

## Meet Singapore's pioneer fine art printers and papermakers



Printers and papermakers at STPI, which was set up in 2002 by American master printer Kenneth Tyler. PHOTO: TIFFANY GOH FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

---

Singapore's pioneering art printers and papermakers have pushed boundaries to create new possibilities in art

---

🕒 PUBLISHED: 6 HOURS AGO

---

Huang Lijie Arts Correspondent ✉ (mailto:lijie@sph.com.sg)

When one speaks of pioneers in Singapore's visual arts scene, the names of artists such as Cheong Soo Pieng and Georgette Chen invariably come up and their emergence on the scene is usually traced to the early to mid-20th century.

The start of this millennium, however, has seen the rise of a group of pioneers in Singapore's fine art scene - printers and papermakers who collaborate with artists.

Printmaking in fine art is a process where artists collaborate with printers to create original works of art.

Singapore's fine art printers and papermakers have restlessly pushed the boundaries of their fields to create new possibilities in art and their efforts have attracted the attention of the art world.

This development is inextricably linked to the setting up of the Singapore Tyler Print Institute in 2002 by American master printer Kenneth Tyler. Widely regarded as one of the most innovative printers of the 20th century, he is closely associated with the resurgence of print as an art in the United States.

While artists in Singapore have been practising printmaking since the 1900s, there were, for a long time, no fine art printers and papermakers to assist them in this medium, which is commonly done on paper.

### **What is a print?**

In fine art, a print is generally defined as a work of art where an image is transferred from one surface to another by making an impression. The surface of the image varies depending on the printmaking technique used.

### **What are the main printmaking techniques?**

An intaglio print is produced by incising an image on a printing plate, typically made of metal, and allowing ink to pass through the recessed areas. The plate can be incised using different methods such as engraving and etching, which uses acid.

A relief print produces an image from a raised surface created by carving a plate made of wood or linoleum.

A lithograph is made by drawing on a smooth stone surface with a greasy crayon or liquid before layers of chemicals, solvent, water and oil-based ink are applied consecutively. The ink clings to the greasy marks, but not to the damp parts, allowing the image to be transferred.

A screen print is a stencilled image produced by passing ink through a screen mesh.

### **What is an edition of print?**

It is possible to produce multiple impressions of a print work. The edition is the total number of impressions made of a work; each impression is considered an original work.

With limited-edition prints, only the edition stated by the artist is printed.

Cultural Medallion recipient and artist Chng Seok Tin, 70, who specialises in printmaking and sculpture, says: "There wasn't a great demand for prints, so we would print our works ourselves."

The opening of the print institute in a restored 19th-century warehouse in Robertson Quay in 2002, however, birthed Singapore's first generation of fine art printers and papermakers.

The \$16-million institute was established with the support of the then Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, National Heritage Board, Singapore Tourism Board and Singapore Totalisator Board. Its development at the turn of the century came as the Government had its sights set on building Singapore into a Renaissance City.

To raise a team of Singapore printers and papermakers, an open call for apprentices was held and a handful of applicants - mostly students from art schools - were picked to train with Tyler in New York before he relocated his print studio here.

Of the six Singapore printers and papermakers who were with the institute when it opened, only one, papermaker Gordon Koh, remains at the centre, now known as STPI. It is part of the visual arts cluster under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, which includes the National Gallery Singapore and the Singapore Art Museum.

Other Singaporeans in the founding workshop team have left the profession, except for Lina Adam, who is a print technician with Lasalle College of the Arts.

On the small circle of Singapore printers and papermakers, STPI's chief printer and project leader Eitaro Ogawa, 42, says not everyone with the requisite skills has the mindset needed to become one. He is from Osaka, Japan, and a Singapore permanent resident who has been with STPI since the start.

He says: "The skills you have are used to establish someone else's work - it requires knowing and serving others, but with a sense of ownership of the work. You become an opportunity-maker for the artist."

