

Foreword

The year 2020 will be remembered for the COVID-19 pandemic and its complex, lasting impact on lives, livelihoods, and the concept of a globalised and borderless world.

Whilst the pandemic has led to borders being closed, businesses and lives disrupted, there have also been positive developments. In many cities today, air quality is better, space constraints reduced, and working from home arrangements have strengthened family and community bonds. Across the spectrum of economy and society, digital transformation and technological innovation have progressed in compressed time and speed.

In the midst of this flux and uncertainty, we have also witnessed the power of the arts and culture in bringing isolated peoples and communities together to uplift spirits and provide relief in the face of daily challenges. Many of us have discovered or renewed our appreciation for the beauty, power and impact of the arts and culture on lives, livelihoods and mental wellbeing. The crisis has also revealed the resilience, creativity and the “never say die” attitude of the arts and culture community, whose members came together to support one another during this time of few or no gigs, and to even rally together to bring relief to the underserved and marginalised groups.

Here in Singapore, the impact of COVID-19 was cushioned by proactive relief measures funded by the government to ensure that lives and livelihood were saved and sustained during this period. The Arts and Culture Resilience Package (ACRP) of \$55 million was given to protect livelihoods, defray costs, enhance capabilities, and encourage innovative digital presentations of artworks. It also helped artists to continue to inspire and uplift the people during the pandemic, and prepare themselves for recovery.

This edition offers a good collection of essays from both local experts and our international counterparts. The essays document the resilience, creativity, adaptability, and perseverance of the arts and culture community and the various governments as they work in tandem to ensure that the arts and culture are sustained and continue to provide succor and joy to their people.

As we prepare for the new normal, one thing is clear—the power of the arts and heritage cannot be underestimated. Here is looking forward to a more resilient, creative, and connected arts and culture community whom I am confident is prepared for the new normal.

Rosa Daniel (Mrs)

Dean, Culture Academy Singapore

Editor-in-Chief's Note

As I pen this note, I note that it is the last two months of 2020—a year that will go down in history as one that tested the entire world economically, socially, and politically.

This edition is testament to the arts and culture communities who have rallied together to bring solace, entertainment, and joy during these isolating times, despite how they are among the worst affected in the pandemic. Through the essays contributed by thought leaders from Australia, China, France, Germany, Indonesia and Singapore, we see that these communities the world over, like the mythical phoenix, is rising from the ashes to emerge stronger and more resilient.

The opening essay by Peter Ho, futurist and thinker from Singapore, reflects on the drivers and shapers of culture through examples from societies through history, focusing on how culture is resilient and adaptive despite cataclysmic events and disruptive trends.

COVID-19 has proved to be one of such cataclysmic events. Our essayists show how arts and culture communities in different parts of the world are adapting to the new normal, with digital technologies taking a lead in providing solutions. The contributions also offer a range of perspectives on how institutions, governments and communities are responding, as well as thoughts on the way forward.

From Australia, Dr Mathew Trinca shares how the National Museum of Australia is documenting the pandemic as it unfolds, with social media platforms playing a key role in connecting people and collecting stories. Our contributors from Europe, one of the worst-hit regions by the pandemic, detail the impact on the cultural sector. From France, prominent cultural leader Jack Lang makes the case for intensive government intervention in revitalising the arts and culture sector. Professor Dr Marion Ackermann of Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, one of Germany's largest museums, writes about the institute's immediate response to the pandemic and how museums will adapt in the post-COVID-19 world.

The essays from Asia present a variety of perspectives on how the arts and culture is adapting in the pandemic. Ye Yipei from The Palace Museum, China, advocates for digital solutions as the way forward for museums to stay relevant while arguing that museums will need to find new methods to add value to the visiting experience.

Singapore's essayists explore the pandemic's impact from diverse viewpoints—Yvonne Tham from The Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, Singapore's premier performing arts venue, talks about the role of an arts centre in bridging distances during these times of safe distancing; Michael Koh and Andy Tan, Centre for Liveable Cities, propose decentralising cultural spaces and detail strategies to implementing it; Alvin Tan

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from National Heritage Board provides an overview of the pandemic's impact on museums and recaps how the museum experience may adapt to the new normal; and Paul Tan, National Arts Council shares how the government agency supported the arts sector through various initiatives, such as grants and commissioned works.

Finally, we close with the contribution from artist Mella Jaarsma, Cemeti Institute for Art & Society based in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Jaarsma provides precious insights into the ability of the local arts community to self-organise and rally together for the bigger good, from marshalling resources to help marginalised communities to launching creative initiatives that brought succour to many in these trying times.

It is in the darkest hour that the grit of the human spirit shines through. We have seen how the arts and culture have great value in bringing people together and lifting spirits during crises. Moving forward, I am confident that the resilience, resolve and relevance of arts and culture communities around the world will steer them through this unprecedented event.

Here is wishing all our readers a much happier, healthier and positive 2021.

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