

Media Release

For immediate release

The President's Young Talents 2018 at Singapore Art Museum

*Highlighting a new generation of Singaporean contemporary artists
before SAM's buildings close for a major revamp*



24 September 2018, Singapore – The Singapore Art Museum presents the *President's Young Talents 2018* exhibition at SAM at 8Q from 4 October 2018 to 27 January 2019, featuring five Singaporean contemporary artists – **Yanyun Chen, Weixin Quek Chong, Debbie Ding, Hilmi Johandi** and **Zarina Muhammad**. This exhibition will be the last held within the museum's premises before both buildings close for a major revamp, and SAM undertakes off-site and pop-up exhibitions in partner and neighbourhood venues.

Inaugurated in 2001 by SAM, the *President's Young Talents* is the nation's only mentoring, commissioning and award programme. It recognises promising Singaporean artists aged 35 and below, whose practices chart new dimensions in contemporary art. Over the years, it has seen numerous artists go on to develop outstanding work in and beyond Singapore. This 7th edition of the *President's Young Talents* seeks to achieve greater artistic and curatorial growth for the artists involved and curator-mentors respectively, maintaining its core focus to nurture emerging artists. The five artists will present newly commissioned artworks that span painting, sculpture, performance and new media, developed under the guidance of a curator-mentor panel made up of David Chan, Roger Nelson, Grace Tan, Jason Wee and Zaki Razak.

Dr. June Yap, Director of Curatorial, Programmes and Publication at the Singapore Art Museum says, "Central to the *President's Young Talents* programme is the recognition and presentation of significant aesthetic practices of our young and emerging artists. But as an initiative of a contemporary art museum, it goes beyond that. A contemporary art museum is not merely a space for the exhibition of the new, the critical and the interesting, it is also where these aesthetic expressions can be examined in relation to a history of art and art-making. Since its inauguration, the *President's Young Talents* has brought to the public many promising artists, artists who have gone on to achieve much, and who have expanded the scope of aesthetic development. It is for this reason that we celebrate and congratulate our young artists, for forging ahead and for taking us with them in this journey. We are also grateful to the curator-mentors – a number of whom are

themselves artists – for lending their experience and expertise to these young artists, spurring them on to new heights.”

Commissioned artworks

The newly commissioned artworks by the five artists are diverse in concepts and mediums, spanning across disciplines of painting, sculpture, performance and new media.

- **Yanyun Chen's *The scars that write us*** adopts the keloid scar as its reference and offers a narrative on wounds and scars, and those that bear them. The work unfolds in three types of spatial experiences – near, far, and wide. The sense of proximity alludes to the complex relationships between the physical marking, the body, and the person who bears the keloid. The installation also endeavours to provide a space of contemplation for those who live with the ordeal of scars – the physical, and otherwise. Of marks and scars, illness and injury, mind and body, this is an installation that speaks of the most personal of experiences that every person holds.
- Shaped by the concept of the contingency plan, ***sft crsh ctrl*** by **Weixin Quek Chong** unfolds, unfurls, suspends, and drapes in ways that evoke a sense of precarity and the notion of non-occurrence. An installation of ‘surfaces’ as explored through material form and transformation, it arouses the feeling of unease and uncertainty, challenging one to disengage from their instinct to rationalise and in doing so reveals the complexity of being dependent on logic.
- In ***Soil Works***, **Debbie Ding** unearths and isolates units of the composite excavated from concealed areas under expressways, overhead bridges, road triangles, carparks – public spaces which are usually overlooked as one travels through Singapore – and proposes, in her words, “a series of artistic investigations into soil in Singapore and its visibility and invisibility”. Through this five-part installation, she considers the strategies of researching the physicality of soil in Singapore by highlighting both its perceptible and less perceivable qualities. In doing so, she destabilises the concept of the scientific laboratory by staging her own multi-station ‘testing’ gallery.
- **Hilmi Johandi's *An Exposition*** engages with the local history and collective memory of Singapore. His work tells the story of the defunct ‘World(s)’ – New World, Great World and Gay World (formerly Happy World) – through fragments of material and memory. The schemas of these bygone era amusement parks are used to introduce an assemblage of fragmentary elements, ranging from wooden sculptures and silent animated videos, to standees and mounted printed vinyls featuring images and scenes captured at the ‘World(s)’, attempting to establish a speculative dialogue that traces the systems of production, consumption, pleasures and entertainment of these ‘World(s)’. Whilst it is immersive, this installation also reminds one of the void that exists within the theatricality of set designs and amusement parks.

