

Spotlight on Singapore

Text
Anya Sulaiman

‘Singapore is a postmodern experiment in the making,’ says Sundaram Tagore, a New York-based gallerist with an outpost in the city. ‘You have to give it time, but so far they’re doing everything right.’ Unlike rival art capitals in the region, which have developed organically but struggled to get state support, Singapore’s government continues to pour an enormous amount of resources into its art infrastructure. What has resulted are world-class museums, an impressive biennale, a dedicated gallery hub and thriving art schools. Determined to become South East Asia’s reigning art capital, the city is continuing to evolve at a rapid pace.

‘Ten to fifteen years ago, our art scene existed in a bit of a bubble,’ says Shuyin Yang, director of ART SG, a new art fair due to launch in late 2021. ‘But recently there’s been a lot more willingness to experiment and take risks, whether in terms of artistic production or collecting.’ Co-founded by Magnus Renfrew, former director of Art Basel Hong Kong, the fair has been postponed twice but the organisers have high hopes for 2021. Complementing the successful boutique fair S.E.A. Focus, launched in 2019 by not-for-profit STPI (formerly Singapore Tyler Print Institute), ART SG will be a large-scale event that shines an even brighter spotlight on the region.

On the institutional front, the Singapore Art Museum is set to reopen in 2023 with a bold new redesign. Multidisciplinary firm SCDA is leading the revamp that will transform the historic former school building and increase its capacity for both artwork and audiences.

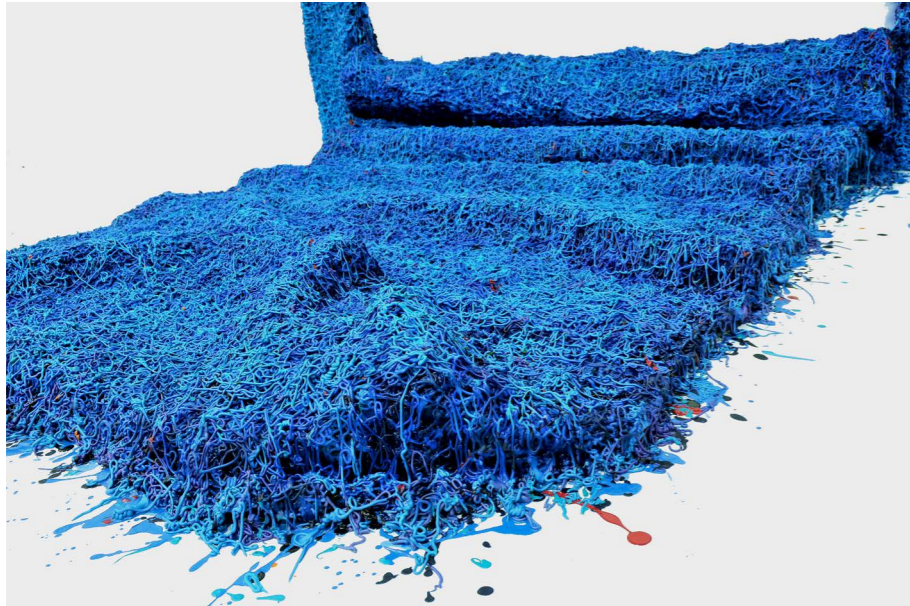
‘The museum’s visitor experience will be reimagined,’ says Soo K Chan, founding principal and design director of SCDA, whose team has designed a new floating Sky Gallery, atriums and lush green spaces all intended to enhance the museum experience.

There are also several innovative artists emerging from the city and South East Asia as a whole, but as Talenia Phua Gajardo, founder and CEO of online gallery and art advisory The Artling, notes, ‘The art and design market is highly fragmented, so thousands of talented artists and designers aren’t receiving the visibility they deserve, especially some of the emerging names.’ This is something her platform aims to change, helping to put the region on the global art map through initiatives like Art In My City, which spotlights artworks from local galleries across Asian cities, and an improved augmented reality feature that allows would-be buyers to see digital versions of artworks on their walls.

Like many in the art world, Phua Gajardo champions Singapore, but she’s reluctant to compare it to other cities, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. ‘This is a good opportunity to think about how we can come together and join forces, as opposed to thinking of ways to “beat” each other,’ she says. That said, she’s still excited to see what the future holds for Singapore. ‘It’s a constant work in progress, but there are many key players in our art scene who are extremely passionate and persistent. There’s great potential if the right minds come together.’



The new Singapore Art Museum, designed by SCDA, will bring contemporary architecture into the museum’s heritage buildings and introduce new spaces for the public to engage with art. The new complex will include an entrance plaza (top) and a purpose-built Sky Gallery (bottom)
Images courtesy of Singapore Art Museum



New York-based Sundaram Tagore has opened an outpost in the city, and is impressed by its growing creative scene. Singapore-based Jane Lee is one of the artists represented by Tagore

Top
Detail of Jane Lee's *Beyond the Blue* (2011). Mixed media, 250 x 190 x 200 cm



Bottom
Detail of Jane Lee's *Belong Series II* (2011). Mixed media on canvas, 125 x 200 x 10 cm
Images courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery



2020 saw the second edition of S.E.A. Focus, a Singaporean event created to showcase South East Asian contemporary artists

Top
Artist Lilibeth Cuena Rasmussen performing her interactive piece *Octopada*



Bottom
The Columns Gallery presented works by Eisa Jocson, a visual artist with a background in ballet
Images courtesy of STPI — Creative Workshop & Gallery