



SINGAPORE
BIENNALE
2011
OPEN HOUSE

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Singapore Biennale 2011 welcomed 912,897 visitors to its *Open House*

After two months of warm hospitality and friendly exchanges over contemporary art, the Singapore Biennale 2011 (SB 2011) closed its doors yesterday on 15 May 2011. Organised by the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) and supported by the National Arts Council, this third edition, led by Artistic Director Matthew Ngui along with curators Russell Storer and Trevor Smith, attracted a record 912,897 visitors, surpassing its set target of 650,000.

This total 912,897 visitor figure is made up of 196,028 indoor or admitted visitors, 696,709 outdoor visitors at *The Merlion Hotel* and National Museum of Singapore (NMS) Rotunda, as well as 20,160 visitors to other auxiliary and pre-opening events of the Biennale. As one admission ticket would allow visitors to enter both SAM and NMS, while visitors enjoy unlimited entry to the Old Kallang Airport and Marina Bay venues, the total visitor figure therefore includes people who would have visited more than one Biennale venue or made multiple visits. Nonetheless, the healthy visitor numbers reflects the strong interest in contemporary art in Singapore.

The total figure comprised indoor visitors or admissions to the four Biennale venues: SAM (including SAM at 8Q), NMS, Old Kallang Airport and Marina Bay; outdoor visitors at Tatzu Nishi's *The Merlion Hotel* at Marina Bay and at Sopheap Pich's commissioned work *Compound* at NMS's Rotunda; and attendance at other auxiliary and pre-opening events such as the Pot Luck series of presentations by artists and curators in 2010, students who participated year-long in the

Self-Portrait, Our Landscape (SPOL) project and visitors to the SPOL showcase during the Istana Art Event in 2010.

Mr. Tan Boon Hui, Director of SAM comments, “We are pleased with the success of this year’s edition and are encouraged by the support and interest in ‘Open House’. The strong indoor visitorship in particular, reflects how the Singapore Biennale has been able to attract a captive audience or visitors who came specially to experience the works. As an institution presenting and advocating contemporary art practice of Singapore and the region, besides facilitating Singapore’s engagement with artists from around the world, we note that SB2011 has also elevated the practice of the nine local Biennale artists. SB2011 has been another step up in reinforcing the international profile of Singapore as a leading destination for contemporary art. On behalf of the museum, Artistic Director and curatorial team, I would like to thank all artists, volunteers sponsors, partners, visitors and the media for their support.”

Over the nine week period, the large scale exhibition offered a visual feast of diverse contemporary art practices from 30 countries. Presenting the highest proportion of commissioned pieces, people in Singapore were treated to a number of brand new site specific works by both leading and rising artists in the region and from around the world. Of note were major works created in response to Singapore as a home, city, and international port: from crowd favourites like Tatzu Nishi’s iconic *The Merlion Hotel*, to works which called for community participation such as Martha Rosler’s *Proposed Helsinki Garden at the Singapore Biennale*, Arin Rungjang’s *Unequal Exchange / No Exchange Can Be Unequal*, Ise’s *Secret Affair*, Koh Nguang How’s *Artists in the News*, as well as interactive video works such as Charles Sandison’s *Through a Glass Darkly* and Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s *Frequency and Volume*. With other notable works such as Elmgreen & Dragset’s *Deutsche Scheune / German Barn*, and Michael Lee’s *Office Orchitect*, this year’s Biennale captured the imagination of the public and inspired debates and conversations.

Mr. Matthew Ngui, Artistic Director, Singapore Biennale 2011, says, “While working on the complex and diverse subject of artists’ processes, the curatorial team (comprising myself, Russell Storer and Trevor Smith) collaborated with the participating artists and organisers to produce a cutting-edge , precisely thought-out and installed exhibition of international contemporary art. Amongst others, world-renowned artists included in SB2011 were Candice Breitz, Phil Collins, Martin Creed, Elmgreen and Dragset, Sheela Gowda, Michael Lin, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Navin Rawanchaikul, Martha Rosler, Charles Sandison, Superflex, Ryan Trecartin, Danh Vo and Ming

Wong. The exhibition was supported by an equally rigorous and sharply designed catalogue which has been well received internationally and available from the opening of SB2011.

