

LEARNING GALLERY

EDUCATORS' RESOURCE

This resource is designed for educators with the aim of fostering meaningful discussions on contemporary art between them and their students.

TANG DA WU

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This educators' resource is designed for use with students before, during and after your visit to the Learning Gallery at Singapore Art Museum.

It shares key concepts and ideas associated with the exhibition to facilitate your visit and complements lessons conducted in school. This includes suggested guiding questions and activities that students may explore in the gallery, at home or in class, wherever relevant.

You may customise your visit by choosing your own preferred exhibition route.

For additional support, please refer to the additional notes for educators and facilitators when addressing the social and emotional learning aspects of the artworks during your discussion.

INTRODUCTION

LEARNING GALLERY

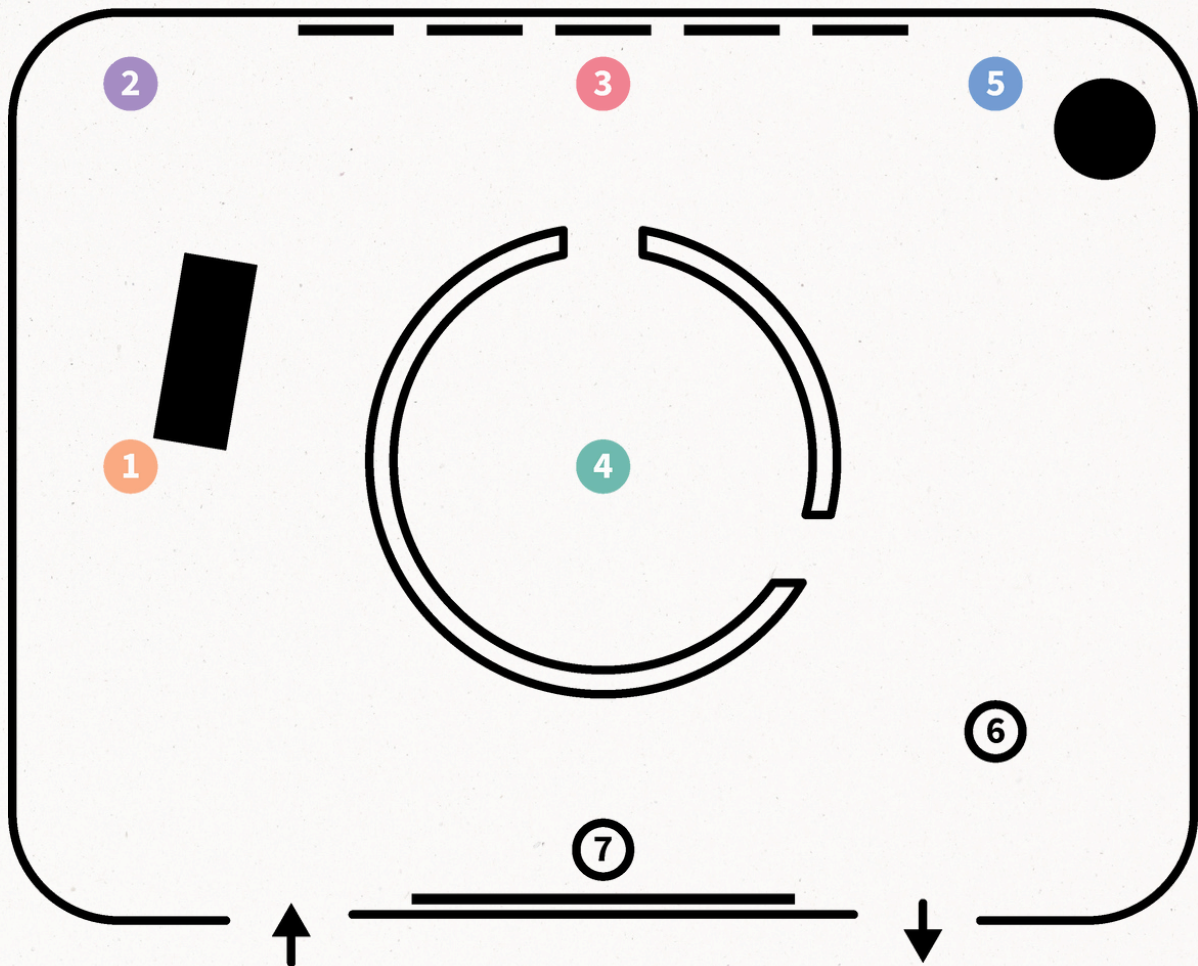
Childhood is a defining stage in all our lives. The foundations of our emotions, beliefs and memories take root during these formative years, with some receding within as we transit into adulthood.

