



26 October 2013 to 16 February 2014
Vernissage: 24 & 25 October 2013
Bras Basah.Bugis Precinct
Our Museum @ Taman Jurong

MEDIA RELEASE

SINGAPORE BIENNALE 2013 ATTENDANCE REVEALS GROWING APPRECIATION FOR CONTEMPORARY ART IN SINGAPORE

Singapore Biennale 2013 closes with over 560,000 visitors

Singapore, 18th February 2014 – The fourth edition of the Singapore Biennale (SB2013), the country's pre-eminent platform for international dialogue in contemporary art, closed its doors on Sunday, 16th February 2014, after attracting a record number of over 560,000 visitors over the past three months. The visitorship reflects a growing appreciation for contemporary art in Singapore through the increasing public demand to directly experience the work and ideas of living artists in Southeast Asia.

Chief Executive Officer for the National Arts Council (NAC) Ms. Kathy Lai said: "As the commissioner of the Biennale, the National Arts Council is encouraged by the success of SB2013. We congratulate SAM on producing a bold fourth edition with a strong focus on Southeast Asia. The record outreach to Singapore and international audiences is laudable and signals the strong interest in the visual arts, and in particular, art created by our home grown and regional artists. For the next Singapore Biennale, we look forward to more thought-provoking works, meaningful discussions and impactful art for everyone."

SB2013's visitor figures have surpassed those of the 2008 and 2011 editions of the Biennale, at 505,200 and 196,000 respectively. The visitor figure accounts for indoor admissions across the three main venues situated within the Bras Basah.Bugis precinct, including the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) and its annex building SAM at 8Q, the National Museum of Singapore, Peranakan Museum, and the National Library Building.

Dr. Susie Lingham, Director of the Singapore Art Museum comments, "We are extremely pleased with the reception of SB2013 and we're all very encouraged by the great public support and interest. Cultivating audiences that appreciate contemporary art and nurture the interdisciplinary arts of our time is a priority for us and the Biennale has been an excellent opportunity to raise Singapore's position as a leading destination for contemporary art."

Titled *If the World Changed*, SB2013 featured works by 82 artists and art collectives from across 13 countries. It drew on the combined expertise of its team of 27 curators to harness the energy of the

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Southeast Asian region and brought to the fore unique practices, concerns and myriad perspectives of artists from this part of the world.

Singapore was treated to a substantive number of works that were specially commissioned for SB2013 and shown for the first time. In particular, SB2013 reached beyond the familiar, featuring artists who hailed not only from major metropolitan centres but also from lesser-known regions, allowing a multi-faceted and diverse presentation of current regional art practices as well as artistic responses.

Comprising of various mediums including video, installation, painting, photography, mixed media, sculpture and more, the engaging works of SB2013 featured the unique interpretations of the title of each artist. The artworks explored concepts such as spirituality; histories, ancestries and futures; the self and the other; exchanges as well as nature and geographies. Notable works that were particularly well-received by the public included Toni Kanwa's *Cosmology of Life*, Singapore film maker Boo Junfeng's *Happy and Free*, Ken + Julia Yonetani's *Crystal Palace: The Great Exhibition Of The Works Of Industry Of All Nuclear Nations* and teamLab's *Peace Can Be Realised Even Without Order*.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This year's Biennale focused strongly on welcoming a wide and varied audience, including those unfamiliar with the language of contemporary art. Amongst the works featured, there were 10 community-driven arts projects, setting SB2013 apart from previous editions. These were created by artists working closely with ordinary people, ranging from school children to prison inmates, enabling a greater engagement with audiences not just in the viewing of art, but also in its creation.

"Many artists practising in Southeast Asia believe that in order for art to be meaningful, it should come from the community where they live and work. As a museum, SAM welcomes community art projects as they bring art to a wider audience, in turn allowing them opportunities to get to know artists and art practices better, eventually raising the level of appreciation and participation in contemporary art in the respective communities", said Dr. Susie Lingham.

The community art projects featured in SB2013 include works such as Siete Pesos' *2243: Moving Forward*, Tay Bee Aye's *Knot, Play, Rest*, Sharon Chin's *Mandi Bunga* and Ahmad Abu Bakar's *Telok Blangah*.

Retired teacher Pauline Tan, 66, who came with her husband, commented: "It was really heartening to note that a prominent area was dedicated to display the individual voices of the inmates. I would also like to congratulate and thank the SAM staff who approached me to explain the exhibit and encouraged me to write a reply to the inmates. It made me even more interested to read the messages on the other bottles."

Art-lovers were also involved as volunteers in the galleries and as daily exhibition tour guides, providing more insights into the artworks and artists. Through the large-scale exhibition, the museums managed to deepen their engagement with committed lovers of contemporary art, gathering a total of 356 volunteers from varied age groups.

OUTREACH AND EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

In an expansion of educational and outreach efforts, SB2013 offered a total of 38 engaging programmes and activities. The programmes were well-received by participants, who were from all levels of society, ranging from school students to working adults. A total of more than 2,000 people actively participated in workshops and talks, achieving an average attendance rate of 93%.

