

# SINGAPORE BIENNALE 2019

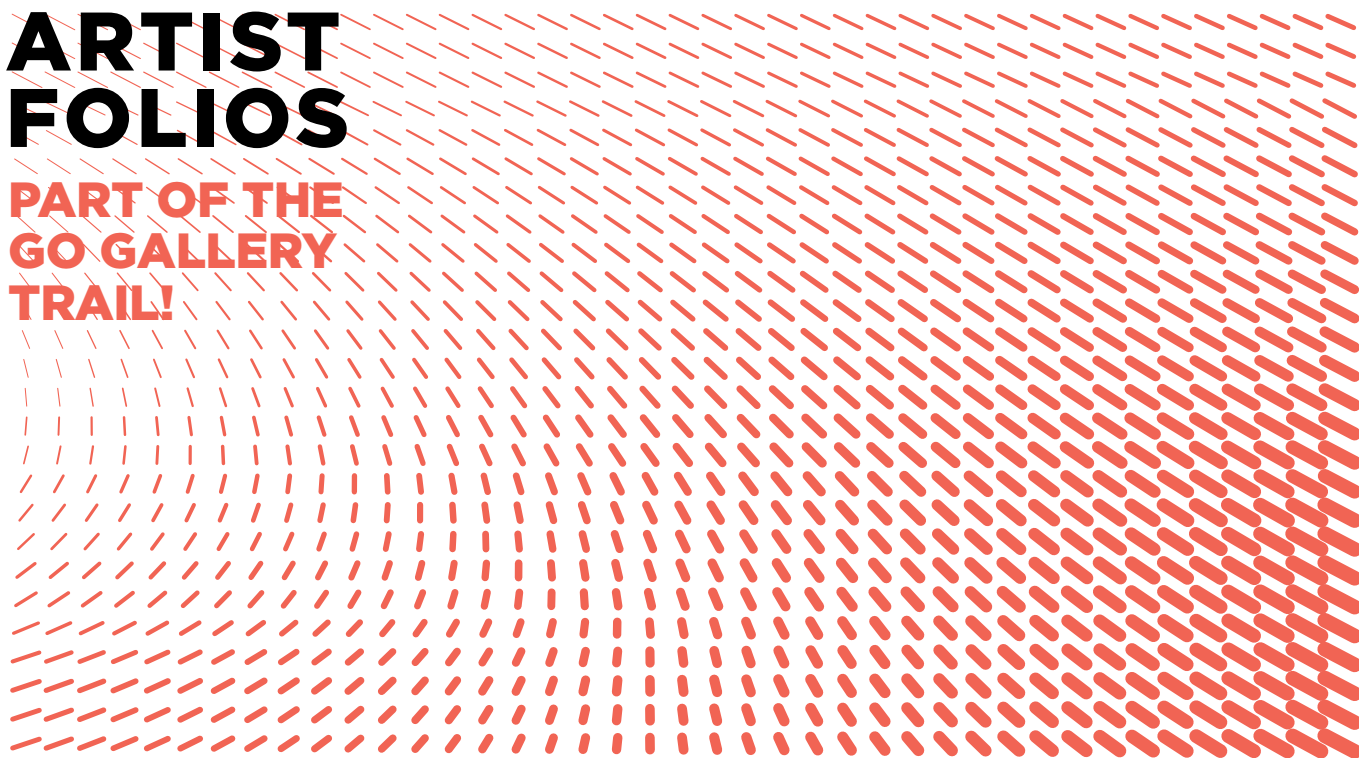
22 Nov 2019 –  
22 Mar 2020

EVERY  
STEP  
IN THE  
RIGHT  
DIRECTION

EDUCATION KIT

## ARTIST FOLIOS

PART OF THE  
GO GALLERY  
TRAIL!



## DENNIS TAN

*MANY WATERS TO CROSS*

2019

SINGAPORE / JAPAN

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**THE ARTIST**  
**DENNIS TAN**

- (b. 1975, Singapore) Lives and works in Japan
- Graduated with a Diploma in Painting, Bachelor's in Environmental Design, and Master's in Architecture.
- Tan approaches his practice of building as “building-without-a-plan” and his practice grounds itself in the sensibilities of the common man. Approaching the subject or topic with naïve curiosity, he is informed by the process and derives new material understanding through the act of object making.