The human impulse to create and appreciate art starts in childhood, and has transcended cultural and geographical boundaries from the moment humans first made their mark on the world. Both art and childhood are universal human experiences, which are characterised by freedom, curiosity and exploration.

The Learning Gallery invites you to embrace this spirit of exploration with a child-like lens. Allow yourself to approach the artworks curiously, unburdened and unafraid of the unknown. Learn about the artworks, artists and their attachments while engaging in both internal conversations and open dialogue.

Perhaps you may once again have an uninhibited relationship with the world: to look, feel and live fearlessly.

EXHIBITION LAYOUT



1 HAN SAI POR
Black Forest

2 JULIAN ABRAHAM "TOGAR"
A Gesture

3 NGUAN
Untitled, from the series Singapore

4 MIGRANT ECOLOGIES PROJECT
Lucy Davis and collaborators, Zai Tang, Kee Ya Ting
and Zachary Chan, with editing by Daniel Hui
*{if your bait can sing the wild ones will
come} Like Shadows Through Leaves*

5 TANG DA WU
深疤凰 SEMBAWANG

6 ACTIVITY CORNER
Cloud Library
Cloud Mailbox
RE-Material

7 INTERACTIVE WALL

ARTIST

TANG DA WU

b. 1943, Singapore

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Tang Da Wu is a pioneer of contemporary art in Singapore. His diverse practice includes performance, installation, painting and drawing, and often explores social and environmental themes.

In 1970, he staged his first solo exhibition of drawings and paintings at the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry with sponsorship from the Singapore Art Society.

He later enrolled in the Birmingham Polytechnic School of Fine Arts (now Birmingham Institute of Art and Design) where he majored in sculpture and graduated in 1974. In 1979, he returned to Singapore and began to create performance art. After practicing as an artist for a few years, Tang furthered his studies at Goldsmiths College, University of London and was conferred a Masters in Fine Arts in 1985.

In 1988, Tang founded Singapore's first artists' colony, The Artists Village (TAV). The collective promoted experimental art and was featured in a retrospective titled *The Artists Village: 20 Years On* at the Singapore Art Museum in 2008.

ARTWORK



Installation view of 深疤凰SEMBAWANG, 2013. Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum.



Installation view of 深疤凰SEMBAWANG, 2013. Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum.

深疤凰SEMBAWANG

2013

Mixed media sculpture,
dimensions variable

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

- 深疤凰SEMBAWANG mythologises The Artist Village (TAV), an artistic community of like-minded practitioners that Tang founded in 1988. TAV was originally located at 61-B Lorong Gambas in Sembawang, an area that seemed removed from the general populace at the time. It was a cherished home and a dynamic space for artists to develop experimental exhibitions and performances during this formative period of contemporary art in Singapore.
- The artwork's title, 《深疤凰》(Shēn bā huáng), is phonetically similar to the area's actual name, 三巴旺 (sān bā wàng). When read together, the Chinese characters in the title mean "the phoenix of the deep scars."

- The artwork is inspired by a large-tailed nightjar (*Caprimulgus macrurus*) — colloquially referred to as the “tok-tok” bird — which appeared nightly near TAV when the artist was still living there. In March 1990, the artist colony moved away from Sembawang due to urban redevelopment plans. Mourning the closure of TAV’s first home, Tang made up a story where the bird-like creature was crying and asking, “Where are my children?”
 - The creature’s beak points upwards and is open, as if it is crying or calling out. The throat of the creature is curved and separated into two parts bound by a loop-like structure that holds air, signifying how the creature breathed life into TAV. The avian is perched on a cluster of quadrilateral or diamond-shaped mirrors, which represent its tears as it emerges from the ashes of its rebirth.
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DID YOU KNOW?

