



Coming Together for Art

The 1980s saw a new sense of dynamism in Singapore's cultural scene, with artists increasingly organising their own multidisciplinary events. In 1982, the Singapore Festival of Arts played a key role in integrating corporate support and including international productions. By the late 1980s, as more art practitioners left their conventional jobs or returned from overseas, artists looked to deepen the relationship between art and civic society.

Inspired by the festival and prior experiences with theatre groups, Gilles Massot organised public events such as the Yin Yang Festival (1987) and the Art Commandos (1988). These events brought together practitioners of literature, art, dance, performance art and music. In 1988, Tang Da Wu established an artist colony in Sembawang, which later became The Artists Village. Another collective of art students from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts gathered at the Goethe-Institut Singapur to organise *Trimurti* (1988), an exhibition featuring installations, performances and other time-based events that probed prevailing notions of multiculturalism and multiracialism in Singapore.

Gilles Massot

(b. 1955, France)

Yin Yang One and Many

1987

Acrylic and gouache on canvas and newspaper

Collection of National Gallery Singapore

2021-00507

Yin Yang One and Many is a double-sided portrait and collage. The title reflects French-born Singaporean artist Gilles Massot's view of life as an exchange between self and society. Massot moved to Singapore in 1981. In 1987, he and artist Simon Wong launched the Yin Yang Festival at the Kent Ridge Guild House, National University of Singapore, with student volunteers including Vincent Leow, who later became an artist. The solo figure on the left is based on a drawing of his life partner.

"In my second year at LASALLE, I joined the Art Commandos Camp, where I was mentored by Gilles [Massot], Vincent Leow, Norensa Sahari and Gordon...As a student, this camp helped me understand how different art forms can come together and create new artwork through experimentation. Art Commandos gave me both performance and visual art experiences [including installations]."

Ahmad Abu Bakar, 2025.

A former member of the Art Commandos and The Artists Village, Ahmad Abu Bakar contributed to early museum programmes before furthering his studies in Tasmania. He continues to explore geometric and abstract forms in his installations while teaching across institutions.

“I reminisced about the time spent at [The] Artist[s] Village of the rich and thought-provoking conversations about art and everything else. Despite taking the long walk from the bus stop to 61-B Lorong Gambas, I always looked forward to immersing in the creative energy and the kampong spirit surrounded by nature, art, and artists, the mood there was always inspiring.”
Vincent Leow, 2025.

Vincent Leow is an artist, educator and cultural organiser whose practice spans a wide range of genres including sculpture, installation, performance art and painting.

As a student at LASALLE College of the Arts, Leow was an active participant and student leader in formative events like the Yin Yang Festival and Art Commandos, as well as The Artists Village. He represented Singapore at the Venice Biennale in 2007 and was awarded the Cultural Medallion in 2020.

“We moved into 61-B Lorong Gambas on the 20th of June 1988 [...] All of these visual things were so interesting for me to draw. I could just sit outside our kampong and draw the scenery in front of me or wander to the neighbours and draw there. It was a world so new to me and it was a privilege to see and document this disappearing way of life in Singapore.”
Hazel McIntosh, 2025.

Hazel McIntosh is an artist, illustrator and educator who trained at St. Martin's School of Art in the United Kingdom before moving to Singapore in the 1980s. Living in the rural area of Lorong Gambas, she drew inspiration from its landscape and community. A lifelong teacher and printmaker, McIntosh taught at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts between 1989 and 1992.

Tang Da Wu (唐大霧)

(b. 1943, Singapore)

Just in Case

1991

Wood, metal and electric torch

Collection of Singapore Art Museum 1993-01667

Just in Case plays with both words and materials. A sealed wooden crate, marked “from Burma to Singapore,” sits with two holes in its top surface. A torch is mounted over one of the holes. Tang Da Wu invites viewers to look inside. Through the second hole, the word “JUST” comes into view. The title hints at layers of meaning: “justice” and “encased,” prompting viewers to consider the social and political conditions in Myanmar—viewed, quite literally, from a distance in Singapore.

“‘Trimurti’ is a Sanskrit word describing three forms usually associated with the Hindu godhead of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Here, we use it to define a manifestation of three forces, similar to nature: Creation, Preservation and Destruction.”

Trimurti exhibition catalogue, 1988.

Staged as a sequel to *Quintet*, the 1987 Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts graduate show, *Trimurti* broke from the formal stillness of a conventional gallery. Drawing on Taoist, Hindu and Sufi philosophies, the artists reimaged the exhibition space as a living, breathing environment. Part live performance, part installation, part exhibition, the event unfolded through paintings, objects and actions that examined the cosmic cycle of life and death.