**DID YOU KNOW?**

*Kolek* racing was once a popular sport in 19th and 20th century Singapore where kampungs would come together to compete with other kampungs in friendly competitions! Can you picture your family *kolek* racing over the weekends?

**THE ARTWORK**

**MANY WATERS TO CROSS**

2019

**Durational performance - construction resulting in hand-crafted timber boat and 2-channel video**

**Performance-construction duration: 8 months; kolek boat:**

**900 x 80 x 80 cm**

**Singapore Biennale 2019 Commission**

- **MEDIUM:** The artist uses a combination of materials that can be found locally, exploring the idea of how a place or culture is affected by the natural materials around it. In this case, finding a type of timber that exists in Singapore.
- **TECHNIQUES / PROCESSES:** The artist conceptualised his artwork as a durational piece where the construction of a *kolek*—a traditional Southeast Asian racing vessel that used to be a common sight off the coast of Singapore. The construction takes place in full view of the public over a period of eight months. He approaches his work in a trial and error format, building without any initial planning— an important aspect of his work. He employs a research-construction process, which requires him to rely on the natural instincts and sensibilities of the common man, allowing them to direct his subsequent steps. In doing this, he rediscovers the disappeared art of *kolek* making.
- **IDEAS / INSPIRATIONS / CONTEXT:** The artwork centres on the making of a *kolek*, formerly a common sight in Bedok, Katong, Potong Pasir, Siglap and Telok Kurau during the 1960s. Due to Singapore's rapid development, people moved out of the coastal kampungs and into high-rise residences. This led to the decline of *kolek* building and racing on the island state. The artist felt that building a *kolek* was interesting as it mirrors the concept of making he resonates with—when an idea is immediately transferred onto the material, similar to sculpting.



## **STEP BY STEP**

### **PRIMARY:**

ART / SOCIAL STUDIES

#### **STEP 1 :: PRE-VISIT**

##### **RESEARCH:**

In Singapore, what are some places/people/items commonly seen in the past that are disappearing or lost today?

**Find one that interests you and share it with your classmates. Examples can include the following:**

- Mama Shops  
(Old Provision Shops)
- Roadside Barber
- Karung Guni  
(Rag-And-Bone) Man

##### **REFLECT:**

What do you think caused these places/people/items to disappear or be lost?

#### **STEP 2 :: AT THE ARTWORK**

##### **SEE—THINK—WONDER:**

Take a look at the different parts of this installation and share your thoughts with a partner!

- What is the subject matter of the artwork? What do you think the work is about?
- Is the technique/process of making the artwork important? Would you look at the artwork differently if you did not know the process of how he chose to make it?
- What do you think were some challenges the artist faced while building the Kolek? How do you think he overcame these challenges?

#### **STEP 3 :: POST-VISIT**

##### **GUESS:**

Pick an object that you are curious about and write down your guesses on how you think it was made.

##### **RESEARCH & SHARE:**

Uncover the facts and share your new discovery with your classmates!



## FIND OUT MORE

### THE ARTIST

- <http://ntu.ccasingapore.org/residencies/dennis-tan/>

### OTHERS

- **Dennis Tan's previous work**  
<https://artsequator.com/looking-institutions-ntu-cca-nus-museum/>
- **Charles Lim & Dennis Tan**  
<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/from-national-sailor-to-filming-sailboats-for-art-7723690>
- **Bedok Heritage Trail (Pg 7 & 8)**  
<https://roots.sg/-/media/Roots/Files/bedok-trail/bedok-trail-roots.pdf?la=en>
- **Kolek Racing in Siglap**  
[http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP\\_2016-08-18\\_134004.html](http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2016-08-18_134004.html)
- **A Yearning to bring Kolek races back to Singapore**  
<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/cnainsider/a-yearning-to-bring-kolek-races-back-to-singapore-7725686>