- The avian creature in 深疤凰SEMBAWANG appears in two subsequent artworks, *Phoenix* (2019) and 3, 4, 5, *I Don’t Like Fine Art* (2023).
 - The creature in the artwork anatomically resembles a bird as it has the distinct ribs and breastbone of an avian, known as a keel or carina, to which the wing muscles are attached. The wings are held close to the body of the creature and each wing has been reduced to the shoulder and forearm ending in a single bone in the bird wing’s finger known as phalanges. It has two long tails with a heart-shaped ocelli at each end. Ocellated feathers feature an eye-like pattern known as ocelli, and are common in birds such as the peacock and turkey. Like feathers, each tail of the creature has a central shaft and a plumed portion that grows from the central shaft known as the vanes. The shaft of the creature has wavy lines, which represent the barbs that form the vane.
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PRE-VISIT QUESTIONS

- What is Sembawang's history? What are some unique aspects of Sembawang?

Brief overview: Sembawang is located in the northern part of Singapore and first appeared on a map, "Plan of the British Settlement of Singapore," in 1828. The area is named after the Sembawang tree (*Mesua ferruginea*), which is native to Southeast Asia. Sembawang once housed a British naval base and rubber plantations in the early 20th century. It has the only natural hot spring on mainland Singapore.

- What is the history of TAV and how has it contributed to the development of art in Singapore? You may wish to investigate the artistic practices of artists who are members of TAV.

Brief overview: TAV's members include internationally acclaimed artists such as Lee Wen, Amanda Heng and Zai Kuning. In 2008, Singapore Art Museum held the retrospective exhibition, *The Artist Village: 20 Years On*, which examined memories of TAV 20 years after its establishment.

VIEW AND DISCUSS



SEE

- What materials do you think this artwork is made of?
- What do you think the creature in this installation resembles?
- Look at the face and posture of the creature. What emotions does it convey?



THINK

- What do you think the creature is doing and why?
- What message do you think the artist is trying to convey with this artwork?
Do you think this artwork effectively shows the artist's intentions? Focus on the choices that the artist made when creating this artwork, as well as the event it was inspired by when you consider these questions.
- How does the title of the artwork add to your understanding of it?



WONDER

- Reflect on the symbolism in this artwork and its title. What message or themes might the artist be exploring?
- What stories or myths do you associate with this artwork?



REFLECTION

SELF-AWARENESS AND SELF-MANAGEMENT

- How does the artwork make you feel? What thoughts or memories does it bring up for you?
- How do you express your emotions through art or other creative outlets?
- The phoenix is a symbol of rebirth and overcoming challenges. Can you think of a time in your life when you overcame a challenge and emerged stronger?

SOCIAL AWARENESS

- How do you think the members of The Artists' Village felt when it closed? How would you feel in their shoes?
- The Artists' Village fostered a sense of community and collaboration. How important is it to have supportive communities in our lives?

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

- The Artists' Village was a space for collaboration and shared experiences. How can we build positive relationships in our own lives?
- If you were part of The Artists' Village, how would you collaborate with others? What strengths would you bring to the group?

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

- The artwork explores the tension between development and preserving the past. When change is inevitable, how can we make responsible decisions regarding our own communities?

POST-VISIT QUESTIONS

- Stories, including their characters and creatures, can be a source of inspiration for art. The phoenix is found in both Western and Eastern myths. In ancient Greece, the phoenix is a mythical bird that symbolises immortality and renewal, whereas in China, it is an immortal bird and the vessel for a harmonious blend of *yin* and *yang*, or male and female elements. Conduct research on artworks inspired by other mythological creatures or stories.
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SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES



ACTIVITY 1 – WHAT IF...

- Role Play: Pretend you are the creature in 深疤凰 SEMBAWANG. Stage a tableau (a motionless scene) that shows what might have occurred after the event that is depicted in the artwork. Upload a photograph of what you think happened next.

