

Foreword

2023 has been a dynamic and eventful year for Singapore arts and culture. Like many other countries, we have put the shadow of the pandemic behind us. Our museums, galleries and performing arts groups have resumed efforts to grow and engage audiences, visitors and stakeholders. But is it as if the pandemic never happened? It is clear that, even as activity in the sector picks up, COVID-19 has left an indelible mark on how work is done in the sector and how to think about risks and opportunities. This observation recurs in many of the 10 essays in this year's edition of *Cultural Connections*.

"Of Tailwinds and Turbulence" focuses our minds on the shifts in our operating context for this eighth edition. The fallout from the pandemic, new economic pressures, the war in Ukraine, the polarisation of values and identities all represent the turbulence that will continue to impact any plans in the cultural sphere. But in the same breath, these same tailwinds point to global, regional and national factors as well as advances in technology that could represent new energies and exciting possibilities.

This edition of *Cultural Connections* also underscores the importance of cultural policy. Governments can and do shape how culture is experienced by its citizens and is projected to the rest of the world. Through their education, developmental policies as well as conceptual and regulatory frameworks, culture can become an integral part of day-to-day life, even as national and ethnic identities continue to evolve with the passage of time.

As Singapore has launched its latest five-year strategic roadmaps for the arts and heritage this year, we feature the Chief Executives from the National Arts Council and National Heritage Board in an exclusive conversation. This new reader-friendly format should be a rewarding read for those who want insights on how Singapore's cultural landscape will advance in the coming years. From our counterparts in the media sector, the Infocomm Media Development Agency outlines the thinking about the film and television sector and the strong connections with Singapore's artistic and cultural DNA. We also have a powerful argument about the role of humanities and social sciences in today's complex world from Nanyang Technological University. From the National University of Singapore, the other top university in Singapore, there is a timely contribution that will help us navigate the complexities of intellectual property law in the time of generative AI.

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As with previous editions, we have also cast our nets wider to invite thinkers from around the world. For more global insights on the direction of arts policies, we have excellent contributions from the leaders of Canada and Hong Kong's arts councils as well as a veteran in the creative economy who frames COVID-19 as an opportunity for us to look beyond the horizon, including thinking about long term issues like inclusivity and sustainability.

Finally, all the editions of *Cultural Connections* aim to provide a diversity of voices, including perspectives from new players, and those working on artistic creation and heritage preservation. This year, we will learn more about the evolution of Chinese literature in Singapore and Malaya during colonial times, reflect on celebrating minority culture in a multicultural society, and understand the role of chamber music in the community music scene.

I hope you will enjoy reading these thoughtful essays and will recommend them to other interested readers as well. Wishing you new creative energies for the rest of 2023!

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Editor-in-Chief's Note

Being invited to edit this issue of *Cultural Connections* was an opportunity for me to reflect on the importance of discourse, and how it is critical in a mature society like Singapore to have a diverse expression of ideas and arguments. In fact, one could easily argue productive discourse as well as the ability to hear/read/internalise different perspectives empathetically is the foundation of any enduring civilisation.

Essays we read in journals like *Cultural Connections* are, for sure, part of our national discourse. They offer deeper reflections on the cultural issues of the day, from the lens of thought leaders. These are not specialist essays targeted at academia which often require substantial foreknowledge, nor are these like the opinion pieces we see in the broadsheets; newspapers simply do not have the space for lengthier expositions. Certainly, these essays won't have clickbait as headlines or the snappy feel-good wrap-ups we have come to associate with social media platforms.

Rather, quality discourse asks thoughtful questions, offers more than one interpretation or conclusion and strives to steep in our minds, long after we have finished reading. Indeed, the most effective arguments can rewire our assumptions and challenge our own biases. What follows may be at a subconscious level but somewhere nestled in our brain must lie the seed for change, and all the good it portends.

Targeting cultural policymakers as well as experienced practitioners, *Cultural Connections'* essays will help us take stock of where we are in the cultural development of Singapore while encouraging us to look at alternate models of working and thinking.

Arts and heritage, of course, touch the lives of every Singaporean and, over the years, other government agencies have also come to realise they have a stake in the well-being, quality of life and rootedness that culture puts on the national agenda. Thus, while *Cultural Connections* adds depth to public policy discourse in general, voices from the rest of the public service who are vested in Singapore's culture have been very welcome. This also underscores the importance of inter-sectoral approaches in our work.

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At the same time, we must keep an open mind and appreciate how any discourse is created in a specific context. As a MCCY publication, *Cultural Connections* must grapple with the realities of good governance in Singapore, including the economic, demographic and geopolitical challenges that confront the country. It is also the hope of the editorial team that we can build a fuller understanding among readers of the trade-offs and desired outcomes behind cultural policymaking in a country as unique as Singapore.

Finally it leaves me to thank my predecessor Thangamma Karthigesu for helming *Cultural Connections* since its very first issue and building a strong foundation for the editorial team. The fact that working on this edition has been so smooth is in no small way thanks to the processes and the team she has put in place.

I hope readers will enjoy this edition's essays. Digital copies are also easily available via the QR code below or <https://go.gov.sg/culturalconnections8>. I look forward to your thoughts on how we can make this journal even better. Do share any feedback or suggestions with us at culture_academy@mccy.gov.sg. Thank you!

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