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AN
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CONTEMPORARY ART IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Media Release

The Fifth Edition of the Singapore Biennale 2016 Opens with *An Atlas of Mirrors* *Explore Facets of Contemporary Life in Southeast Asia through Contemporary Art*

Singapore, 25 October 2016 – The Singapore Biennale 2016 (SB2016), one of Asia’s most exciting contemporary visual art exhibitions, will be launched by Singapore’s Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for Economic and Social Policies, Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam. SB2016 opens to the public on 27 October 2016 and runs until 26 February 2017. Titled *An Atlas of Mirrors*, this Biennale features works by 63 artists and art collectives from 19 countries and territories across Southeast Asia, East and South Asia.

Artworks of various media are curated around nine sub-themes and presented at eight locations, with the Singapore Art Museum and SAM at 8Q as anchor venues. SB2016’s opening weekend will feature programmes for members of the public, including artist performances, curator and artist tours and talks, and after-hours musical performances in the SAM Courtyard on Friday (28 October). The four-month long international contemporary art exhibition is organised by SAM and commissioned by the National Arts Council of Singapore. SB2016 will feature several site-specific and commissioned contemporary works never seen before on the biennale circuit.

"*An Atlas of Mirrors* references the atlases and mirrors that have been instrumental in humankind’s exploration of the world as we navigate and map our journeys into the unknown. It is hoped that the evocative title, which guided its curatorial direction, would intrigue and inspire audiences to explore and experience the many ways of seeing our world and ourselves. Each mindfully presented artwork offers a unique encounter: we are invited to share the imaginative and critical perspectives of artists from Southeast, South and East Asia, who are grappling with everyday contemporary realities, double-edged legacies, as well as the recurrent ‘big ideas’ and poetic metaphors that reflect the human condition“, says Dr Susie Lingham, Creative Director, Singapore Biennale 2016.

Kathy Lai, CEO of National Arts Council, Singapore and Commissioner of SB2016, says, “The inaugural Singapore Biennale opened in 2006, and was helmed by an international team of curators. Today, the Biennale is organised by SAM – Singapore’s museum of contemporary art, and this edition promises many opportunities for the public to encounter exciting art. As in previous editions, the Biennale creates opportunities for established and emerging artists from Singapore, Southeast Asia and beyond to be featured together. More importantly, the Biennale is also a valuable platform for artists to grow by developing their practice or realising ambitious new works through the commissioning process. I hope that Singaporeans and international visitors alike will have a renewed sense of wonder and curiosity about our neighbours and the region through contemporary art, and I congratulate the Creative Director, Dr Susie Lingham for a thoughtful and thought-provoking Biennale.”

Over 80 percent of the 58 artworks are new commissions or adaptations of works for the fifth edition of the Singapore Biennale. Within the 58 artworks are group presentations, which comprise individual artworks in dialogue with each other to present a final piece. These artworks respond to the title of *An Atlas of Mirrors*, and explore notions of space, time, memory, nature, boundaries, agency, identity, displacement and absence.

SB 2016 Artwork Experience

New works by Eddy Susanto, Harumi Yukutake and Zulkifle Mahmod, among others examine the concept of **space** and place. Zulkifle Mahmod's sound sculpture *SONICreflection* foregrounds the otherwise overlooked auditory character of various Southeast Asian communities in Singapore and the space they inhabit. Eddy Susanto's *The Journey of Panji* is a calligraphic cartography charting the movement of the Panji cycle throughout Southeast Asia and suggests the impossibility of 'containing' Southeast Asia and of conceiving the region as a singular entity. Harumi Yukutake's *Paracosmos* propels the viewer into a parallel world, a space of otherness that is recognisable but unfamiliar.

Artworks that reflect on the concept of **time** include Phasao Lao and Tcheu Siong, husband and wife artists of Hmong ethnicity, who bring their textile artworks *History*, *Tree Spirit*, *Spirit of Sky & Earth 3 & 4* together to speak about universal concepts of genealogy, movement and migration, and symbolism and representation. Pannaphan Yodmanee's SB2016 commission titled *Aftermath* is a titanic mural mapping the Buddhist cosmos that resembles a landscape painting, presenting us with the ultimate question: at the end of all ends, will we find comfort in our faith? Gregory Halili's *Karagatan (The Breadth of Oceans)* pays homage to people whose fates and fortunes are bound to the ocean, mapping a community of coastal people who labour to harvest the bounty of the ocean but rarely reap its wealth.

Memory is the common thread weaving through the works of Phuong Linh Nguyen, Fyerool Darma and Do Ho Suh. *Memory of the Blind Elephant* by Phuong Linh Nguyen explores the materiality of rubber and investigates the historical significance of the country's rubber trees and plantations. Fyerool's *The Most Mild Mannered Men* present sculptures of two key figures in Singapore history: Sir Stamford Raffles and Sultan Hussein Mua'zzam Shah, exploring the partisanship between major and minor narratives in historical discourse. Do Ho Suh's *Gate* is a poignant and personal memory of home, making a statement about dislocation and transformation in contemporary Asia, and the ghost of what has been left behind.

Contemplating the relationship between **nature** and culture are works by Patricia Perez Eustaquio and Deng Guoyuan. Eustaquio's commissioned piece, *The Hunters Enter the Woods*, reflects on our contradictory attitude towards the world, both manmade and natural, asking what drives our quest for the unique, even as we seek to manipulate and replicate the object of our desire. Deng's *Noah's Garden II* is at once a garden of flora and a labyrinth of mirrors that create a feeling of the loss of subjectivity.

