

Foreword

When Singapore gained independence on 9th August 1965, there were only two museums – The National Museum which showcased a mix of ethnographical and natural history items and The University Art Museum, now known as the National University of Singapore Museum – both legacies from the colonial era. The arts and culture scene then was small and nascent as our newly-independent nation-state prioritized and struggled to build a sustainable economy, provide good and safe homes for the people and build modern infrastructure.

Today, fifty-one years later, Singapore is home to more than fifty-four museums, state-run as well as private; big, small and medium in size and covering a whole range of topics from ethnography to Singapore history, Asian civilisations, World War 2 history, natural history, visual arts, city development, etc. Our past and heritage are preserved through our 72 national monuments and our well-loved Singapore Botanic Gardens which is now a World Heritage Site inscribed under UNESCO. This massive and speedy development of Singapore's arts and heritage scene should be recorded for posterity. The significant knowledge and know-how that we have accrued in developing our culture sector can benefit future generations of professionals in Singapore and abroad.

Research and scholarship plays a fundamental role in ensuring the sustainability and continued growth of the sector. Now more than ever, we, and our cultural institutions, need to actively research our cultural identity and shared heritage. Without good research and scholarship, knowledge developed in specialist areas as well as professional know-how can be irreparably lost, making it increasingly difficult for institutions to develop and innovate, and for individuals to maintain globally competitive international standards of professionalism.

Recognising these challenges, the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth established the Culture Academy in October 2015 to be a centre of excellence for the development of culture professionals and administrators. The Culture Academy Singapore champions thought leadership and is committed to the development of a robust and local body of knowledge and resources, and the nurturing of a community of practice across specialisations and disciplines built on knowledge management and sharing. The Culture Academy Singapore also seeks to learn from and share Singapore's experiences with cultural institutions and thought leaders in the region and beyond.

Cultural Connections, the first arts and heritage journal to be produced within the public sector, is a result of the commitment from the Ministry and the leaders of our cultural institutions to build up professional capabilities and domain expertise, as well as to promote scholarship and nurture thought leadership. In focusing on the significant recent journeys that our cultural institutions have undergone in considering our 50 year history to re-vamp, revitalise and envision new trajectories for culture in Singapore, the inaugural issue of *Cultural Connections* provides insights into cultural work in Singapore.

I am confident this journal can be sustained through the comprehensive documenting and generous sharing of our rich experiences across the cultural scene in Singapore. This inaugural issue contributes towards excellence in our cultural discourse to inspire current and future generations in the arts and heritage.

Rosa Daniel (Mrs.)
Deputy Secretary (Culture)
Ministry of Culture Community and Youth

Editor in Chief's Note

Thank you for reading *Cultural Connections*, the arts and culture journal of Singapore's Culture Academy.

Cultural Connections is an annual publication that provides a platform for administrators and professionals in the arts and culture fields to publish their original research, reports or case studies of important cultural policies, best practices, events and projects, as well as connect with each other across the various disciplines so that diverse experiences and learning points can be shared and exchanged to promote thought leadership in this field. As such, we hope that this journal will provide our readers with an idea of the latest research undertaken by our culture professionals whether in their administrative roles, curatorial work, or as conservators, educators, programmers or communicators.

This inaugural issue is themed "New Beginnings". It refers to the fact that this is a new journal published at an exciting time in Singapore's arts and culture scene when exciting new chapters are being written for future generations. From articles on the new roles played by national museums in the twenty-first century, to the role of and challenges faced by a modern historian, to essays on the major revamp that took place in the National Museum of Singapore and the openings of the National Gallery Singapore and a new heritage institution, the Indian Heritage Centre, this inaugural issue contains articles that shared what worked and did not in the conceptualisation and design of the galleries and spaces, and the programming of the various institutions.

To complement these articles, we also have Singapore's Heritage Conservation Centre sharing its journey into RFID tagging and how this technology has improved its collection management. There is also a piece on how the HCC's new research laboratory and state-of-the-art equipment have helped to unveil new insights into conservation work and enabled their conservators to better assess and treat the national collection. This issue ends with a case study by National Heritage Board's Digital Engagement team on their foray into the digital world and how this has helped bring the National Collection and Singapore's history and heritage into an individual's mobile device, making such information easily accessible for research and edutainment.

This inaugural issue is only the beginning; in the future, the editorial team intends to develop this publication into a peer-reviewed journal that will be a thought leader and key reference for culture administrators and professionals not only in Singapore but the region as well.

Thangamma Karthigesu
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