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**Media Release**

**Singapore Biennale 2016's Clear Regional Focus Wins Strong Public Support**

*More than 614,000 visitors came to the 5th edition of the Singapore Biennale*

*Singapore, 2 March 2017* – The fifth edition of the Singapore Biennale 2016 (SB2016), one of Asia's most compelling contemporary visual art exhibitions, closed on 26 February 2017 with record numbers which surpassed 614,000 visitors. Singapore Biennale 2016: *An Atlas of Mirrors*' educational programmes and outreach activities, which took place over the exhibition's four-month period, also had high public participation. The strong visitor numbers manifest a tangible commitment by the public to engage with contemporary art from the region, and signal heightened interest among local and international audiences for diverse artistic viewpoints from across Southeast, East and South Asia.

The Singapore Biennale 2016 visitor figures topped that of the Biennale in 2013, which had closed with 560,349 visitors. This Biennale's total visitor numbers include ticketed admissions at SAM and SAM at 8Q, as well as indoor admissions across SB2016 Biennale venues around the Bras Basah Bugis precinct, including National Museum of Singapore, Peranakan Museum, Asian Civilisations Museum, The Arts House and the Singapore Management University's de Suantio Gallery.

"The enthusiastic response to the Singapore Biennale 2016 is heartening and encouraging. The Biennale underscores SAM's commitment to curating and exhibiting the contemporary art of the region, which reflect and express the diverse, current-day issues and concerns within this culturally rich locale. We are pleased that this edition has provided the opportunity for audiences from Singapore and abroad to better understand the intersecting interests of Southeast, East and South Asia through art, and to form unique perspectives of the world from the vantage point of Southeast Asia." says Ms Joyce Toh, Curatorial Co-Head, Singapore Art Museum.

Singapore Biennale 2016 featured works by 63 artists and art collectives from 19 countries and territories across Southeast Asia, East and South Asia. From monumental installations to sound art and film, artworks of various mediums were curated around nine sub-themes and presented at several locations, with the Singapore Art Museum and SAM at 8Q as anchor venues. Singapore Biennale 2016 artworks responded to the title of *An Atlas of Mirrors*, exploring notions of space, time, memory, nature,

boundaries, agency, identity, displacement and absence. One of this edition's highlights was its presentation of several site-specific and commissioned contemporary works never seen before on the biennale circuit.

In conjunction with Singapore Biennale 2016, the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the Benesse Prize, awarded at the Venice Biennale for the last ten editions, was presented for the first time in Asia. The 11<sup>th</sup> Benesse Prize was awarded to Ms Pannaphan Yodmanee from Thailand, for her work titled *Aftermath*. Singaporean artist Mr. Zulkifle Mahmud was also announced as the recipient of the Soichiro Fukutake Prize – a special award presented on the occasion of the inaugural Asian edition of the Benesse Prize – for his work titled *SONICreflection*. This collaboration with the Singapore Biennale for the Asian edition of the Benesse Prize is recognition of the depth of the Singapore Biennale and rich and exciting artistic developments of this region.

Chief Executive Officer for the National Arts Council (NAC) Mrs. Rosa Daniel said: “As the commissioner of the Biennale, the National Arts Council is encouraged by the public and regional interest shown in Singapore Biennale 2016. We heard good buzz from visitors, media and members of the arts community. The fact that the Benesse Holdings Inc has chosen to partner the Singapore Art Museum by co-organising the first Asian edition of the Benesse Prize at this Biennale, further attests to its reputation. We congratulate the Singapore Art Museum on a successful 2016 edition and commend its commitment to developing a contemporary art biennale with a strong theme and focus on Southeast Asia and Singapore.”

The Singapore Biennale 2016 curatorial team consisted of SAM Curators Ms. Joyce Toh, Ms. Tan Siuli, Mr. Louis Ho, Ms. Andrea Fam and Mr. John Tung, as well as four Associate Curators who were invited by SAM to work collaboratively together. The four Associate Curators are Ms. Suman Gopinath - based in Bangalore, India; Ms. Nur Hanim Khairuddin - based in Ipoh, Malaysia, Mr. Michael Lee from Singapore, and Ms. Xiang Liping - based in Shanghai, China. In addition, a Singapore Biennale 2016 Advisory Committee comprising experts from different fields – from historians, sociologists, academics, to arts practitioners such as playwrights, intellectuals, curators – gave independent and invaluable advice to the Singapore Biennale 2016 Curatorial team. Members of the Committee included respected art historian Mr. TK Sabapathy, curator Ms. June Yap, playwright and director Mr. Huzir Sulaiman, and academic Professor Chua Beng Huat, amongst others.