During the opening weekend, *Artists and Curators in Conversation* saw 1,000 people gain insights, in situ, into the ideas and creative processes of the SB2013 artists and curators. Visitors also had the option to join Singapore-based Biennale curators on themed tours that explored various topics and ideas reflected in the Biennale works. The *Appreciating Art Lecture Series* presented an overview of contemporary art development in Southeast Asia within socio-political and cultural contexts drawn from the SB2013 works.

In addition, a new range of talks, *The Mapping Series*, jointly organised by the Singapore Art Museum and National Library Board, invited experts from diverse fields such as social sciences, cultural anthropology and arts and design, in discourses that encouraged multi-layered and multi-disciplinary exploration into themes and issues of SB2013.

Singapore-based artists such as ZNC, Speak Cryptic, Shirley Soh, Hazel Lim and Grace Tan organized workshops, where each session allowed participants to learn and create pieces based on each artist's Biennale work. Other special programmes included a two-day *SB2013 Symposium* aimed at contextualizing and investigating Asian biennales and Southeast Asian art practices.

Undergraduate Grace Oh, 25, commented: "I truly enjoyed the wide variety of works featured in SB2013, which showcased the different interpretations and responses to the title *If the World Changed*. Participating in the curator tours gave me a deeper insight and appreciation of the artworks, as opposed to me viewing the gallery on my own."

Vivian Tan, Head of Department Arts, at St. Joseph's Institution, 44, remarked: "Our school's curated tour of the Singapore Biennale during the closing weekend was very enjoyable and informative. The students left the museums with new inspirations and artistic references for their art works and renewed desires to think more deeply about their own artistic intentions. As first time visitors of the Biennale, my colleague and I were very impressed by both the quality and quantity of art works. My only regret is not to visit the show earlier, as I would definitely return for a second or third visit with my family and more friends. I would like to thank the Singapore Art Museum for showcasing such a high quality regional exhibition. It is truly an exhibition Singaporeans can be proud of."

SB2013 is organised by the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) and supported by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY), the National Arts Council (NAC) and the National Heritage Board (NHB).

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For more information, please read on:

Annex A – Additional Feedback from Visitors

For **press images**, please contact SAMteam@ogilvypr.com

About the Singapore Biennale

The Singapore Biennale was established in 2006 as the country's pre-eminent platform for international dialogue in contemporary art. It places Singapore's artists within a global context, and fosters productive collaborations with the international arts community. In this way, the Biennale provides new opportunities for local visual artists, arts organisations and businesses, and cultivates deeper public engagement with the arts. It complements achievements in other areas of arts and culture, collectively enhancing Singapore's international profile as a vibrant city in which to live, work and play. The 2006 and 2008 editions of the Biennale were organised by the National Arts Council. As with the 2011 edition, Singapore Biennale 2013 is organised by the Singapore Art Museum of the National Heritage Board, and supported by the National Arts Council.

About the Singapore Art Museum

The Singapore Art Museum (SAM) focuses on the creation of art in the present moment. It advocates and presents the contemporary art practices of Singapore, Southeast Asia and Asia, situating them within the global context of art making today. SAM has built up one of the most important collections of contemporary art from the region, and its programming aims to introduce new artistic practices and styles to the public, as well as nurturing discerning audiences for contemporary art. SAM is also organiser of the Singapore Biennale 2013 and the past edition in 2011.

About the National Arts Council, Singapore

NAC was set up to spearhead the development of the arts in Singapore while advancing the country's aspiration to be a distinctive global city for the arts. NAC's mission is to nurture the arts and make Singapore's rich and diverse culture an integral part of people's lives. Anchored on the twin strategies of excellence and engagement in the arts, NAC aims to build a vibrant arts sector by creating a conducive environment where the arts is accessible to all, and artistic talents have the necessary resources and capabilities to excel and achieve long-term sustainability. For more information on NAC's programmes and initiatives, please visit www.nac.gov.sg

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Singapore Biennale 2013 Additional Feedback from Visitors

- teamLab's *Peace Can Be Realised Even Without Order* was a strong favourite with visitors to SB2013. Archivist Don Shiau, 33, was no exception, "I wanted to stay there for days and study each one. Brilliant, uplifting, exciting, absolutely hypnotic."
- Artist Ashley Christudason, 31, loved that "this year's Biennale brought me to wine and dine alongside hyper-visual experiences that reshaped areas of my thinking and senses, leaving me with several moments spent in awe. It was simply eclectically-plethoric, a true celebration of artistic diversity."
- Architect Lim Huck Chin, 49, praised *The Mapping Series* saying this was precisely, "the kind of open discourse we need more of, excellent stuff, well done SAM and Biennale 2013!"
- Student Clara Lim, 19, enjoyed drawing on porcelain during the Biennale's closing weekend, and added that artist Hazel Lim was "very friendly and helpful" and she hopes to "attend more of such awesome events!"