- Historic and mythic, ***Pragmatic Prayers for the Kala at the Threshold*** by **Zarina Muhammad** takes the *penunggu* or ‘guardian at the gate’ as its departure point and charts out a space that traverses beyond the physical. According to her, her work aims to “disrupt and irrupt time and move beyond the single narrative of place”. Divided into three distinct realms – the hills, land and sea – each designation comprises of a selection of material objects and modes of presentation that reflect and respond to the history, culture and memories of the zones they are housed in. These objects act as coordinates in which to map the histories and paths that the spirits of these realms may have resided and roamed in.

Mentorship

A key aspect of the *President’s Young Talents* exhibition is the process of mentorship. A mentoring committee, comprising past participating artists of the *President’s Young Talents* programme and independent curators, selected the finalists for this edition. Artists were each paired with a mentor who, with their extensive knowledge, experience and involvement in the arts, guided them as they developed their artworks over the six-month mentorship period.

Grand Prize and People’s Choice Award

This year’s *President’s Young Talents* exhibition carries two awards – the Grand Prize, awarded by an independent jury which will include members from SAM; and a People’s Choice Award, the result of which is determined by the artwork that receives the most public votes on-site. Winners of the Grand Prize and People’s Choice Award will be announced during the awards ceremony on 29 November, and will receive a cash prize of \$20,000 and \$5,000 respectively.

The *President’s Young Talents 2018* is organised by the Singapore Art Museum and supported by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. The exhibition is on view at SAM at 8Q from 4 October 2018 to 27 January 2019, and visitors may cast their votes for the People’s Choice Award until 25 November 2018. The exhibition will also be accompanied by a range of programmes, including artist performances, theatrical and music responses to the artworks, curator tours, talks and artist-led workshops.

The 2018 edition of the *President’s Young Talents* is supported by Ascendas-Singbridge Gives Foundation.

For more information, please read:

Annex A – Exhibition Synopsis: *President’s Young Talents 2018*

Annex B – Artwork Descriptions and Artist Biographies

Annex C – Accompanying Programmes for *President’s Young Talents 2018*

Images of artists and artworks may be downloaded at bit.ly/Media-PYT2018

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www.singaporeartmuseum.sg

www.facebook.com/singaporeartmuseum

www.instagram.com/singaporeartmuseum

www.youtube.com/SAMtelly

About the Singapore Art Museum

Singapore Art Museum is a contemporary art museum which focuses on art-making and art-thinking in Singapore, Southeast Asia and Asia, encompassing a worldwide perspective on contemporary art practice. SAM advocates and makes accessible interdisciplinary contemporary art through research-led and evolving curatorial practice.

Since it opened in January 1996, SAM has built up one of the most important collections of contemporary art from the region. It seeks to seed and nourish a stimulating and creative space in Singapore through exhibitions and public programmes, and to deepen every visitor's experience. These include outreach and education, research and publications, as well as cross-disciplinary residencies and exchanges.

SAM occupies two buildings: the old St Joseph's Institution on Bras Basah Road, built in 1855 and now a National Monument; and SAM at 8Q, a conservation building across the road on Queen Street that was the old Catholic High School. The museum building along Bras Basah Road is currently closed in preparation for a major building revamp, with museum programming continuing at SAM at 8Q and partner venues such as the National Library, Singapore.

SAM was the venue organiser of the Singapore Biennale in 2011, becoming the main organiser in 2013 and 2016. SAM will continue to organise the next two editions in 2019 and 2022. SAM was incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee on 13 November 2013, operating under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth.

