



NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL
SINGAPORE



6 February 2007

MEDIA RELEASE

Singapore at 52nd Venice Biennale

10 June – 21 November 2007

(Vernissage: 6 – 9 June 2007)

**Pavilion Venue: Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti
Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti**

The Singapore Pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition will present new works by four Singaporean artists - Tang Dawu, Vincent Leow, Jason Lim and Zulkifle Mahmod, in a trans-generational showcase of contemporary art practice in Singapore.

This will be Singapore's 4th consecutive presentation at the Venice Biennale. The Commissioner for the Singapore Pavilion is Lim Chwee Seng, Director of Visual Arts, National Arts Council (NAC) and the Curator is Lindy Poh.

The Singapore showcase is themed *Figments, Fictions and Fantasies*. It reflects the common thread among the four artists to explore myth, imagination, illusion and altered realities in their works, which arose from their responses to the Pavilion site and the notion of the *carnavalesque* in Venice – the ultimate City of carnival and dreams.

Tang is an iconic figure in contemporary Asian art practice and regarded as the 'father of performance art' in Singapore. Leow is a pivotal figure in alternative art practices whose works are celebrated for capturing the energy, visual language and attitudes of the vanguard of its time. A leading contemporary ceramics sculptor, Lim combines performance art practices in his presentations. Sonic or sound sculptor-artist Zulkifle is a prime figure in the emerging new media field in visual arts.

The artists, whilst individualistic in their expressions and practice, share many areas of intersections or convergence in their artistic ideals and concerns. They have enjoyed a good measure of recognition locally and abroad, contributed extensively to art education and dialogue, and also share the common experience of initiating and managing artist collectives in Singapore. Their presentation in Venice characterises key aspects of their practices at pivotal junctures of their development, and reflect the individuality, yet close interlinks between practitioners in Singapore today. Together in a single showcase, they present a resonating experiential show at the Pavilion that many will be able to relate to.

“Singapore’s participation in the Venice Biennale is part of the Council’s strategy to nurture and develop visual art practices in Singapore, and showcase the strength and diversity of Singapore artists and artistic practices internationally. This year, the Pavilion builds on the positive reviews and reception from the international art community at the inaugural Singapore Biennale 2006, continuing the international contemporary art dialogue through the impactful line-up and contributions of our artists,” said Lim Chwee Seng, Singapore Commissioner and NAC Director of Visual Arts.

“Presenting international traveling shows and participation in international biennales has been a key strategy in Singapore Art Museum’s (SAM) pursuit to actively promote contemporary art practices from Singapore. To this extent, SAM has spearheaded Singapore’s first participation in international biennales, including the Venice Biennale (2001). The 2007 Venice Biennale marks Singapore Art Museum’s 3rd collaboration with NAC as co-presenters. A multi-agency approach ensures better synergy and collaboration among agencies for optimal visual arts international programming development and engagement with the international art world,” said Kwok Kian Chow, SAM Director.

The Singapore Pavilion is sited in the 15th century Gothic and atmospheric Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti, a popular location on the main island of Venice next to the Accademia Bridge. A well-known art and cultural venue and a highly-visited tourist destination, the site was important in shaping of the Pavilion’s theme and the works of the artists.

The Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition is the most established and prestigious international contemporary art event and widely regarded as one of the most significant. The Singapore Pavilion is jointly presented by the National Arts Council and the Singapore Art Museum.

We invite you to publicise the participation of Singapore at the Venice Biennale 2007.

Please refer to the attached annexes for more information:

Annex 1 – About the Curatorial Theme

Annex 2 – About the Curator and the Artists

Singapore Pavilion at 52nd Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition

Exhibition date : 10 June – 21 November 2007
Vernissage : 06 June – 09 June 2007
Location of Pavilion : Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti
Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti
Campo S. Stefano, 2945
30124 VENEZIA

Commissioner : LIM Chwee Seng (Mr)
Curator : Lindy POH (Ms)
Artists : Vincent LEOW (Mr)
Jason LIM (Mr)
TANG Dawu (Mr)
ZULKIFLE Mahmood (Mr)

Presenters : National Arts Council, Singapore
Singapore Art Museum

Sponsor : Mr Anil Thadani of Symphony Capital Partners (Asia) Pte.
Ltd.