A Space of Their Own

With the government's redevelopment of rural areas, The Artists Village lost its space at Lorong Gambas in 1990. Other art collectives and organisations found semi-permanent venues, such as The Substation (1990–2021), 5th Passage (1991–1994) and Plastique Kinetic Worms (1998–2008), which became hubs of interdisciplinary practices. Artists used these locations to initiate community-based practices in public spaces—5th Passage operated within Parkway Parade, a shopping mall, while Plastique Kinetic Worms occupied an unused historical shophouse in Chinatown.

Adopting a collaborative model of working with various public institutions and artist-run spaces, The Artists Village staged a series of art events, such as A Sculpture Seminar (1991) and The Space (1992). Hosted in conjunction with the Singapore Festival of Arts Fringe at the now-demolished Hong Bee Warehouse, The Space provided a platform for emerging artists. Their inquiries into issues of self and gender spurred The Substation to launch an annual arts programme called The New Criteria.

Lee Wen (李文)

(b. 1957, Singapore; d. 2019, Singapore)

Journey of A Yellow Man No. 11: Multi-Culturalism

1997

Inkjet print on paper

Collection of National Gallery Singapore

2014-01370

Since 1992, Lee Wen had appeared as the “Yellow Man” all over the world. This particular performance took place at The Substation in 1997, where he gave a lecture before stepping into a tub to wash the yellow paint from his body. His performance was both symbolic and pointed—a critique of Singapore Art '97

for over-representing ink and watercolour at the expense of performance and installation art.

Top left

Juliana Yasin

(b. 1970, Singapore; d. 2014, Singapore)

Kite Series 8

2000

Acrylic on paper

Top right

Benjamin Puah (潘家定)

(b. 1976, Singapore)

Having my cup of tea when Vincent was sleeping

2000

Print on paper

Middle left

Yvonne Lee (李翠华)

(b. 1972, Singapore)

Untitled

2000

Woodblock print on paper

Vincent Leow (廖芳炎)

(b. 1961, Singapore)

Lotus

2000

Woodblock print on paper

Bottom left

Zulharli Adnan

(b. 1977, Malaysia)

Zip it

2000

Risograph on paper

Bottom right

Zainudin Samsuri

(b. 1974, Singapore)

Being

2000

Woodblock print on paper

Collection of National Gallery Singapore

The works displayed here are part of *Boxed: 26 × 26*, a set of works on paper created by artists and collaborators to commemorate Plastique Kinetic Worms (PKW)'s second anniversary and to raise funds for the collective. Founded in 1998 by Singaporean artists Vincent Leow and Yvonne Low, PKW was one of the few artist-run spaces to emerge during a period when many others in Singapore had ceased operations. With The Artists Village and 5th Passage spaces no longer active, PKW became a crucial site for contemporary and experimental art. Over the following decade, it fostered international collaborations, supported younger artists and offered a space for curators and researchers to engage with Singapore's evolving art scene. PKW's presence extended beyond the local, with the collective's participation in the 2002 Gwangju Biennale.

Dominique Hui (许嘉欣)

(b. 1972, Singapore)

Statue of Liberty

1992

Chinese ink and gouache on paper and newspaper

Collection of National Gallery Singapore

1995-02054

Statue of Liberty was created at The Space, the former Hong Bee Warehouse where Tang Da Wu and The Artists Village held a

series of experimental art projects in the early 1990s. The work continues Dominique Hui's graffiti-inspired series shown at the same site. Hui layered collage over the female form to explore themes of censorship. In this work, gender is left intentionally open. Male, female and androgynous figures appear side by side, suggesting the fluid and contested views of gender during the 1990s. The use of American pop iconography and production of body images reflect the pervasiveness of Western media of that time.

Khairul Anwar Salleh

(b. 1965, Singapore)

A Study of 3 Thermos Flasks

1990

Acrylic, ink, coloured markers and pen on canvas

Collection of National Gallery Singapore

2020-00485

At first glance, this raw still life feels casual— even careless. Yet, beneath the surface is Khairul Anwar Salleh's mischievous response to the mood of contemporary art in 1990s Singapore. Khairul found much of his peers' works heavy with angst and weighed down by global sociopolitical changes. His answer was to take a playful defiance. The nonchalant brushstrokes and visible corrections are nods to Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art. This painting was featured in Khairul's first solo exhibition at The Substation in October 1990, and later inspired sculptor Faizal Fadil's 1991 readymade sculpture of the same name.