To find out more, visit www.singaporeartmuseum.sg

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Annex A

Exhibition Synopsis: *President's Young Talents 2018*

Dates: 4 October 2018 – 27 January 2019

Opening Hours: 10am – 7pm (Saturdays to Thursdays), 10am to 9pm (Fridays)

Venue: SAM at 8Q, 8 Queen Street, Singapore 188535

Admission Charges:

Standard*	
Adults	\$6
Students & senior citizens (with valid ID)	\$3
Children under six	Free
Groups of 20 or more	20% off standard adult admission charges
Singaporeans and permanent residents	Free

* Free admission to SAM every Friday from 6.00pm to 9.00pm and on Open House days

The *President's Young Talents* is Singapore's premier and only mentoring, commissioning and award programme, which recognises promising artists aged 35 and below, whose practices chart new dimensions in Singapore contemporary art. Previous *President's Young Talents* include Boo Junfeng, Heman Chong, Charles Lim, Donna Ong, Tan Pin Pin and Vertical Submarine, to name a few, all of whom have gone on to develop outstanding work in and beyond Singapore.

Inaugurated by the Singapore Art Museum in 2001 to promote critically engaged practices through discourse and experimentation, the 2018 edition of *President's Young Talents* seeks to afford greater artistic and curatorial growth for the artists involved and curator-mentors respectively. Invited curator-mentors, ranging from past participating artists to independent curators, will form a curatorial committee to mentor artists for the programme. An independent jury – which will include members from SAM – will be convened to award the *President's Young Talents 2018* prize.

Artists

This edition's artists are Yanyun Chen, Weixin Quek Chong, Debbie Ding, Hilmi Johandi and Zarina Muhammad. Their newly commissioned artworks that span painting, sculpture, performance and new media will be on view at SAM at 8Q till 27 January 2019, and are in the running for the Grand Prize and People's Choice Award, which will be presented at an awards ceremony on 29 November 2018.

Curator-mentors

The Curatorial Committee members this year are: David Chan, Roger Nelson, Zaki Razak, Grace Tan and Jason Wee. The SAM curatorial team led by Andrea Fam, facilitated the selection and curating of the *President's Young Talents* exhibition.

Annex B **Artwork Descriptions and Artist Biographies**

Yanyun Chen

The scars that write us

2018

Charcoal, chalk, gold leaf, steel plates (set of 10) and steel sheets (set of 6)

Steel plates 30 x 30 cm each; steel sheets 180 x 80 cm each

Collection of the Artist

Singapore Art Museum Commission

The scars that write us adopts the keloid scar as its reference and offers a narrative on wounds and scars, and those that bear them.

Entering into a dark, quietened space, a visitor's first perceives rather than sees the work directly, evoking a sense of anticipation, curiosity, and uncertainty for what lies ahead, obscured.

The work unfolds in three types of spatial experiences: near, far, and wide. The sense of proximity – or distance – alludes to the complex relationships between the physical marking, the body, and the person who bears the keloid. The installation also endeavours to provide a space of contemplation for those who live with the ordeal of scars – the physical, and otherwise.

Of marks and scars, illness and injury, mind and body, ***The scars that write us*** is an installation that speaks of the most personal of experiences that every person holds.

Yanyun Chen (b. 1986, Singapore) is a visual artist and lecturer at Yale-NUS College. Her drawing practice deconstructs our role as witness-of-decay – depicting wilting flowers as a manifestation of time passing; researching nudity embroiled in historical spectacles and censorship; investigating the fictions and operations of etymology; and reading scars on skin. Grounded in stories and philosophical readings, her works incorporate a blend of classical Eastern and Western drawing techniques.

Chen is a PhD candidate at The European Graduate School in Switzerland/Malta, where she obtained her Masters in Communications. She has trained in the Czech Republic, Denmark, Singapore and Sweden, and was awarded the Special Jury Prize at the 15th Japan Media Arts Festival (2012). Her published works include *50 Drawing Exercises*, *Tracing Etymology: Origin and Time*; *Monsters and Demons* and *It's Fiction*. She manages illustration and animation studio Piplatchka, and co-founded Delere Press. She lives and works in Singapore.