For visuals, interviews and media enquiries, please contact:

Ms Eileen Chua
Corporate Communications Manager
National Arts Council, Singapore
DID: +65 6837 9575 Mobile: +65 9048 3141 E-mail: eileen_chua@nac.gov.sg

Ms Lynn Tan
Assistant Manager (Marcom)
Singapore Art Museum
DID: +65 6332 3219 Mobile: +65 9222 6221 Email: lynn_tan@nhb.gov.sg

SINGAPORE AT 52ND VENICE BIENNALE INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION ABOUT THE CURATORIAL THEME

Figments, Fictions and Fantasies

The Singapore Pavilion at the 52nd International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale 2007 will premiere at one of the most coveted biennale sites - the historic *Palazzo Franchetti Cavalli* - from the 10 June to 21 November 2007.

The Pavilion features the works of four notable Singapore artists - TANG Dawu (b. 1943) Vincent LEOW (b. 1961), Jason LIM (b.1966) and ZULKIFLE Mahmud (b.1975) – who have been invited to develop site-specific works for the pavilion.

'Figments, Fictions and Fantasies' has emerged from the artists' responses to the site. The theme also characterises key aspects of their practices at pivotal junctures of their development. It puts into focus their exploration of myth, imaginary constructs, illusions, simulated or altered realities in their past body of work as well as in relation to this project. Some of their works feature the notion of the *carnavalesque* in Venice – the ultimate City of carnival and dreams. Often taken as a celebration of the senses, the concept of *carnavalesque* is importantly also a device of subversion and resistance deployed by artists to enable new and multiple perspectives of reality.

Continuing his previous ceramics work on *hybridity* - with its suggestions of cross-breeding, impurity and intermingling - **Jason LIM's 'hybrid chandelier'** is a fictional apparatus that plays off the charged symbolisms and ideologies evoked by vintage chandeliers marking each room in the Palazzo. A collaborative work by LIM and fellow artist **ZULKIFLE Mahmud** develops further the idea of illusion and mirage. Their installation fragments and disrupts the immaculate image of the chandelier through interrupted reflections and sound vibrations – suggesting the impossibility of a fixed and absolute reality.

With his signature odd and twisted sensibility, **Vincent LEOW** engages the mythos of the Palazzo Chambers of Pleasure and masked intrigues, associated with Venice's reputation as a city of illusion and deception. LEOW dips into kitsch and pop culture – weaving elements of Gothic and Pop art, of urban macabre & the *grotesque*, of 'Vegas' aesthetics, S & M culture, bad taste and camp – into a bizarre plot that offer multiple readings spanning sexual, social and cultural politics.

ZULKIFLE Mahmud's sound installation, ***'Sonic Dome- An Empire of Thoughts'*** inspired by the Gothic design of the Palazzo, bears the iconic *quatrefoil* design and insignia of the Lion. With its evocative archive of ambient and manufactured sounds, this interactive work suggests undercurrents of the erotic, enigmatic and fabulous that run through Venetian fables of Exploration and Discovery and of Venice, as an empire of the imagination.

TANG Dawu, in a work developed with **Ben Zai TANG**, offers a suite of drawn, photographic and filmic images as well as sound footage that have emerged from TANG's ongoing exploration of folk myths in contemporary contexts. Working with the idea of Venice - constructed through a dense history and network of literature, philosophy, film and myth – TANG's installation comprise literal and metaphorical sketches of Venice. These extracts of sounds, fleeting sensations and visual memories suggest Venice as a city and an encounter - experienced through glimpses, partial 'views' and the workings of the imagination.