Witness to Paradise, a presentation of multiple artworks by Abeer Gupta, Sanjay Kak, Nilima Sheikh and Praneet Soi, brings together works in various media by each of the artists in a single presentation to reflect on a landscape that was once was and now is Kashmir. Also in this zone is Melissa Tan's "*If you can dream a better world you can make a better world or perhaps travel between them*", a SB2016 commission questioning the passing of time through the mapping of the physical features that make up our transient landscape.

The question of **agency** is at the heart of several artworks such as *Putar Alam Café* by Azizan Paiman, *Hearings* by Jack Tan and *Unwalked Boundaries* by S. Chandrasekaran. *Putar Alam Café* is a social experiment to show how the media profoundly affects our perception and understanding of things around

us. *Hearings* explores the experience of litigants-in-person at the State and Family Courts of Singapore. *Unwalked Boundaries* focuses on the thousands of Indian convicts who, from 1825 to 1873, were transported to Singapore and served their sentence as manual labourers, highlighting the awkward gaps in Singapore history where the convicts' contributions have been long overlooked.

Delving into the issue of **identity**, Ade Darmawan's *Singapore Human Resources Institute* transforms the detritus of consumerist society into lenses for viewing the political, social and economic changes that have shaped both Singapore and the region. Marine Ky's *Setting Off*, is both steeped with the artist's own experiences and recollections of being displaced from the country of her birth, Cambodia, and also speaks about the numerous and varied journeys individuals and communities find themselves facing and eventually embarking on.

Displacement is today a key global issue and is addressed by artists Bui Cong Khanh and Niranjan Rajah. Titled *Dislocate*, Bui's work combines the woodworking craftsmanship of his ancestral province of Fujian, China, with the cultural identity of central Vietnam, to investigate and highlight the geo- and sociopolitical tensions between Vietnam and China. Rajah's *Koboi Balik Lagi (The 'Koboi' Returns Again)* explores personal and family narratives, as well as the cultural, political and social landscapes of Malaysia and reflects his psychological and sociocultural consciousness as an artist living and working in Canada, and as a Malaysian citizen.

The notion of **absence** is explored by several artists including Ahmad Fuad Osman and Perception3, and focuses on unusual perspectives and the gaps in histories. Ahmad's *Enrique de Malacca Memorial Project*, based on a belief that the first person to circumnavigate the world was a Malay - Panglima Awang also known as Enrique of Malacca, juxtaposes contradictory and sometimes fictional colonial, postcolonial and nationalist representations. It alludes to the complexity of Enrique's intertwined identity and history, and the fluidity of sociocultural boundaries in Southeast Asia. Perception3's *There are those who stay/There are those who go* examines the idea of 'staying' and 'going' or "two perspectives of a single decisive moment". The artwork is sited where the old National Library building once stood (demolished amid public outcry in 2005), and offers an open reflection on Singapore's architectural heritage.

Opening Weekend Programme (27 – 30 October 2016)

Artist performances anchor SB2016's opening week programme. Among the performances not to be missed include Rathin Barman's *Home, and a Home* where he investigates 'home' and 'landscape' as an idea, not just the physicality of its presence, but the space that it occupies in the minds and memories of displaced Bangladeshi migrants. This work grew out of the time Barman spent in Singapore chronicling the conversations and poetry of migrant Bangladeshi migrant labourers. Chia Chuyia's *Knitting the Future* is a durational performance piece, premised upon her concern about environmental issues and recalls older rituals of food preparation and suggests that perhaps our future lies in our past.

Other programme highlights include the Artist and Curator Tour as well as Artist Insights series, which offers visitors the chance to meet with artists and find out about the processes behind the work. For visitors who wish to discover SB2016 at their own leisure, the Treasure Trails offer three different routes of increasing level of engagement and commitment with the artworks. The full list of opening weekend activities can be found in Annex D.

SB2016 will be anchored at the Singapore Art Museum on Bras Basah Road and Queen Street. Venues include Singapore Art Museum and SAM at 8Q, Asian Civilisations Museum, de Sautio Gallery at SMU, National Museum of Singapore, Stamford Green, Peranakan Museum, and the Arts House (opening

weekend only). In addition, there are five participating Affiliate Projects, and 26 parallel projects taking place over the same period of time. The four-month long international contemporary art exhibition is organised by SAM and commissioned by the National Arts Council of Singapore, and will open from 27 October 2016 through 26 February 2017.

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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. It further cultivates deeper public engagement with contemporary visual arts through a four-month exhibition, and its accompanying public engagement and education programmes that include artist and curator talks and tours, school visits and workshops, and community days. 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. The 2006 and 2008 editions of the Biennale were organised by the National Arts Council. As with the 2011 and 2013 editions, Singapore Biennale 2016 is organised by the Singapore Art Museum, and commissioned by the National Arts Council. Visit www.singaporeartmuseum.sg/SingaporeBiennale for more information.

About the Singapore Art Museum

The Singapore Art Museum (SAM) 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 researched 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. In 2011, SAM was the venue organiser of the Singapore Biennale, becoming the main organiser in 2013 and 2016. 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

About the National Arts Council, Singapore

The National Arts Council champions the arts in Singapore. By nurturing creative excellence and supporting broad audience engagement, we want to develop a distinctive global city for the arts. With a nod to tradition and an eye to the future, we cultivate accomplished artists and vibrant companies. Our support for the arts is comprehensive – from grants and partnerships to industry facilitation and arts housing. The Council welcomes greater private and corporate giving to and through the arts so that together we can make the arts an integral part of everyone's lives. For more information on the Council's mission and plans, please visit www.nac.gov.sg