“The curatorial team of SB2011 consciously developed a relationship between the artworks and the local venues. In doing so, viewers were encouraged to see art not in isolation but related to their own environment and architecture. In particular, we managed to open up Old Kallang Airport, while casting the participating museums and the Merlion in new light. We encouraged the artists to make their work relevant to places and communities of people, and a significant number of new commissioned works were installed for the Singapore Biennale. This opportunity is especially relevant for the South East Asian artists (including our nine Singaporean artists), who on the whole, face less opportunity for this than their counterparts in Europe and America. A comprehensive two day programme of artist talks facilitated by regional and international curators formed the backbone of the activities at the opening weekend, where the Singaporean public and invited guests could hear directly from the artists about their creative processes and thinking. *Self-Portrait, Our Landscape* is a major outreach project for over 40 schools in Singapore that was devised by the curatorial team.

“These achievements not only solidify Singapore’s image as an international hub but even more importantly, that Singaporeans were able to experience a major cutting-edge international exhibition of contemporary art as good as any other on this planet in their own country. Curatorially, SB2011 remains generally free from the shackles of any specific individual institutional agenda and this signifies a maturation of Singaporean society into a more open and inclusive place to live in, which I hope will continue,” Mr. Ngui concludes.

OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

True to the exhibition’s ‘Open House’ title and in line with SAM’s objective of educating and cultivating an appreciation of contemporary art practices, this year’s Biennale introduced a number of new initiatives to attract and engage the public in the process of art-making. These include community and education programmes from the extensive *Self-Portrait, Our Landscape* project which saw over 3,000 students from 40 schools explored their own identity and place within the community, to the Young Art Writers programme that connected 81 interested youths with established writers and curators, so they could learn to respond thoughtfully to artworks in writing.

On top of free guided tours in various languages, a specially designed SB2011 audio guide and downloadable smartphone application allowed visitors to delve deeper into artists’ motivations

while newly introduced youth text offered easy to understand artwork descriptions that helped contextualise the works, giving visitors the opportunity to better enjoy the art they viewed. In addition, to encourage families to enjoy the exhibition together, nine Family Days Out with free activities were organised at the Old Kallang Airport on Sundays and Public Holidays from 3 April to 15 May, while educational school tours, peer-led guide programmes and on-site workshops were also arranged for students throughout the exhibition period. An Education Kit for teachers and activity sheets for students were also introduced for the first time so that they could enjoy their Biennale visit in a fun, interactive way.

PARALLEL EVENTS

Public and private arts organisations also took advantage of SB2011 to organise a series of independent events that together presented a more holistic and comprehensive visual art experience for all visitors. This included a key parallel exhibition, *Negotiating Home, History and Nation: Two decades of contemporary art in Southeast Asia 1991–2011* held at SAM. There were also showcases at LASALLE College of the Arts, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, NUS Museum, Post Museum, The Substation, Japan Creative Centre, Singapore Tyler Print Institute, Esplanade's Jendela Gallery and Objectifs. These parallel shows helped increase the impact and scale of the Biennale as an event, and were opportunities to draw attention to and raise the profile of Singapore and Southeast Asian artists.

STRONG SUPPORT

SB2011 received strong support from the private and public sectors. In all, 29 organisations came forth to provide some \$1.5 million in cash and in-kind sponsorship. Close to 160 local and international media personnel attended the Vernissage weekend, including many foreign journalists from Asia, Europe and the US. Aside from traditional media coverage, the online community also lent their support through numerous blog posts from arts related sites as well as more general lifestyle ones.

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For more information on the SB2011, the following materials are enclosed:

Annex A – Visitorship Breakdown

Annex B – Responses from International Media and Art Writers

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. Singapore Biennale 2011 is organised by the Singapore Art Museum of the National Heritage Board, and supported by the National Arts Council, which first inaugurated the Biennale in 2006 and was also the organiser for the 2008 edition.

