

field notes
OBSERVATIONS
ON ART, PLACE
AND MEMORY

BY IAN TEE
Artist & Writer

.....
HANDBOOK FOR

.....
DATE OF VISIT

.....

BEGIN YOUR JOURNEY HERE

Singapore Stories: Pathways and Detours in Art
DBS Singapore Galleries, Level 2,
City Hall Wing, National Gallery Singapore

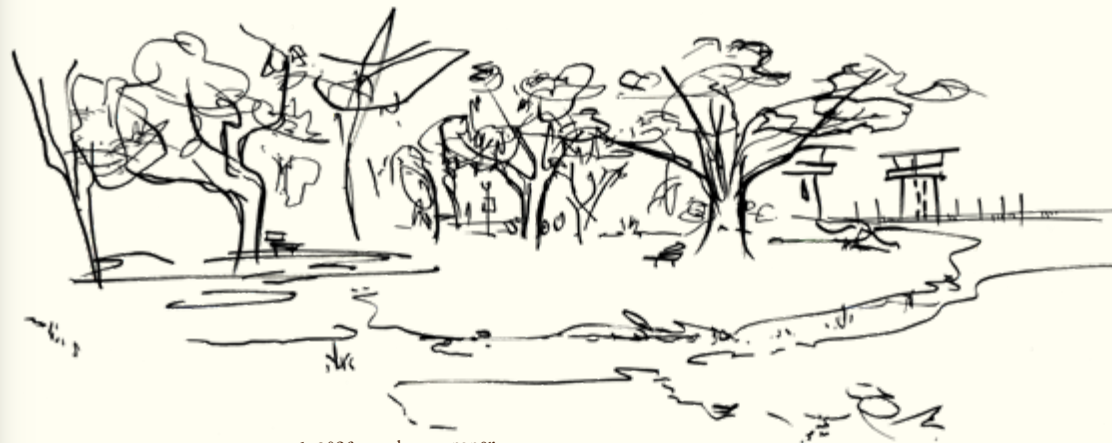
ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This booklet draws inspiration from *Art Remembers*, an exhibition on display at the Gallery from 21 August to 18 October 2026 that explores archives as living spaces where memories are preserved, revisited and reimagined. Featuring selected artworks from the Gallery's refreshed long-term exhibition, *Singapore Stories: Pathways and Detours in Art*, this booklet invites readers to encounter the past through the perspectives of artist and writer Ian Tee. Through his reflections, readers are encouraged to consider how artists engage with art and archives as dynamic spaces for rethinking histories and shaping imagined futures.

walking the ground

Art is subjective for both the maker and the viewer. In my practice as an artist and writer, I am constantly in dialogue with art of the past. I try to put myself in the shoes of my predecessors and reflect on how their experiences and circumstances informed the way they approach art-making. I believe that artists do not just record the world, but actively shape how it is represented and remembered.

To me, artworks function as living collections of memory, place and experience. They are alive because their meaning and significance change depending on the viewer's interpretation. It is a reciprocal relationship where the artwork and its audience meet in the middle. In this booklet, I invite you on a journey to look closely at how artists' formal decisions impact the way a place or event is depicted. These field notes encourage you to reflect on the artistic intentions, emotional impact and how memories are shared through art.



Ian Tee, *Kranji Reservoir Park*, 2026, marker on paper.

field note 1: story

Through the genre of history painting, artists often reinterpret historical events and shape how they live in popular imagination.

Chua Mia Tee
Epic Poem of Malaya, 1955
Oil on canvas, 105.5 x 125 cm
Collection of National Gallery Singapore

This work has been collectively
adopted by [Adopt Now] supporters
© Chua Mia Tee and family

On display at DBS Singapore Gallery 1



Painted by Chua Mia Tee in 1955 as Malaya moved towards independence, *Epic Poem of Malaya* depicts a young man reading to a group of youths. The figures are gathered closely together, their attention focused on the speaker.

While the painting does not show a specific historical event, the artist gives us a glimpse into the thoughts and feelings of those living through a period of change. The painting becomes an imagined archive, bringing together voices that may not appear in official narratives.

ACTIVITY

COMPLETE THE STORY

IMAGINE STEPPING INTO THE SCENE. GIVE EACH CHARACTER A VOICE.

WHAT MIGHT THEY BE THINKING OR SAYING, AND WHY? ADD SPEECH OR THOUGHT BUBBLES BASED ON THE SCENE.



field note 2: movement

Some moments in history are defined by movement and unrest. At times, artists chose to capture this turbulence not through a realistic depiction of the event, but by using visual elements such as line, shape, colour, and composition to convey a sense of action and emotion.