### **Educational Programmes and Outreach Activities**

The 2016 edition of the Singapore Biennale also offered a diverse range of engaging educational programmes and public outreach activities. These included sold-out artist and curator tours, artist performances, artist-led walks, workshops, art and music collaborations, and the Singapore Biennale

2016 Symposium. These programmes attracted diverse groups of participants, from students, young adults, and families with young children, to art enthusiasts and art professionals. Among the highlight activities in the closing month of Singapore Biennale 2016 that drew great public interest was Biennale on Wheels, a self-guided exploration of artworks across all Biennale venues on bicycles.

The highly anticipated two-day Singapore Biennale Symposium explored the theme *Why Biennale At All?* and took place during Singapore Art Week in January 2017. The ticketed event took a critical look at the role, relevance and potentialities of biennales in the region and beyond. There were in-depth presentations and panel discussions from a diverse range of art thinkers, including biennale directors, curators, artists and scholars from around the world. Symposium participants were also able to engage with the speakers during question and answer sessions that followed each discussion.

One of the Symposium speakers, Mr. Shwetal A. Patel – Executive Officer of the Kochi Biennale Foundation, comments, “The Singapore Biennale is the fulcrum that underpins much of what is exciting about the country’s art scene today. Intrinsicly local with a global outlook, the Biennale reflects the aspirations of the Singaporean people as well as the region at large. In the future, I hope the Biennale and its related programmes, events and exhibitions will thrive to generate and exhibit the great art and artists of our time.”

In its efforts to engage with the wider visual arts community in Singapore, SAM and Singapore Biennale 2016 also included a total of five Affiliate Projects, which were organised and developed by other art institutions responding closely to the Biennale title of “*An Atlas of Mirrors*”, and 25 Parallel Projects, which were visual art exhibitions taking place locally and regionally at the same time.

Singapore Biennale 2016: *An Atlas of Mirrors* was organised by the Singapore Art Museum and commissioned by the National Arts Council of Singapore. It was on from 27 October 2016 to 26 February 2017.

#SingaporeBiennale

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## **About the Singapore Biennale**

The Singapore Biennale was established in 2006 as the country's pre-eminent platform for international dialogue in contemporary art. It places Singapore's artists within a global context, and fosters productive collaborations with the international arts community. In this way, the Biennale provides new opportunities for local visual artists, arts organisations and businesses. It further cultivates deeper public engagement with contemporary visual arts through a four-month exhibition, and its accompanying public engagement and education programmes that include artist and curator talks and tours, school visits and workshops, and community days. It complements achievements in other areas of arts and culture, collectively enhancing Singapore's international profile as a vibrant city in which to live, work and play. The 2006 and 2008 editions of the Biennale were organised by the National Arts Council. As with the 2011 and 2013 editions, Singapore Biennale 2016 is organised by the Singapore Art Museum, and commissioned by the National Arts Council. Visit [www.singaporeartmuseum.sg/SingaporeBiennale](http://www.singaporeartmuseum.sg/SingaporeBiennale) for more information.

## **About the Singapore Art Museum**

The Singapore Art Museum (SAM) is a contemporary art museum which focuses on art-making and art thinking in Singapore, Southeast Asia and Asia, encompassing a worldwide perspective on contemporary art practice. SAM advocates and makes accessible interdisciplinary contemporary art through research-led and evolving curatorial practice. Since it opened in January 1996, SAM has built up one of the most important collections of contemporary art from the region. It seeks to seed and nourish a stimulating and creative space in Singapore through exhibitions and public programmes, and to deepen every visitor's experience. These include outreach and education, research and publications, as well as cross-disciplinary residencies and exchanges.

SAM occupies two buildings: the old St Joseph's Institution on Bras Basah Road, built in 1855 and now a National Monument; and SAM at 8Q, a conservation building across the road on Queen Street that was the old Catholic High. In 2011, SAM was the venue organiser of the Singapore Biennale, becoming the main organiser in 2013 and 2016. SAM was incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee on 13 November 2013, operating under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. To find out more, visit [www.singaporeartmuseum.sg](http://www.singaporeartmuseum.sg)

## **About the National Arts Council, Singapore**

The National Arts Council champions the arts in Singapore. By nurturing creative excellence and supporting broad audience engagement, we want to develop a distinctive global city for the arts. With a nod to tradition and an eye to the future, we cultivate accomplished artists and vibrant companies. Our support for the arts is comprehensive – from grants and partnerships to industry facilitation and arts housing. The Council welcomes greater private and corporate giving to and through the arts so that together we can make the arts an integral part of everyone's lives. For more information on the Council's mission and plans, please visit [www.nac.gov.sg](http://www.nac.gov.sg)