ACTIVITY 2 – DEBATE ROYALE

- Debate: Divide the class into two groups. Assign each group a “yes” or “no” stance. To prepare for the debate, the groups must write down as many arguments as they can think of that support or oppose their stance in relation to the debate questions below. Suggested debate questions include:
 - “Can nature and humans co-exist in Singapore?”
 - “Can nature and urban development co-exist in Singapore?”
 - “Is it important to have dedicated spaces for the artistic community in Singapore?”

ACTIVITY 3 – CITYSCAPE QUEST

- Encourage students to conduct research on the area that their school is in and the urban changes in the area, including any notable places and landmarks that have appeared or disappeared.
 - Look up art spaces in Singapore and organise a trip to visit one of these art spaces.
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FIND OUT MORE!

ARTIST

- National Library Board Singapore. (n.d.). “Tang da Wu.” Retrieved June 11, 2024, from <https://www.nlb.gov.sg/main/article-detail?cmsuuiid=03677f95-1db0-4a99-93e7-deecc971a07b>
- “Revisit Sembawang through the eyes of Tang Da Wu | The Straits Times.” (2023, July 19). <https://www.shanghartgallery.com/galleryarchive/feeds/detail/6956>
- “Tang Da Wu | The Guggenheim Museums and Foundation.” (n.d.). *The Guggenheim Museums and Foundation*. Retrieved June 11, 2024, from <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/tang-da-wu>
- Yong, C. (2024, January 10). “Singapore Art Week: Performance art rock star Tang Da Wu, 81, never tries to educate others with his art.” *The Straits Times*. <https://www.straitstimes.com/life/arts/singapore-art-week-performance-art-rock-star-tang-da-wu-81-never-tries-to-educate-others-with-his-art>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Kwok, K. W., & Lee, W. (Eds.). (2009). *The Artists Village: 20 Years on*. Singapore Art Museum and Artists Village.
 - “Sembawang Heritage Trail – Historical Landmarks of Sembawang.” (n.d.). Retrieved June 11, 2024, from <https://www.roots.gov.sg/places/places-landing/trails/Sembawang-Heritage-Trail---Historical-Landmarks-of-Sembawang>
 - Tan, S., & Ho, L. (2018). *After utopia: Revisiting the ideal in Asian contemporary art*. Singapore Art Museum.
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ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR EDUCATOR / FACILITATOR

If a student is feeling uncomfortable when talking about their emotions, you may consider the following suggested approaches:

1. ACKNOWLEDGE AND VALIDATE THEIR EMOTIONS

Let the participant know that you are concerned about their wellbeing.

- Verbal: “I hear you're feeling overwhelmed. It's okay to feel this way.”
- Non-verbal: Make eye contact, nod empathetically, and show that you're listening attentively.

2. ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Allow the participant to talk about their experiences (and beliefs) if they want to, but do not force them.

- Verbal: “What was that like for you?” or “Can you tell me more about...?”

3. PARAPHRASE TO CLARIFY

Restate what you believe they are saying in your own words to ensure you are understanding their experience correctly.

- Verbal: “It seems like you were frightened and worried.”

4. OFFER A BREAK

- Verbal: “Would you like to take a short break?”
- Non-verbal: Gesture towards a door or a quiet area.

5. CHECK-IN PRIVATELY

- Verbal: “If you'd like to talk about this further, we can have a private conversation later.”
- Non-verbal: Discreetly approach the participant after the session.

6. GROUNDING TECHNIQUES

- Verbal: “Can I offer you some grounding techniques? Perhaps focusing on your breath or the sensations in your body might help.”
- Non-verbal: Demonstrate deep breathing exercises or guide the participant through the technique.

7. ADJUST THE PACE

- Verbal: “Let's slow down for a moment. We can revisit this topic later if you're feeling more comfortable.”