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Weixin Quek Chong

sft crsh ctrl

2018

Silk twill, latex, wood, silicone, vinyl, faux fur, paper, screens, aluminium and stainless steel

Dimensions variable

Singapore Art Museum Commission

Collection of the Artist

Shaped by the concept of the contingency plan, ***sft crsh ctrl*** by Weixin Quek Chong invites visitors to engage with a range of objects and series of material encounters that seem to evade traditional inquiry. The work unfolds, unfurls, suspends, and drapes in ways that challenge the visitor's understanding and expectation of materials. Its components evoke a sense of precarity and the notion of non-occurrence. It is an installation of 'surfaces' as explored through material form and transformation, and challenges the viewer to disengage from their instinct to rationalise. ***sft crsh ctrl*** guides the visitor towards feelings of unease and uncertainty, and in doing so reveals the complexity of being dependent on logic.

Weixin Quek Chong (b. 1988, Singapore) is a visual artist whose practice explores the materiality of human experience and existence, and the relationships between the digital, organic and aesthetic. The effects and methods of manipulating images across materials are core to her practice.

She received her MFA from the Royal College of Art in London with a specialisation in printmaking, and was a recipient of the NAC Overseas Arts Scholarship (Postgraduate) (2012) and the Tan Ean Kiam Postgraduate Scholarship. Previously an artist-in-residence at the NTU Centre of Contemporary Art in Singapore, her works have been exhibited in Carrara, Istanbul, London, Paris, Santiago, Seoul, Taipei, Vienna and Yogyakarta. She lives and works in Singapore, the UK and Spain.

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Debbie Ding

Soil Works

2018

Mixed media installation

Dimensions variable

Collection of the Artist

Singapore Art Museum commission

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, soil is a 'biologically active, porous medium, that has developed in the uppermost layer of Earth's crust'. Yet what *is* soil? In ***Soil Works***, Debbie Ding unearths and isolates units of the composite excavated from concealed areas under expressways, overhead bridges, road triangles, carparks – public spaces which are usually overlooked as one travels through Singapore – and proposes, in her words, “a series of artistic investigations into soil in Singapore and its visibility and invisibility”.

The installation is presented in five parts: “Red Landscape”, “Home without a Shelter”, “Topsoil”, “Sand Weight”, and “Soil Column”. Each ‘station’ beckons the visitor to observe soil in a range of alternative investigative approaches.

Through ***Soil Works***, Ding considers the strategies of researching the physicality of soil in Singapore by highlighting both its perceptible and less perceivable qualities. In doing so, she destabilises the concept of the scientific laboratory by staging her own multi-station ‘testing’ gallery.

Debbie Ding (b. 1984, Singapore) is a visual artist and technologist who researches and explores technologies of perception through personal investigations and experimentation. She uses prototyping as a strategy for artistic production, and to iteratively explore potential dead-ends, in the pursuit of knowledge. This has led to a series of archive and map-based works under the moniker ‘Singapore Psychogeographical Society’, as well as computer-aided investigations into archaeological and historical finds.

Ding received a BA in English Literature from the National University of Singapore, and as a recipient of the NAC Arts Scholarship (Postgraduate), an MA in Design Interactions from the Royal College of Art, London. She has presented in Singapore at The Substation (2010, 2012, 2015, 2017), NUS Museum (2016), the Singapore Biennale (2016) and National Museum of Singapore (2017). She has exhibited her work internationally in France, Germany and the UK. She lives and works in Singapore.