Painted in 1955, the same year as the Hock Lee Bus Riots, a confrontation between the police, bus workers and students, Lim Hak Tai's *Riot* reflects the atmosphere of tension and upheaval in Singapore during a period of student protests and workers' strikes.

Influenced by Cubism, an art movement that reimagined how reality could be represented through geometric forms and multiple viewpoints, Lim uses angular shapes and fragmented forms to capture the instability and intensity of a society in flux.

Rather than presenting a clear narrative, the painting invites us to experience the force of the moment. Every shape, line, and form contributes to a sense of disruption, movement, and uncertainty.

ACTIVITY

TRACE THE TENSION

FOLLOW THE MOVEMENT IN THE PAINTING.

HOW DO VISUAL ELEMENTS SUCH AS LINES, SHAPES, AND COLOURS GUIDE YOUR EYES THROUGH THE SCENE? WHICH AREAS FEEL MOST ACTIVE, AND HOW DOES THE ARTIST CREATE THIS SENSE OF TENSION?



Lim Hak Tai
Riot, 1955
Oil on board, 49.5 x 89 cm
Collection of National Gallery Singapore

On display at DBS Singapore Gallery 2

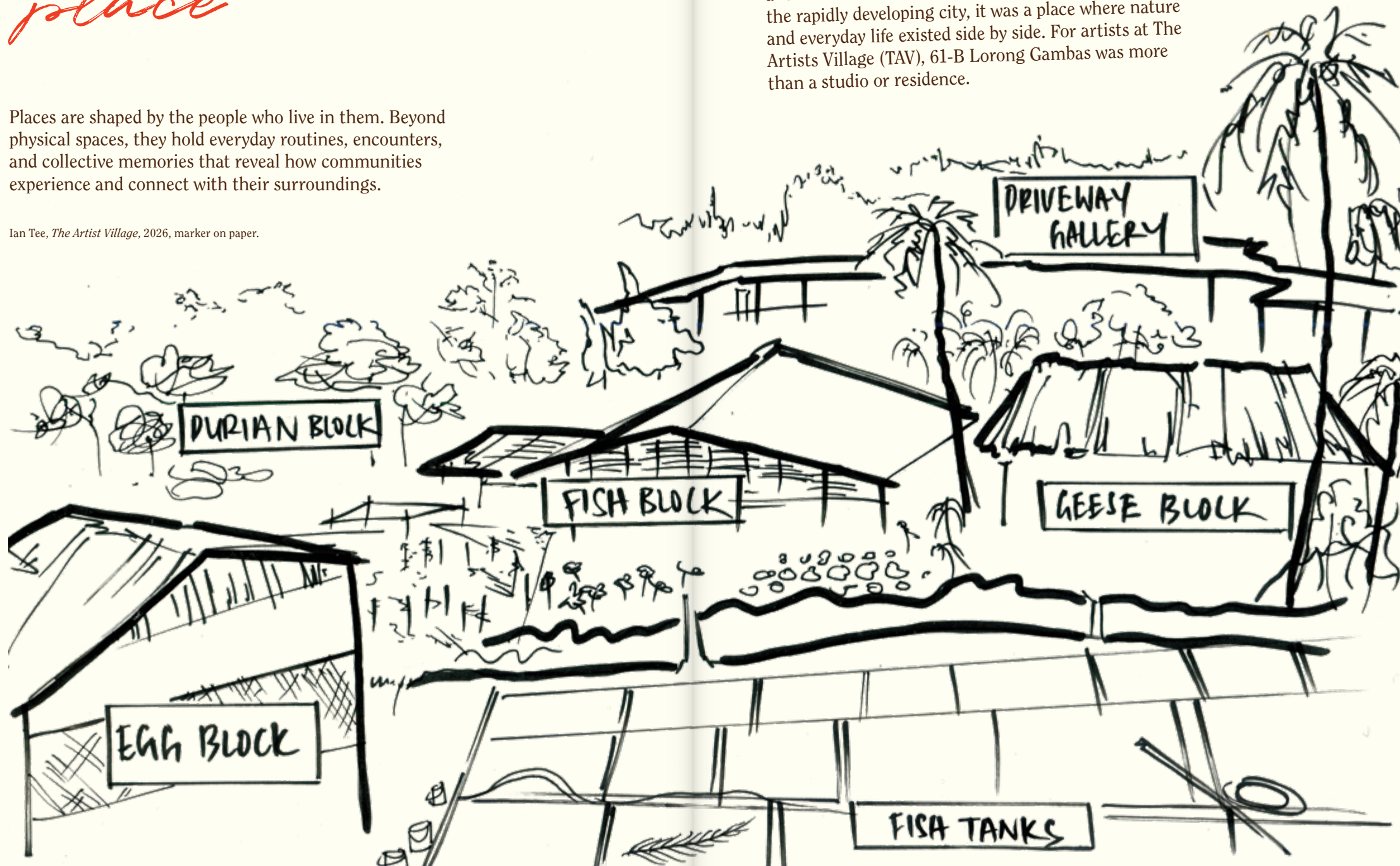
A CURIOUS DETAIL WHY DO YOU
THINK LIM HAK TAI CHOSE TO INCLUDE
THE DATE "1954-1955" AT THE BOTTOM
OF THE ARTWORK IN A LEGIBLE WAY?

field note 3: place

Places are shaped by the people who live in them. Beyond physical spaces, they hold everyday routines, encounters, and collective memories that reveal how communities experience and connect with their surroundings.

