

**singapore
biennale
2025**

**pure
intention**



ARTIST FOLIO

(For Educators)

Ming Wong

TERTIARY:

History

Social Studies

Visual Arts

Performing Arts

THE ARTIST

- Ming Wong is a Singapore-born, Berlin-based artist whose performance, videos, photography and installation works probe ideas of authenticity and originality.
- Reinterpreting world cinema and popular culture, his practice examines how culture, gender and identity are constructed and circulated.
- Recent presentations include: *AUUUUDITORIUM*, Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai (2024); *Signals: How Video Transformed the World*, MoMA, New York (2023); and *Wayang Spaceship*, Singapore Art Museum (2022).
- He has shown at the Biennale of Sydney (2024), Aichi Triennale (2022) and Seoul Mediacity Biennale (2021). Wong represented Singapore at the 53rd Venice Biennale (2009), receiving a Special Mention.
- His work, *Life of Imitation*, is in Tate Modern's collection.
- He is the 2025 artist-in-residence at the National Gallery, London.

THE ARTWORK



Installation view of Ming Wong's *Filem-Filem-Filem* (2008–2010), as part of Singapore Biennale 2025: *pure intention*. Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum.

Filem-Filem-Filem

2008-2010

Photographic series, comprising 50 “Polaroid”-type instant colour photographs
Collection of Singapore Art Museum

- Artist Ming Wong presents a series of 50 digital photographs in the ‘Polaroid’ or instant film format in *Filem-Filem-Filem*.
- *Filem* is a film in Malay.
- This body of work, a material trace of cinemas in Singapore and Malaysia, was developed out of the artist’s research into the pioneering multi-cultural film industry in pre-independence Singapore.

THE ARTWORK

- Testament of early periods of a burgeoning film industry, these cinemas were originally envisioned as 'dream palaces' for the local masses, full of grandeur and considered modernist progressive for its time.
- Cinemas then had a large screen with more than 100 seats, sometimes with elevated seating sections called 'circle seats' located on an upper deck. Cinemas no longer exist in the same way as a building with a single screen but multiple halls, each hall consisting of fewer seats called 'cineplexes' or 'multiplexes', often found nestled within shopping and recreation complexes.
- Today, these architectural forms of social and cultural entertainment have either been demolished or given a new lease of life as churches, supermarkets and even entertainment centres!
- In this work, the artist digitally composites and re-photographs each image. As the digital returns to the analogue, the image produces an unreal architectural presence and evokes a mixed sense of time and place.
- The cinemas were deliberately reduced in scale, and this reflects the current way of viewing the world through devices such as mobile phones.

THE ARTWORK

- Cinemas preceded the widespread proliferation of televisions in Singapore and Malaysia and it is representative of a communal spirit. Then, people watched movies in cinemas collectively, and now, it has given way to individualism and the viewing of film private viewing of these movies in their homes or on the move through their mobile devices.
- Cinema architecture is essential as it stands witness to Singapore's and Malaysia's cultural and social histories and urban development, and invite reflections on shifts in technology and consumption patterns. Hence, each photograph in this artwork can be viewed as a portrait with stories of its untold past glories, yet revealing its vulnerability in the present and future.

DID YOU KNOW?

Ming Wong repeats the word 'Filem' thrice in the artwork title. This repetition of a word or phrase in immediate succession is a literary device called epizeuxis. It is derived from the Greek word epizeugnum, meaning to join together. It creates emphasis and is perceived as more forceful, increasing the urgency to inspire and motivate the audience.

Apart from Cathay and Capitol Theatres and the demolished Ruby Theatre, one cinema featured in this artwork is the Majestic Theatre, now known as The Majestic. Located in Chinatown on Eu Tong Sen Street, it was initially a Cantonese opera house called Tien Yien Moh Toi Theatre (天演舞台) built in 1927 by tin mining and rubber magnate Eu Tong Sen. It became a movie theatre and continued to screen films until 1998.

Later, it was occupied by Singapore Pools and the Majestic Smart Seniors Applied Learning Centre (MSSALC). The Majestic's architecture, by architects Swan & Maclaren, is a unique blend of East and West, featuring dragons from Chinese folklore, along with its tiled façade that showcases scenes influenced by Cantonese opera, mixed with Western architectural sensibilities.

ACTIVITIES AND QUESTIONS

PRE-VISIT:

- Buildings are more than their foundation and structures. They are powerful storytellers that hold a deep, layered record of history, culture and experience. Do you agree with this statement and why?
- In recent years, cinema closures have made the news in Singapore. Why do you think cinemas are closing, and what are we losing when they disappear from our community?

DURING YOUR VISIT:

Thinking routines: Circle of viewpoints

1. In a group of three, each person chooses one of the perspectives below:
 - a. An elderly visitor 70 years and above.
 - b. An architecture student or a cinephile.
 - c. A young person of today.
2. Think and write down the following:
 - a. What do they see in the artwork?
 - b. What do they think or feel when they look at the artwork?
 - c. What questions do they have about the artwork?
3. Share with one another.

POST VISIT:

- Look closely at the architectural details of your school or any building of choice and “read” it as if it were a portrait of a person.

Instructions:

1. Divide students into groups of five. Each group should draw three columns on a piece of paper: 1) Face (façade of the building), 2) Body (structure of the building), and 3) Personality (trait, character or expression of the building).
 2. In the Face column, write down details about the front of the building, i.e. windows, doors, etc.
 3. In the Body column, they should describe the building’s overall shape and size.
 4. In the Personality column, observe details to describe the building as if it were a person.
 5. As an extension: imagine your friend as a façade of a building. What will the building look like?
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FIND OUT MORE:

ARTIST

- *Ming Wong: Life of Imitation*. Singapore: Singapore Art Museum (SAM), 2010.
- Wong, Ming. “Filem-Filem-Filem.” Ming Wong, last modified September 27, 2016. <http://www.mingwong.org/filem-filem-filem>.

FIND OUT MORE:

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- National Heritage Board. "Filem-Filem-Filem." *Roots.sg*. Last updated October 7, 2024. <https://www.roots.gov.sg/Collection-Landing/listing/1243999>.
- National Heritage Board. "Cinemas Over The Years: From Open-air Tents to State-of-the-art Movie Experience." *Roots.sg*. Last updated December 15, 2021. <https://www.roots.gov.sg/stories-landing/stories/cinemas-over-the-years/story>.
- Remember Singapore. "A Century of Cinemas, Movies and Blockbusters." *Remember Singapore*, August 2, 2012. <https://remembersingapore.org/2012/08/02/singapore-cinemas-history/>.
- Nasir, Heirwin Md, and Gladys Low. "Majestic Theatre." *Singapore Infopedia*. Last modified September 1, 2025. <https://www.nlb.gov.sg/main/article-detail?cmsuuid=8ea083a8-f59c-4ca7-815f-b8c114ddf51a>.
- National Heritage Board. "The Majestic." *Roots.sg*. Last updated September 21, 2021. <https://www.roots.gov.sg/places/places-landing/Places/surveyed-sites/The-Majestic>.
- Sew, Teng Kwok. *Chinatown*. Oral history interview, Accession Number 002209. Interview by Yeo Loo Feng. Oral History Centre (Singapore), National Archives of Singapore. Accessed September 29, 2025. https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/oral_history_interviews/record-details/1e8a89ab-1160-11e3-83d5-0050568939ad?keywords=singapore%20cinema%20majestic&keywords-type=all