STPI's printers and papermakers work with leading international and Singapore artists, who do not necessarily specialise in printmaking, to experiment with print- and papermaking possibilities in all types of visual art. Artists are invited to collaborate with STPI through its artist residency programme and past participants include Singapore sculptor Han Sai Por and well-known Japanese video artist Tabaimo.

### **'We never say no'**

Another reason for the relatively small pool of Singapore printers and papermakers, says printmaking artist April Ng, is the limited demand for fine art prints. This makes it difficult for the field here to support more talent.



Related Story

**Once reluctant papermaker now wants to master the craft**



Related Story

**Addicted to fun job**



Related Story

**Printmaker pushing limits**



## Related Story

### **Pioneer imparting skills**

Ms Ng, 53, a part-time lecturer at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, says: "There has been greater appreciation for printmaking here since STPI opened, but people still ask me why I do print and not art in other mediums."

The development of printers and papermakers in Singapore, which has centred on STPI, has nonetheless seen growth.

Its chairman Ong Yew Huat, 60, says its team of senior printers and papermakers, who learnt their skills from foreign master printers and papermakers who helped set up STPI, "are on their way to becoming masters in their own right and have started to impart their knowledge to a second generation".

Almost all of the 13 printers and papermakers at STPI are Singaporeans and permanent residents and they include papermakers Edmund Chan, 27, and Nehru Ganeish, 29, who joined in the last two years.

The reputation of STPI's team has been on the rise.

The works they make with artists have been regularly featured at major international art fairs, including Art Basel, and are collected by renowned museums such as New York's Museum of Modern Art and the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo.

Print- and papermaking workshops overseas, such as in the US, have also been looking to STPI and adopting its approach of producing works that experiment boldly with print- and papermaking techniques.

STPI's senior printer-at-large Oh Thiam Guan, 41, sees this as a validation of how far it has come and does not view the competition as a threat because he believes STPI's unique culture of openness to research and development cannot be copied.

He says: "When an artist challenges us with an idea, we never say 'No'. It is always, 'Let me think about it.' "

This way of doing things, Ogawa says, stems from the fact that many in STPI's team were not originally skilled printers and papermakers.

He says: "If everybody were experienced printers, I imagine everything we did would be contained to the things we know because we don't want to fail. But because we didn't know very much, doing something we didn't know became very normal to us.

"So if an artist challenges us to do what we don't know, we are confident that even if we don't know how to do it today, we will tomorrow."

Subscribe now and choose from eight amazing gifts! Plus, stand to win a trip to anywhere in the world or a luxurious stay at Resorts World Sentosa! Find out more at [bit.ly/STsuboffer](http://bit.ly/STsuboffer)

## MORE FROM THE STRAITS TIMES



What it takes to be future-ready

🕒 Jun 08, 2016



Teen girls caught shoplifting in Bangkok's Platinum Mall and smiling in mugshots

🕒 Jun 21, 2016



Brexit: Why I voted Leave - A Singaporean in UK

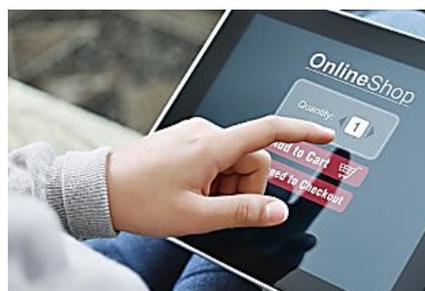
🕒 Jun 28, 2016



Stitching together a world of Nonya tales

🕒 Jun 28, 2016

## FROM AROUND THE WEB



How the Right IT Server Promotion Can Help Your Business

HPE



A local Singapore Math Student becomes the first to outsmart financial markets with the

24BusinessNews



How to Create Your New Website in 20 Minutes?

Wix



Hotels Don't Want You To Know About This Secret Discount Trick

Secret Escapes