Ian Tee, *The Artist Village*, 2026, marker on paper.

In the late 1980s, Lorong Gambas was a rural landscape on the outskirts of Singapore, with kampongs, vegetable and chicken farms, and pockets of greenery. Away from the rapidly developing city, it was a place where nature and everyday life existed side by side. For artists at The Artists Village (TAV), 61-B Lorong Gambas was more than a studio or residence.



Through their works, Vincent Leow and Hazel McIntosh recover glimpses of a landscape and way of life that have since transformed. Their artworks allow us to revisit a version of Singapore that is increasingly difficult to encounter today, allowing us to encounter the textures and rhythms of a rural environment that has largely disappeared from the city's landscape.



Top:
Vincent Leow
Rooster, 1989
Oil on canvas, 176 x 258 cm
Collection of National Gallery Singapore

This acquisition was made possible
with donations to the Art Adoption &
Acquisition Programme

Left:
Macintosh Hazel
*Around the Artists Village: Chicken
coops at The Artists Village*, 1989
Ink on paper, 35.5 x 24.5 cm
Collection of National Gallery Singapore

On display at DBS Singapore Gallery 3

ACTIVITY

SKETCHING EVERYDAY STORIES

LOOK CLOSELY AT THE WORKS BY HAZEL MCINTOSH
AND VINCENT LEOW.

YOUR TURN: THINK ABOUT THE EVERYDAY PLACES
AND MOMENTS AROUND YOU. WHAT WOULD YOU
CHOOSE TO DRAW, AND WHAT STORY WOULD IT
TELL ABOUT YOU?

field note 4: memory

As places change, art becomes a way of reconnecting with experiences that may no longer be accessible. After 1990, the landscape around The Artists Village at Lorong Gambas was transformed by redevelopment.

The National Stadium is another example of a place that carries collective memories. Built in 1973 and demolished in 2010, it was a landmark where generations of Singaporeans gathered for sporting events, performances, and national celebrations.

In the photograph by Lim Kwong Ling, the artist chooses to make only a fragment of the stadium's structure visible. Yet, the children running in the corridor allow us to imagine the larger space beyond the frame. Through this partial view, the photograph evokes a memory of a place that exists both in the image and in our imagination.

Lim Kwong Ling
Racing at the National Stadium, c. 1970s
Oil on canvas, 176 x 258 cm
Gelatin silver print on paper, 49.3 x 20.6 cm
Gift of the artist and family
Collection of National Gallery Singapore



From the constructed scene in *Epic Poem of Malaya* to depictions of everyday life, we have explored artworks as field notes: fragments of observation that reveal how people, places, and moments are experienced and remembered.

These are not complete stories. They are perspectives and traces that invite us to look closely, question what we see, and imagine what is no longer present.

In these, we find space for new meanings, memories, and possibilities.

REFLECT WHAT PART OF THE
WORLD AROUND YOU FEELS IMPORTANT TO
DOCUMENT TODAY? HOW DO YOU IMAGINE
IT WILL CHANGE IN THE FUTURE?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ian Tee is a Singaporean artist exploring themes of youth, identity and history. His projects are often shaped by an obsession about a piece of visual culture or painting genre, and how its meanings can be recontextualised through stylistic or material shifts. He works across mediums such as metal, textile, collage, drawing, and site-responsive installations.

www.ian-tee.com
@ianteestudio

TEXT & ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS
Ian Tee

EDITORS
Jying Tan
Kelysha Cheah Kassim

DESIGN
aaah.studio

SPECIAL THANKS
Adele Tan
Grace Chia
Mohamad Shahfeeq
Seng Yu Jin

Our appreciation to all the artists whose artworks have inspired this booklet.

Copyright in this publication may be held by persons or entities other than, or in addition to, National Gallery Singapore. The Gallery makes every reasonable effort to obtain permission for all copyright material reproduced herein. FIELD NOTES: Observations on Art, Place and Memory is published by National Gallery Singapore.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the Gallery's prior written permission. Published in August 2026.

All information is correct at the time of printing.

PRINTED IN
SINGAPORE