



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Matthew Ngui appointed Artistic Director of the 3rd Singapore Biennale

The National Arts Council today announced the appointment of one of Singapore's most internationally recognised visual artists, Matthew Ngui, as the Artistic Director of the third Singapore Biennale (SB). He is the first Singaporean to serve as its Artistic Director.

Organised by the National Arts Council, the third edition of Singapore's premier international contemporary art event aims to position Singapore prominently as an international centre and regional thought leader in the field of visual art. Following the success of its preceding editions in 2006 and 2008, SB will continue to grow Singapore's reputation as a key player in the global arts arena, and to connect Singapore artists with the international visual arts scene.

"One of the objectives of the Singapore Biennale is to develop our artistic and curatorial capabilities. We are very pleased to introduce Matthew Ngui not only as the Artistic Director for the upcoming Singapore Biennale, but as the first artistic director from Singapore. Matthew's personal experience in international biennales and his own credentials as a practising visual artist overseas and in Singapore will undoubtedly stand him in good stead to helm the Biennale. Matthew is well-known for his site-specific projects that engage communities of people. This is in line with SB's aim to continue engaging the Singaporean audience, as well as foreign visitors, with an array of contemporary visual art works and activities," says Lee Suan Hiang, Chairman of the Singapore Biennale Steering Committee, and Chief Executive Officer of the National Arts Council.

Ngui is armed with vast experience in the field of visual arts Biennales as a participating artist and more recently as a curator. He was part of the curatorial team for SB2008, and had exhibited at the Sao Paulo, Venice and Gwangju Biennales in 1996, 2001 and 2002 respectively. In fact, Ngui is one of four artists who represented Singapore at its first participation at the 49th Venice Biennale in 2001. Ngui is also the first Singaporean artist to exhibit at Documenta in 1997. Trained in sculpture, Ngui's focus is now in the realms of installation, video, performance, site-specific works and public art.

Says Matthew Ngui, Artistic Director of the Singapore Biennale, "I would like for the focus of the Biennale to be on Singapore and other countries as sites, homes and nations, where the role of art is to engage and re-present realities through its unique creative processes that often give new and fresh insights into the spaces we inhabit. Hence on site in Singapore, we hope to engage artists with the public as participating and active audiences starting from the very process of art making in both private and public spaces."

For SB, Ngui has chosen to work with two established curators who are especially known for their experience in curating contemporary visual arts. Russell Storer is presently Curator, Asian Contemporary Art at the Queensland Art Gallery. He had previously curated at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, and was Visiting Curator at Documenta 12, Kassel and Curatorial Comrade for the 2006 Biennale of Sydney. Canadian Trevor Smith has curated contemporary art in America, Canada and Australia. He was site manager for the

Sydney Biennale in 1992/1993, and also curated Australia's participation at the Sao Paulo Biennale in 2002.

Together with the two curators, Ngui will be putting together a Biennale where artworks are exploratory, revelatory, relevant yet refreshing to familiar locales in Singapore. The upcoming Biennale promises to be a vital visual arts exhibition where audiences will be surprised and challenged into looking at the world with fresh perspectives.

Please refer to the following annexes for more information:

Annex 1 – Artistic Director's Statement

Annex 2 – Profile of Artistic Director Matthew Ngui

Annex 3 – Profiles of Curators: Russell Storer (Australia) and Trevor Smith (Canada)

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About the Singapore Biennale

Organised by the National Arts Council, Singapore, the Singapore Biennale aims to position Singapore prominently as an international centre and regional thought leader in the field of visual art. It encourages Singapore artists and Singapore to engage with the international art world, through the invitation of regional and international artists to exhibit with Singapore artists, and for Singapore to join the international community of art biennales whose language is mainly conducted through the medium of contemporary art. As a platform for collaborations with the global arts community, the Biennale provides new opportunities for local visual artists and arts businesses, and is a significant opportunity to cultivate deeper public engagement with the arts. It complements the achievements of other areas of the arts and cultural scene, collectively enhancing Singapore's international image as a vibrant city to live, work, play.

About the National Arts Council (Singapore)

The National Arts Council (NAC) 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 is accessible to all, and the community of artists, arts groups and arts businesses can innovate, excel and achieve sustainability in the long term.

www.nac.gov.sg

Singapore Biennale

Artistic Director's Statement

As an artist, I prefer to work in a site-specific manner, where art engages in some way with the site's history, socio-cultural identity and physical space. This is not uncommon amongst artists where their art processes often engage deeply with the respective environments, producing works that are grounded and relevant to these sites. It is this engagement in all its possibilities that I hope to explore with Singapore Biennale.