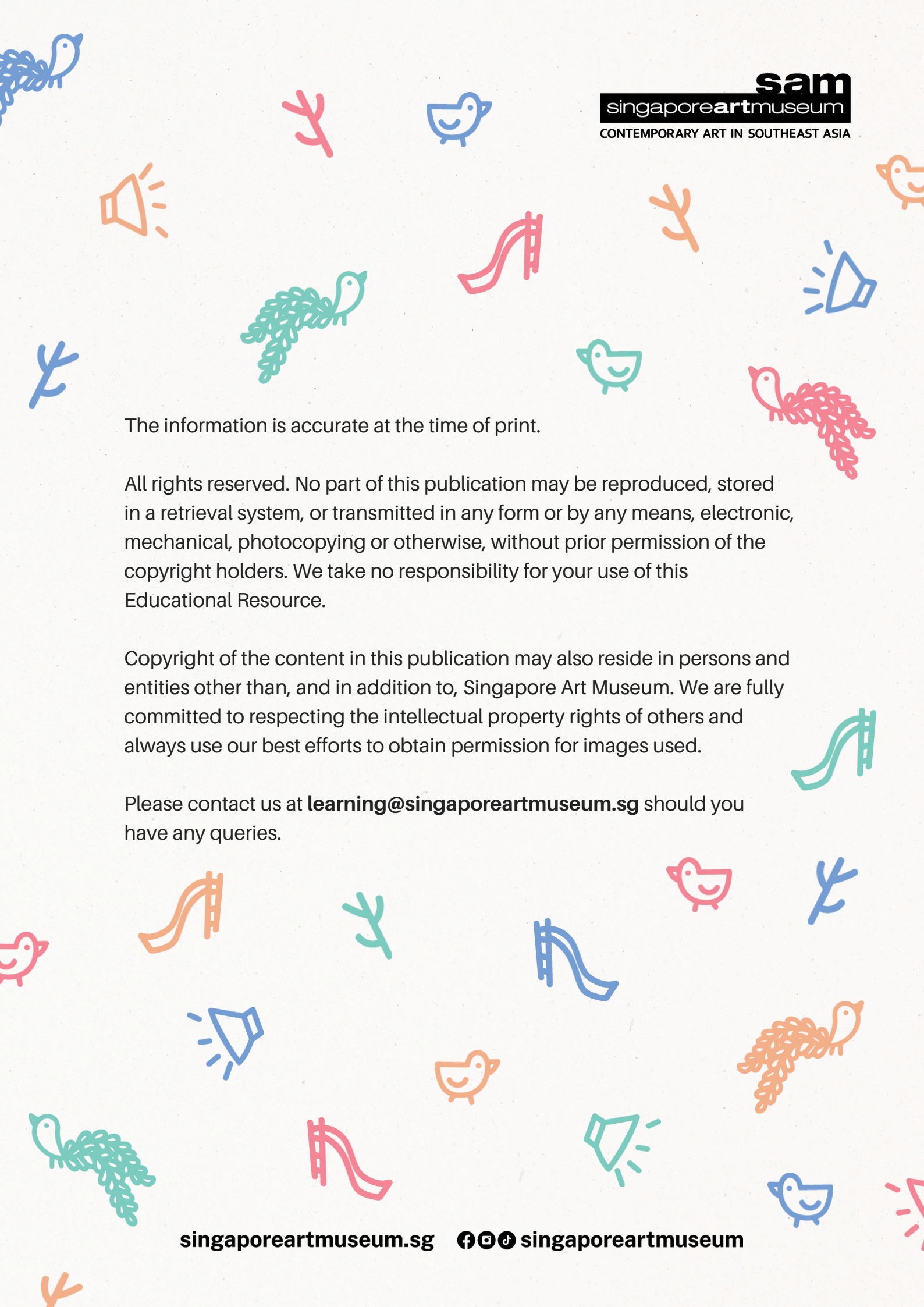
8. SHIFT THE FOCUS

- Verbal: “Perhaps we could shift our focus to a different topic for now and come back to this later.”

9. GET HELP IF NEEDED.

If the participant is in distress, do not hesitate to get help from a fellow teacher or school counsellor.

- Verbal: “I'm concerned about your well-being. Would you like me to get help from another teacher or a counsellor?”



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