Suzann Victor

(b. 1959, Singapore)

Still Life

1992/2025

Eggplants and metal clips

Commissioned by National Gallery Singapore

Originally conceptualised in 1992 for *Body Fields*, a live performance event curated by 5th Passage at Parkway Parade, Still Life is considered an early example of site-specific installation in Singapore. At the heart of the work is the humble aubergine, or *brinjal*—a perishable fruit that serves as a cheeky euphemism for the phallic. Decades before the emoji era, the reference was already at play, being provocative. The work introduces several recurring motifs in Suzann Victor's practice, such as the use of organic materials and the slow, inevitable process of decay to conjure the passage of time.

The aubergines in the work are replaced monthly. The old aubergines will be donated to Ground-Up Initiative (GUI), a non-profit social organisation, for composting in their community farm.

Navigating the Interdisciplinary

Following the recommendations of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts (ACCA) in 1989, Singapore saw a major expansion of government infrastructure from the mid-1990s, which supported and enabled the growth of the nation's cultural landscape. At the same time, changes in education introduced subjects such as English Literature and Theatre Studies into school curricula, broadening students' exposure to the arts. This exposure became a formative experience for artists who later crossed into other disciplines in their practice.

This broadening of pedagogical frameworks was mirrored by the founding of new theatre groups in Singapore. These groups allowed artists to try different roles behind the scenes in theatre productions. The establishment of the Esplanade and its interdisciplinary programme created more opportunities for artistic exchange between both local and international artists. Further partnerships with events such as the M1 Singapore Fringe Festival, an annual festival of live performances organised by The Necessary Stage, enabled the Esplanade to serve as a site for interdisciplinary experiments and artistic provocations.

Ming Wong (黄汉明)

(b. 1971, Singapore)

Four Malay Stories Redux

2005/2025

Video, four-channel, black and white wardrobe and LED screens

Commissioned by National Gallery Singapore

In *Four Malay Stories Redux*, Ming Wong interweaves the original P. Ramlee movie clips with footage from Wong's *Four Malay Stories* (2005) through a custom-designed digital filter. The resulting video flickers with horizontal strips, resembling

glitches on ageing CRT television screens. At intervals, the original Ramlee film scenes interrupt or “corrupt” the footage.

Wong created the redux version in 2025 because fewer people now remember P. Ramlee’s films and contributions to Malayan cinema. The redux version opens up a direct dialogue between the “original” and “remake/reinterpretation,” revealing the gaps, mistakes and imperfections that are central to Wong’s re-stagings.

Ho Soon Yeen (何舜莹)

(b. 1970, Singapore)

Lanterns Never Go Out

Programme Cover

Original 1994, reproduced 2025

Digital print on vinyl

© The Necessary Stage

This iteration of the play was staged from 17–19 March 1994 at Guinness Theatre, The Substation.

Director: Elvira Holmberg

Playwright: Haresh Sharma

Production Manager: Clarisse Ng

Stage Manager: Charmaine Tan

Lighting Design: Thio Lay Hoon

Sound & Music: Hossan Leong

Poster Design: Ho Soon Yeen

Written in 1989, *Lanterns Never Go Out* was the debut play by Haresh Sharma for The Necessary Stage (est. 1987), a non-profit theatre company. The play takes its title from Singaporean writer Dr. Geraldine Heng’s poem “Little Things” (1983).

The story centres on a teenager preparing for her GCE ‘O’ Level examinations that will take place the following year, a pivotal

academic milestone in Singapore's education system. As she navigates relationships and becomes increasingly aware of societal and familial expectations, the play explores her evolving sense of self and her existential questioning of adulthood.

For the 1994 production, artist-educator Ho Soon Yeen designed the programme cover and poster. Ho also contributed to Singapore's theatre scene as an actor in Practice Theatre Ensemble's *Death of a Hero* (1995) and created the graphic design for Drama Box's *The vaginaLOGUE* (2003, 2008).

National Language Class Flyer

A production by spell#7performance

Original 2008, reproduced 2025

Digital print on vinyl

© spell#7performance

This iteration of the play was staged from 3–5 April 2008 at Theatre Studio, Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay.

Director: Paul Rae

Cast: Noor Effendy Ibrahim, Yeo Yann Yann

National Language Class takes its title from Chua Mia Tee's 1959 painting of the same name, which depicts a Malay teacher teaching a group of Chinese students the Malay language. The play was first conceptualised by actor-artist-educator Noor Effendy Ibrahim in 2005 as a performance and installation before being developed into a play with spell#7performance, responding to concerns about building a nascent national identity and language.

The play recreates the scene from the painting, providing a space for audiences to question the power dynamics between teacher and students, as well as between mother-tongue speakers and newer migrants to Singapore. In the 2008 iteration, artist-educator and thespian Noor Effendy Ibrahim plays the role

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of the Malay teacher, while actress Yeo Yann Yann plays the student.