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Hilmi Johandi

An Exposition

2018

Oil on canvas, three-channel video, digital print on vinyl sticker mounted on wood, synthetic polymer paint, plywood and mild steel

Installation: dimensions variable; video: 16:9, colour, silent

Singapore Art Museum Commission

Collection of the Artist

An Exposition tells the story of the defunct 'World(s)' – New World, Great World and Gay World (formerly Happy World) – through fragments of material and memory. The schemas of these bygone era amusement parks are used to introduce audiences to an assemblage of fragmentary elements. In doing so, Hilmi attempts to establish a speculative dialogue that traces the systems of production, consumption, pleasures and entertainment of these 'World(s)'.

Visitors are welcomed to traverse a space marked out by components that together appear to resemble a deconstructed theatrical set. These range from wooden sculptures and silent animated videos, to standees and mounted printed vinyls featuring images and scenes captured at the 'World(s)'.

The installation is immersive whilst reminding the viewer of the void that exists within the theatricality of set designs and amusement parks. In a presentation of decontextualised signs and symbols, ***An Exposition*** engages with the local history and collective memory of Singapore.

Hilmi Johandi (b. 1987, Singapore) primarily works with painting and explores interventions with different mediums that are associated within the domain of framing, fragmentation (deconstruction) and compression (reconstruction). His explorations set in the context of Singapore, range from the familiar to symbolic motifs. He composes and synthesises images from film, archival footages and photographs into a fragmented montage that hints at the social effects of rapid development, and the personal desires and contempt of those who embrace modernisation.

Hilmi has been involved in exhibitions in Japan, London, New York, Paris, Singapore and Thailand. He was a recipient of the NAC Arts Scholarship (Postgraduate) (2017), LASALLE Scholarship (2017) and the Goh Chok Tong Youth Promise Award. He lives and works in Singapore.

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Zarina Muhammad

Pragmatic Prayers for the Kala at the Threshold

2018

Bamboo, sandalwood, clay, stone, turmeric powder, sandalwood powder, saffron, nine grains and spices, rose water, incense, glass jars and paper

Dimensions variable

Collection of the Artist

Singapore Art Museum commission

Pragmatic Prayers for the Kala at the Threshold by Zarina Muhammad takes the *penunggu* or 'guardian at the gate' as its departure point and charts out a space that traverses beyond the physical.

The installation is laid out as three distinct divisions that serve as the hills, land and sea of Bukit Larangan, Bras Basah, as well as Kallang and the coastal areas of Singapore, respectively. Within each designation are a selection of material objects and modes of presentation that reflect and respond to the history, culture and memories of the zones they are housed in. These objects act as coordinates in which to map the histories and paths that the spirits of these realms may have resided and roamed in.

Historic and mythic, ***Pragmatic Prayers for the Kala at the Threshold*** aims to, in the artist's words, "disrupt and irrupt time and move beyond the single narrative of place".

Zarina Muhammad (b. 1982, Singapore) is an artist, educator and writer whose practice is deeply entwined with her decade-long multidisciplinary research on the shapeshifting forms and cultural translations pertaining to Southeast Asian ritual magic and its mythological roots. In the various incarnations of her work, she is particularly interested in the broader contexts of myth-making, gender-based archetypes, and the region's tenuous and tentative relationship to mysticism and the immaterial against the dynamics of global modernity.

She has presented her work in Australia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore and Thailand. She lives and works in Singapore.

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Annex C

Accompanying Programmes for President's Young Talents 2018

A series of programmes will take place throughout the exhibition period, where visitors can further engage with the ideas and concepts explored in the artworks. More information may be found at www.singaporeartmuseum.sg

[PERFORMANCES]

Dictation 3.1 by Weixin Quek Chong

Saturday, 20 October 2018

3 – 3.25pm & 3.35 – 4pm

SAM at 8Q, Gallery 4.11

Free with museum admission

Enter into a communicative state of mutual suspense as text is shared through a series of dictation exercises between artist Weixin Quek Chong and museum visitors.

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Artwork response: Gamelan Performance

Thursday, 26 October 2018, 7pm

SAM at 8Q, Gallery 1.11

Free with museum admission

Explore themes in Zarina Muhammad's artwork, such as that of honouring ancestors and offering gratitude to the land, through Central Javanese songs performed by Indonesia's Singa Nglara Gamelan Ensemble, featuring Soerya Soemirat.

