.**

### **Performance | Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music**

Sat, 30 Nov 2019 | 2pm, 3pm and 4pm | Level B1, Padang Atrium | Free

Watch Singapore's first conservatory of music perform their musical response to the Gallery's latest exhibition *Suddenly Turning Visible: Art & Architecture in Southeast Asia (1969–1989)*, which explores the relationship between architecture and visual arts. Each performance will last 30 minutes.

**Curator Tour**

Sat, 7 Dec 2019 and Sat, 11 Jan 2020 | 11am – noon | Meeting point: outside The Ngee Ann Kongsi Concourse Gallery, Level B1, City Hall Wing

Free for ticket holders, registration required through [www.nationalgallery.sg](http://www.nationalgallery.sg)

Led by the exhibition's curators, this tour takes you through the curatorial narratives, artwork highlights and key archival materials of *Suddenly Turning Visible*, providing insights into the making of the exhibition.

**Workshop and Performance | A Somatic Series by Vincent Yong**

Sat – Sun, 7 – 8 Dec | 2.30pm and 4.30pm | City Hall Wing, Level 5, Rooftop Studios I

Free, registration required through [www.nationalgallery.sg](http://www.nationalgallery.sg)

Movement educator and art therapist Vincent Yong translates the works featured in *Suddenly Turning Visible* into a unique, body-led experience. This participatory workshop consists of a 30-minute introduction to somatic movement, followed by a 45-minute in-gallery experience.

**Artist Talk | Khoo Sui Hoe**

Sat, 14 Mar 2020 | 11am – noon | City Hall Wing, Level B1, The Ngee Ann Kongsi Concourse Gallery

Free, registration required through [www.nationalgallery.sg](http://www.nationalgallery.sg)

Listen to Malaysian-born artist Khoo Sui Hoe as he discusses his artistic practice, with a focus on his painting titled *Children of the Sun*. Commissioned in 1965 for the Singapore Conference Hall by its architect Lim Chong Keat, the artwork was the largest and most significant public painting commission at the time, and is closely intertwined with Singapore's architectural history.