

Foreword

Singapore's 60th anniversary offers a poignant moment to reflect on our national journey and envision our cultural future. The theme of this year's edition of *Cultural Connections*—"Celebrating SG60: Deepening Roots, New Momentum"—encapsulates this dual opportunity to look back on six decades and to project forward to the decades ahead. It invites us to appreciate how our foundations have been shaped and strengthened, and recognise the forces that can realise or challenge our collective aspirations.

Our arts and culture ecosystem has matured over the past decades, shaped by sustained investments, vibrant communities and a growing confidence in our creative voices. These diverse voices reflect Singapore's fundamental multicultural and multilingual character. This collection demonstrates how cultural diversity is increasingly a defining strength to be celebrated. It is vividly brought to life in the thoughtful panel discussion between Meenakshy Bhaskar, Samuel Wong and Mohd Yaziz Mohd Hassan, who share how their respective performing arts practices continually evolve through cross-cultural innovation. Similarly, Pooja Nansi and Meira Chand's reflections on Singapore's literary development remind us how writing in multiple languages and from different cultural traditions enriches the tapestry of Singaporean storytelling.

Technology is another recurring theme in this volume. While it is most directly addressed in Lindsey McNerney's essay on the urgent need to reimagine creativity in the age of artificial intelligence (AI), other contributors also grapple with its implications. Several contributions note how the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated our embrace of digital platforms, reshaping everything from artistic production to audience engagement. While our artistic community pivoted with excellence to leverage technology, there are new challenges—questions of access, authenticity and sustainability. We continue to address these issues while recognising the immense opportunities to reach wider audiences and work in more collaborative, distributed ways.

Several contributions touch on the robust and growing dialogue among art forms. The boundaries between genres are increasingly porous. Literary practitioners describe how they draw from and incorporate performance and sound; theatre-makers work with digital installations; visual and musical artists are inspired by movement, rhythm and text. What we are witnessing is not a fragmentation but a fruitful interweaving of artistic domains and skills. This year's contributions demonstrate how Singaporean practitioners resist the constraints of disciplinary silos, embracing fluidity, hybridity and experimentation as creative principles.

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Amid this dynamism, we remain anchored by shared values: commitment to excellence, a desire to connect, and the belief that the arts are essential to our collective identity and wellbeing. As we reflect on six decades of cultural growth and innovation, we must also look ahead—to the artists and audiences of the future, to forms of expression that are emerging or even yet to be discovered, and to the policies, programmes and platforms that will nurture them. I hope that this issue of *Cultural Connections* will inspire continued dialogue, deepen the roots of our understanding, and spark new energy for the journey ahead.

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Editor-in-Chief's Note

This tenth volume of *Cultural Connections* marks a key milestone: not only the 60th anniversary of Singapore's independence, but also a decade of documenting our cultural imagination through this publication. This year's theme, "Celebrating SG60: Deepening Roots, New Momentum," presented our contributors with a generative polarity, within which they have explored multiple tensions: between old and new, continuity and change, memory and possibility.

Kwok Kian Chow opens the volume with a rich meditation on "generative polarity" itself—how dualities, constructively engaged, can inform policies, practices and partnerships across our cultural institutions. He urges us to embrace complexity in cultural development, and to engage with our history not as a static legacy, but as fertile ground for reimagination.

We see this reimagination in Goh Yew Lin's essay on the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, which reflects not only on musical excellence, but also on infrastructural and audience-building strategies needed to propel classical music into a "golden age". Similarly, Meira Chand and Pooja Nansi examine the arc of Singapore's literary growth: Meira recounting how far we've come since the early days of Singapore Writers Week and its successor the Singapore Writers Festival, which Pooja directed for several years as it shaped new generations of authors and readers. Nisha Sajani reminds us that reimagination can help us to find new roles for artistic and cultural activity, including the maintenance and nurturing of health and wellness, both individual and collective.

Singapore's policy ecosystem has often been lauded for its coherence, with strong alignment between public agencies, private initiative, and community energy. Rachel Teo explores this nexus through the lens of private museums and philanthropic support; Hamzah Muzaini examines the role of community-led initiatives in the richness and range of Singapore's overall offerings.

This collection also features wide-ranging wisdom from two panel discussions with experts from the performing arts and theatre. We have described these contributions as being "In Their Own Words", retaining as far as possible the conversationality and mutually iterative idea-building of these discussions. Among many insights, Meenakshy Bhaskar, Samuel Wong and Mohd Yaziz Mohd Hassan delve into the importance of seamless leadership transitions by building up the next generation of performance practitioners. Chong Tze Chien, Nelson Chia, Shaza Ishak and Subramanian Ganesh ponder the

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challenges of speaking to both national and specific ethnic audiences, even as the local theatre scene has professionalised significantly over the years.

In all these essays, past, present and future are in dynamic conversation. History is never static, as Kwok Kian Woon and Kwa Chong Guan remind us. Whether tracing 700 years of regional history or reinterpreting civilisational narratives, they show how understanding our past is essential to orienting ourselves in the present. Heritage is not merely about preservation, but about meaning-making. The future—particularly through technology—has also loomed large across the volume. Lindsey McNerney challenges us to reckon with artificial intelligence as a new creative co-pilot, while urging us to retain and strengthen our uniquely human capacity for creative, independent thought. Others address technology more implicitly—from hybrid formats to digital audiences, from tech-enabled storytelling to new audiences. The momentum is real; if steered well, new technologies can deepen and even broaden our cultural roots.

As we look ahead to SG100 and beyond, I hope the reflections in this volume offer inspiration—not only for what has been, but for what is already here, and might yet be. May these contributions spark new collaboration, nourish creative risk-taking, and strengthen our sense of shared cultural purpose.

Dr. Aaron Maniam

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