SINGAPORE AT 52ND VENICE BIENNALE INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION ABOUT THE CURATOR AND THE ARTISTS

Full biographies of curator & artists are available on request.

Curator

Lindy POH is a professional curator, writer and lawyer specializing in intellectual property, entertainment and media law. She is an advocate and solicitor and legal partner in a Singapore-USA law firm, *Balkenende Chew & Chia*, (in association with *Samuel Seow Law Corporation*) with a background in Construction Law and Intellectual Property. In the legal field, she works primarily with architects, artists, developers, writers, entertainers, playwrights, filmmakers, publishers, agents and photographers.

She is a founder of Silver Rue, a Singapore-based art consultancy (Reg in 1998) that provides visual culture consultancy. Formerly a curator at the Singapore Art Museum (1996-2000), she curates, produces and manages projects in the visual arts, culture and heritage for local and overseas exhibitions and events, including Hong Kong, Japan, and Italy. Her special interests include photography, film, printmaking, Southeast Asian art, contemporary art and art education.

Artists

Four Singapore artists have been invited to exhibit in the Singapore Pavilion. Each artist has strong individual careers and has stood out in their areas of practice. The selection provides a trans-generational survey of contemporary art practice in Singapore.

TANG Dawu (b.1943, Singapore) is an iconic figure in contemporary Asian art practice and regarded as the 'father of performance art' in Singapore. In the 80s and 90s, TANG performed extensively throughout the U.K and as held numerous exhibitions nationally and internationally in Portugal, Japan, The Philippines, Indonesia, Poland, Malaysia and the U.K. He founded the Artists' Village (Singapore) in 1988, and in 1999 and 2000, participated in the first Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale and Gwangju Biennale respectively. TANG was the 1999 Laureate of the 10th Fukuoka Asian Culture Prize (Arts & Culture), Japan and has been hugely influential in shaping contemporary art in Singapore.

Vincent LEOW (b. 1961, Singapore) is a pivotal figure in alternative art practices in Singapore. He co-founded UTOPIA with LIM (below), and helmed the contemporary artist-run space *Plastique Kinetic Worms*. LEOW has exhibited locally and internationally in Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, Germany, India, The Netherlands, France, China, Hong Kong Australia and the U.S.A. In 2002, he participated in the 3rd Gwangju Biennale. Cutting across genres and adopting multiple media in a long, prolific and often rebellious practice, LEOW's works are celebrated for capturing the energy, visual language and attitudes of the vanguard of its time.

Jason LIM (b. 1966, Singapore) is a leading contemporary ceramics sculptor and performance artist in Singapore. Noted as a 'maverick' in the field, LIM has radically shifted assumptions about ceramics as a discipline, pushing its potential as a media in installation and performance art pieces. He has also been at the forefront of performance art practices, and was co-Artistic Director of the performance event *Future of Imagination*. LIM has had several solo exhibitions nationally and internationally, including Australia and Japan. He has been invited to present performance art in many international performance festivals in Thailand, Japan, Germany, England, Poland, Vietnam and Greenland and to take up residency work periods in Japan, The Netherlands, Australia and the U.S.A. This year, he was awarded the Freeman Fellowship for his residency work period at the Vermont Studio Center in Vermont, U.S.A.

ZULKIFLE Mahmud (b. 1975, Singapore) is a prime figure in the emerging new media field in the visual arts of Singapore. A sonic or sound sculptor-artist, ZUL is an Associate Artist at the alternative art space *The Substation*, and has co-founded the art collective *Studio 19* and sound-art collective *Pink Ark*. He has exhibited locally and internationally in Thailand, Germany, Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, as well as in Norway and Finland, where he completed artist-in-residence programmes in 2001 and 2004 respectively. In 2006, he was invited to be part of the Ogaki Biennale in Japan. ZUL's practice signals a more encompassing and expanded visual arts sensory experience that includes the dimension of sound and aural sensations.