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Behind the scenes at Singapore Art Week

## BEHIND THE SCENES AT SINGAPORE ART WEEK



Han Sai Por, Tropical Fruit, 2014, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and the Singapore Tyler Print Institute, Singapore

23 January 2014 | The celebrations of Singapore Art Week have drawn to a close for another year, with over 70 events that showed an art scene of genuine diversity and strength. *Art Collector* went behind the scenes and found a smart and vibrant city committed to fostering creativity across all levels.

The flagship event and catalyst of Singapore Art Week is Art Stage Singapore, which has gone from strength to strength since its initiation four years ago. Continuing the trend, this year has seen a reported increase in overall visitors to 45,700, up from 40,500 last year. Founder and director of the fair Lorenzo Rudolf spoke to *Art Collector* about his decision to launch a new brand of art fair in Asia. This year he introduced curated regional Platforms to the fair with three aims in mind: to reduce the gap between commercial and non-commercial elements of the art world by providing context, to introduce a new way for emerging galleries to position themselves internationally, and to increase the involvement of curators and artists.

Rudolf also spoke about the important role Art Stage Singapore has for the South East Asia region. In launching a new brand of art fair instead of another Basel, he wanted Art Stage to be a place to discover the creativity of a continent, stating that the overall image of this fair is to be an Asian fair with an Asian focus instead of an international fair with tokenistic Asian involvement. He also acknowledged the responsibility of Art Stage Singapore as a flagship event, stating that its role is to develop alongside the broader Singapore art scene to develop the region as a hub of art.



Gillman Barracks arts hub, a former military base for British and then Singapore armed forces. Courtesy: Gillman Barracks, Singapore

There are a multitude of creative venues across Singapore, many of which are based in former civic and military venues reclaimed as collective art destinations. For Art Week, the galleries across these venues launched all new exhibitions and simultaneous opening events.

Gillman Barracks is the newest art destination in Singapore. The Barracks was the site of a battle between the British and Japanese armies during WWII and was home to the British military and then the Singapore Armed Forces, who remained at this site until the 1990s. After redevelopment, Gillman Barracks launched in 2012 as a centre for the creation and exhibition of



contemporary art in Asia. International galleries were invited to launch premises here and it is now home to 17 galleries.

For Singapore Art Week the Gillman Barracks complex put on an exciting nighttime gala event which saw two galleries present their inaugural exhibitions - Pearl Lam Galleries and the Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA). The CCA opened with *Paradise Lost*, an exhibition bringing together three major video works by Fiona Tan, Zarina Bhimji and Trinh T Minh-ha that each explore the concept of a shared and projected space of an imaginary Asia. The expansive CCA space, which will also hold residencies and educational programs, was packed all night as visitors absorbed these captivating video works. *Paradise Lost* will show until 30 March 2014.

Pearl Lam Galleries opened their Singapore space with *Where Does It All Begin? Contemporary Abstract Art in Asia and the West*, which is on show until 9 March 2014. Founder and director Pearl Lam also has galleries in Shanghai and Hong Kong. She visited Singapore 15 years ago and was indifferent to the possibilities at that time. But since the Singapore government's funding of a cultural masterplan in the early 2000s alongside the establishment of Art Stage Singapore, the cultural landscape in Singapore had changed dramatically and Lam decided to launch in Singapore. In addition to the Gillman Barracks opening, her gallery also had a prominently positioned stand at this year's Art Stage.



Sphenodiscus splendens, sphenodiscus opalised ammonite, 100 million years old, 30 x 24cm. Found in South Dakota, USA. Courtesy: the author and Set in Stone Gallery, Singapore

Artspace@Helutrans is another art destination in Singapore. Helutrans is an arts logistics and storage company that launched a custom designed 22,000 square feet gallery complex within their portside facility in 2009. Artspace@Helutrans has four resident galleries: Richard Koh Fine Art, Ikkan Art Gallery, Galerie Steph and ReDot Fine Art Gallery. These galleries all open their exhibitions simultaneously and all launched new exhibitions for Singapore Art Week. Artspace@Helutrans also hosts regular pop up exhibitions. During art week, Set in Stone Gallery held one of their twice-yearly exhibitions. This gallery specialises in aesthetic museum-quality fossils for personal collections - see directly above for an example.

Another venue that dazzled during Singapore Art Week was the Singapore Tyler Print Institute (STPI), which was founded by influential American art figure Kenneth E Tyler. After retiring from his commercial endeavors in New York, he wanted to establish a non-profit space. He considered Australia but was ultimately attracted to Singapore due to the organic creative potential being actively supported by the Singaporean government, and the STPI opened in 2002. This venue focused on creation, offering residencies to south east Asian and international artists of four to six weeks duration that culminate in an exhibition. The STPI offers artists expansive workshop programming in paper and print practices that push the traditional boundaries of these mediums. During Singapore Art Week the STPI opened *Moving Forest* by renowned Singapore artist Han Sai Por - see the leading picture of this article for an installation shot. She invigorated her 50 year practice by creating breakthrough sculptural and frame-bound works using paper and print. *Moving Forest* is on show until 22 February 2014.



Dawn Ng, *Banana*, 2014. Wood, porcelain, glass, acrylic paint, ceramic and brass, 140 x 113 x 30cm. Courtesy: the artist and Chan Hampe Galleries, Singapore

A new initiative of this year's Singapore Art Week was Art in Motion tours, launched by the Art Galleries Association Singapore. Free guided bus tours took art lovers across 13 different galleries. When Art Collector was on board our tour began at the Old Hill Street Police Station cluster, now a brightly coloured building that is the permanent home of galleries including Art-2 Gallery, Cape of Good Hope Gallery, Gajah Gallery and Galerie Belvedere. The Art in Motion tour organised brief but engaging talks from the directors, curators and exhibiting artists of these spaces.

The next stop on the Art in Motion tour was Chan Hampe Galleries, which is co-owned and directed by Australian expat Benjamin Hampe. For Singapore Art Week, Chan Hampe Galleries launched *Windowshop: A Modern Day Cabinet of Curiosities* by Dawn Ng. This exhibition comprised a meticulous collection of common objects alongside a sculptural merry-go-round and neon installation that simultaneously explored deeply personal and universal themes. Ng gave an articulate and engaging artist talk where she explained the motivation behind the curated object collections. One of these collections is pictured below - called *Banana*, which as explained by Ng, was a common insult when she was growing up in the 1970s. The insult was directed at the younger generation: yellow on the outside but white on the inside. Ng pointed out the collection of eastern and western objects inside her yellow container signified the false simplicity of the insult.

Singapore Art Week is going from strength to strength, with 45 events last year and 70 events this year, underlining both the importance of coordinated and active support and the expanding scale of the local art scene. With Art Stage Singapore continuing to grow and refine itself, alongside the proliferation of the city's commercial and non-profit art destinations, Singapore Art Week is a celebration to pen in the diary of all art lovers. This year's Singapore Art Week ran from 13 until 19 January 2014.

Alexandra Djurichkovic

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