About the Singapore Art Museum

The mission of the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) is to document, interpret and promote the contemporary art practices of Singapore and the Southeast Asian region. Opened in January 1996 as a museum under the National Heritage Board of Singapore, SAM has amassed one of the world's largest public collections of modern and contemporary Southeast Asian artworks. Since 2009, SAM has focused its programming and collections development initiatives around contemporary Southeast Asian art and art practices. Through strategic alliances with arts and cultural institutions and community organisations, SAM facilitates visual arts education, exchange, research and development within the region and internationally. SAM is also the organiser of the Singapore Biennale 2011.

About the National Arts Council, Singapore

The National Arts Council was established in September 1991 to spearhead the development of the arts in Singapore. To realise its vision of developing Singapore into a distinctive global city for the arts, NAC provides total support to nurture artistic talent, promotes the practice and appreciation of the arts among Singaporeans, builds up capabilities and resources, facilitates internationalisation and advocates the value of the arts. Through its holistic range of programmes and initiatives to develop the entire arts value chain, the Council champions the growth of a vibrant arts sector where the arts are accessible to all, and the community of artists, arts groups and arts businesses can innovate, excel and achieve sustainability in the long term.

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Singapore Biennale 2011 BREAKDOWN OF VISITOR FIGURES

TOTAL VISITORSHIP 912,897

Comprising:

Indoor	196,028 (SAM (including SAM at 8Q), National Museum of Singapore, Old Kallang Airport and Marina Bay (visitors into <i>The Merlion Hotel</i>))
Outdoor	696,709 (visitors outside Tatzu Nishi's <i>The Merlion Hotel</i> at Marina Bay and at Sopheap Pich's <i>Compound</i> at National Museum's Rotunda)
Others	20,160 (auxiliary and pre-opening events such as the Pot Luck series of presentations by artists and curators in 2010, year-long <i>Self-Portrait, Our Landscape</i> (SPOL) project, visitors to the SPOL showcase at the Istana during the Istana Art Event 2010)

Singapore Biennale 2011

RESPONSES FROM INTERNATIONAL MEDIA AND ART WRITERS

“A particular strength of this large but quite low-key exhibition is its multilayered approach to Singapore as a global trading port and its self-conscious image as a hospitable place to call home... The overall effect is polished and thoughtful, if a bit polite.” - By Daniel Palmer, ‘Singapore Biennale 2011’, Issue 139, *Frieze*.

“What is certain is that the National Arts Council and the Singapore Art Museum (the government institutions supporting this worthwhile event) have succeeded in providing a nutrient-rich growth medium to advocate for the value of visual culture and provide an enhanced and much-needed base for fresh shoots of contemporary art to take hold in this region.” - By Randy Gladman, ‘Hydroponic Hot House: The Singapore Biennale 2011’, 11 March 2011, Financial Times of London’s *HowToSpendIt.com*.

“Commissioning works that must be created in Singapore seems to be a good strategy to let local and foreign artists familiarize themselves with Singapore’s life and culture. It also gives the public a chance to come close to art and art making, as well as increase their appreciation of art.” - By Carla Bianpoen, ‘The 3rd Singapore Biennale: International with an Asian focus’, 3 March 2011, *The Jakarta Post Online*.

“There is, however, another important element in any open house: the host and their efforts at giving their guests the best experience. And in the case of the Singapore Biennale, one can’t help but be impressed and encouraged by the importance given to art by the Singaporean Government, which has poured in S\$6mil (RM14.3mil) to make this event come alive. First mooted in 2006 as a means of positioning the Lion City as an international centre for visual arts, the Singapore Biennale 2011 is organised by the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) of the Singapore National Heritage Board and supported by the National Arts Council.” - By Sharmilla Ganesan, ‘Thought-provoking art at exhibition’, 20 March 2011, *The Star Online*.