Wonder, the theme for the last Biennale was a development from *Belief* (the theme for the first Biennale), where the curious, questioning mode in "wonder" challenged the notion of "belief" - a point the previous curatorial team under the directorship of Fumio Nanjo made. Working as a curator on that second exhibition, I also came across the sense of wonder and surprise present in the making of art. This process of working with sites and/or communities of people is a combination of the exploratory, curious and questioning nature of the artists' research and the sense of surprise and fresh insight that often happens when the artwork is installed. To focus on this process of art-making is an extension of the concept of *Wonder* and therefore a further development of the themes of the 2 previous biennales. I hope that for this next Biennale, we would be able to encourage these exploratory and revelatory art processes to happen in the many potentially interesting sites on the island of Singapore, and perhaps elsewhere also.

The structure of the Biennale would have three focal points. The first is to develop site-specific projects with local and international artists to be researched and made in Singapore; the outcome of which will be a range of small and major artworks to be shown at the various exhibition spaces, including public sites. The second focus would have a broad international perspective on site-specific works that reveal something of the respective sites the artists have engaged with. The third, and coming from the other end, is where there will a conscious attempt to work with specific sites in Singapore through a collaborative framework of artists, our Biennale office and the owners of the public or private spaces. All foci, however, will be related to Singapore as a site, a home and country, and other spaces and nations, where revelatory art practices occur.

Singapore Biennale

Profile of Artistic Director

Matthew Ngui



Matthew Ngui is a visual artist, trained in sculpture and now working in the areas of installation, video, performance, site-specific works and public art. He lives and works in Australia and Singapore, exhibiting locally and internationally in contemporary art museums and spaces in cities such as Berlin, Bordeaux, Copenhagen, Graz, Hong Kong, London, Manila and Vienna. He participated in the Sao Paulo (1996), Venice (2001) and Gwanju Biennales (2002) and the tenth Documenta in 1997. The focus of Ngui's work has been to make site-specific installations and performances that engage the locality and people of the city/space in which the work is exhibited. To this end, he has been working on two long term community-related art proposals for the Singapore Skyline and an alpine town in Switzerland.

Ngui has taught at art schools of the Australian National University, Curtin University of Technology (Australia), Edith Cowan University (Australia), Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Singapore), Ecole cantonale d'Art du Valais (Switzerland) and run workshops or attended residencies in Austria, Japan, Holland, Switzerland, and Venezuela. He is past Chairman of the Artists Regional Exchange in Perth, and has served as a council member of the National Arts Council, Singapore, and on the Boards of the Singapore Art Museum and the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art. He has also been involved in the Public Art Appraisal Committee of the National Heritage Board, Singapore.

He is currently working on public art commissions for the New Performing Arts Venue in Perth, Midland Re-development Authority in Western Australia and the new Orchard Central building on Orchard Road. Recently, a survey exhibition of his art practice over nearly two decades, which began at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, has travelled to the John Curtin Gallery for the Perth International Arts Festival and the National Museum of Singapore for the Singapore Arts Festival.

Singapore Biennale

Profile of Curatorial Team

Russell Storer (Australia)

Russell Storer is Curator, Contemporary Asian Art at the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia. He curated 'William Yang: Life Lines' for 'The China Project' at the QAG (2009) and is part of the curatorial team for the 6th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (2009-10). He was formerly a curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, where he organised the group exhibitions 'Video Logic', 'Interesting Times: Focus on contemporary Australian art', and 'Situation: Collaborations, collectives and artist networks from Sydney, Singapore and Berlin', as well as exhibitions by artists including Simryn Gill, Matthew Ngui, Paddy Bedford, Juan Davila, Ugo Rondinone, and Simon Starling. He was a Visiting Curator at documenta 12 in 2007 and a Curatorial Comrade for the 2008 Biennale of Sydney, and has written widely on contemporary art for a range of Australian and international publications.



Trevor Smith (Canada)

Trevor Smith is the inaugural Curator of Contemporary Art at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts - the oldest continuously operating museum in the United States. Prior to joining the Peabody Essex, Smith was Curator in Residence at the Centre for Curatorial Studies, Bard College where in 2006 he co-curated *Wrestle*, the inaugural exhibition at the Hessel Museum and in 2007 presented *Martin Creed: Feelings*, the first large-scale survey of this artist's work. From 2003-2006 he was Curator at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City where, among other projects he co-curated the widely acclaimed exhibition *Andrea Zittel: Critical Space* and presented a major survey of the work of Brian Jungen.



Smith was born in Canada and studied Art History at the University of British Columbia. From 1992-2003 he was based in Australia where he worked first at the Biennale of Sydney, then as Director of the Canberra Contemporary Art Space, and from 1997-2003 as Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. Highlights among his exhibitions there include *The Divine Comedy: Francisco Goya, Buster Keaton, and William Kentridge* for the Art Gallery of Western Australia and the Perth International Arts Festival in 2002. He also curated a major survey of the work of Robert MacPherson and presented his work as the Australian representative to the 2002 Sao Paulo Bienal. He has produced over fifty exhibitions and has published widely in exhibition catalogues and journals in North America, Europe, Australia and Asia.