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Artwork response: *KAMI*

Friday, 25 January 2019

8 – 8.30pm

SAM at 8Q, Gallery 1.11

Free with museum admission

A play by theatre-maker Irfan Kasban, *KAMI* is about a wandering deity's journey to self-discovery. A response to Zarina Muhammad's artwork, the questions explored include: what is our current day relationship to the land, the otherworldly, to the seen and unseen? Do ghosts and gods exist because we believe in them? Is their survival dependent on the frequency in which we fervently speak of and to them?

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***Pragmatic Prayers for the Kala at the Threshold* by Zarina Muhammad**

Sunday, 27 January 2019

SAM at 8Q

Free with museum admission

Delve deeper into Zarina Muhammad's artwork, *Pragmatic Prayers for the Kala at the Threshold*, with a closing artwork performance.

[TOURS]

Artist and Curator Tour

Saturday, 6 October, 7.30pm

SAM at 8Q

\$20 (Tickets available at SAM at 8Q and ARACTIX)

Join a closed-door tour of the exhibition with the *President's Young Talents 2018* artists and SAM curator Andrea Fam.

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A Tour of the Atmospheres and Microclimates of the Civic District, Singapore

Saturday, 13 October 2018

4 – 5.30pm

SAM at 8Q, Lobby

\$15 (Tickets available at SAM at 8Q and ARACTIX)

Explore the microclimates of urban spaces with artist Debbie Ding in this talk and tour of the civic district. Using the exaggerated solar environment of *Soil Works* as a starting point, learn about the spatial apparatus of atmospheres, as well as museological and air-conditioning systems in our environments.

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Seniors Day Out: Kopi, Teh and Contemporary Art

January 2019

SAM at 8Q

Discover how contemporary art is for everyone with these intergenerational and multilingual tours led by students from Nanyang Girls' High School. Specially catered for seniors and focusing on artworks referencing Singaporean places and history, these multilingual tours include refreshments.

[ARTIST TALKS & PANEL DISCUSSIONS]

Artist Talk: Yanyun Chen on working with scars

Tuesday, 30 October 2018, 6pm – 7.30pm

SAM at 8Q, Moving Image Gallery (Level 2)

\$10 (Tickets available at SAM at 8Q and ARACTIX)

Hear *The scars that write us* artist Yanyun Chen discuss the thinking and working process, material investigations and the stories that emerged while working with keloids and scars in this in-depth artist talk.

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In Conversation: Skin, Scars and Trauma

Wednesday, 23 January 2019, 7:30pm – 8:30pm

SAM at 8Q, Moving Image Gallery (Level 2)

\$15 (Tickets available at SAM at 8Q and ARACTIX)

Join this panel discussion with artist Yanyun Chen, writer Jeremy Fernando, and art therapist, as they discuss the relationship between keloids, scars, trauma, images, narratives, and healing.

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President's Young Talents Specialist Talks

Various dates in November and December 2018

SAM at 8Q

Discover the artistic journeys and current projects of alumni artists from the *President's Young Talents* programme, which is now in its 7th edition.

[WORKSHOPS]

Artist-led Workshops

Various dates
SAM at 8Q

Gain a deeper appreciation of contemporary art as you meet the *President's Young Talents 2018* artists. Through these workshops, discover their artistic processes, ways of thinking and choice of materials and medium. More information available at www.singaporeartmuseum.sg

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Kneading Kala: an artist-led workshop on the Genius Loci and shapeshifting stories on space

Saturday, 24 November 2018

2 – 3pm

Workshop Space 2, Level 2, SAM at 8Q

\$20 (*Tickets available at SAM at 8Q and ARACTIX*)

In this workshop led by Zarina Muhammad, participants will be invited to write a letter or create little effigies in remembrance of the stories of imagined, mythic or historical guardians of the hills, land and seas.

Suitable for ages 16 and up. Participants are welcomed to bring additional materials.