

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Weixin Quek Chong wins the Grand Prize and Yanyun Chen the People's Choice Award at the *President's Young Talents 2018*

29 November 2018, Singapore – Singapore Art Museum announced the winners of the seventh edition of the *President's Young Talents* this evening at an awards ceremony graced by Madam Halimah Yacob, President of the Republic of Singapore. Weixin Quek Chong won the Grand Prize with her artwork titled *sft crsh ctrl*, while Yanyun Chen's *The scars that write us* garnered the most votes by members of public at the exhibition, clinching the People's Choice Award. The Grand Prize and People's Choice Award are worth \$20,000 and \$5,000 respectively, and will go towards the development of their artistic practices.

Inaugurated in 2001 by SAM, the *President's Young Talents* is the nation's only mentoring, commissioning and award programme for emerging Singaporean artists aged 35 and below. Alumni and winners of earlier editions include the likes of Heman Chong, Boo Junfeng, Charles Lim and Ang Song Ming, many of whom have gone on to develop outstanding work in and beyond Singapore. This edition features artworks by Yanyun Chen, Weixin Quek Chong, Debbie Ding, Hilmi Johandi and Zarina Muhammad, developed under the guidance of a curator-mentor panel made up of David Chan, Roger Nelson, Grace Tan, Jason Wee and Zaki Razak.

The winner of this edition's Grand Prize was selected by an independent jury panel comprising artist and art educator Vincent Leow, artist Kumari Nahappan, Michaelangelo Samson, Managing Director at Standard Chartered Bank and Chair of the acquisition committee at SAM, Bala Starr, Director at the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts, and Dr. June Yap, Director of Curatorial, Programmes and Publication at SAM.

In a joint statement, the jury panel said, "What a privilege it was to experience groundbreaking installations by five young Singaporean artists at a national institution. The decision was not an easy one as each work had strengths that were recognised across the judging panel. After much deliberation, Weixin Quek Chong's installation, *sft crsh ctrl*, stood out for its command of space and material, and the fluidity with which she executed her concept. We also recognise Weixin's work contains elements of risk integral to contemporary practice."

An installation comprising draped materials – from sheets of latex to faux fur – and objects that evade traditional inquiry, *sft crsh ctrl* challenges viewers to disengage from their instinct to rationalise the artwork, and in so doing, reveals the complexity of being dependent on logic.

On winning the Grand Prize, Weixin Quek Chong said, "The *President's Young Talents* has been a formative experience for me, and the opportunity to develop my work for the commission really pushed me to try things I had only imagined previously. It was great having so much understanding and encouragement from my mentor and the Singapore Art Museum, as well as all the combined efforts to realise the installation. It was already amazing to be able to be part of this edition's

President's Young Talents, and this is really more than I had expected; I'm so grateful for this support to further my work."

The People's Choice Award component in the *President's Young Talents* programme provided the public an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process, and encouraged critical thinking and public dialogue on local contemporary art. On her artwork securing the highest number of public vote on-site at the exhibition, Yanyun Chen says, "It is an honour that a story about one family's keloids is able to speak to a wider public, and for these thoughts to echo and reverberate with others. It heartens me that scars, as a repository of memories and narratives, can have voices of their own, and can remind us that they are beautiful in their own way. May we all come to terms with our wounds. Thank you for this award, for your votes and for my family for trusting their stories with me."

Dr June Yap, Director of Curatorial, Programmes and Publications at SAM, said, "We at the Singapore Art Museum are pleased with both outcomes of the Grand Prize and People's Choice Awards. The selection of Weixin Quek Chong and Yanyun Chen represent important concerns and considerations for a contemporary art museum — experiences that resonate with the public and that which is at the vanguard of contemporary expression. We congratulate all the artists for their efforts and are grateful to the public who have taken the time to reflect on and engage with the artworks of *President's Young Talents 2018*."

"Since the Singapore Art Museum inaugurated the *President's Young Talents* programme 17 years ago, the museum remains dedicated in its support of local artists who continually push the boundaries of the definitions and expressions of contemporary art. We are grateful for the generous support of this edition of the *President's Young Talents* by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and Ascendas-Singbridge Gives Foundation, and the time and effort put in by the members of the curator-mentors and jury panel," said Mr Edmund Cheng, Chairman of SAM. "While this is the last exhibition to be held at SAM's premises before its major building revamp, SAM will continue to present contemporary art from Singapore and the region at partner venues and off-site locations during this period."

The *President's Young Talents 2018* is organised by SAM and supported by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. The exhibition of the finalists' artworks is held at SAM at 8Q from 4 October 2018 to 27 January 2019. Accompanying programmes include artist performances, theatrical, poetry and music responses to the artworks, tours, talks and artist-led workshops. The 2018 edition of the *President's Young Talents* is supported by Ascendas-Singbridge Gives Foundation.

For more information, please read:

Annex A – Exhibition Synopsis: *President's Young Talents 2018*

Annex B – Accompanying Programmes for *President's Young Talents 2018*

Annex C – Artwork Descriptions and Artist Biographies

Images of artists and artworks may be downloaded at bit.ly/Media-PYT2018

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www.singaporeartmuseum.sg

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www.youtube.com/SAMtelly

About the Singapore Art Museum

Singapore Art Museum 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 School. The museum building along Bras Basah Road is currently closed in preparation for a major building revamp, with museum programming continuing at SAM at 8Q and partner venues such as the National Library, Singapore.

SAM was the venue organiser of the Singapore Biennale in 2011, becoming the main organiser in 2013 and 2016. SAM will continue to organise the next two editions in 2019 and 2022. 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

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Annex A

Exhibition Synopsis: *President's Young Talents 2018*

Dates: 4 October 2018 – 27 January 2019

Opening Hours: 10am – 7pm (Saturdays to Thursdays), 10am to 9pm (Fridays)

Venue: SAM at 8Q, 8 Queen Street, Singapore 188535

Admission Charges:

Standard*	
Adults	\$6
Students & senior citizens (with valid ID)	\$3
Children under six	Free
Groups of 20 or more	20% off standard adult admission charges
Singaporeans and permanent residents	Free

* Free admission to SAM every Friday from 6.00pm to 9.00pm and on Open House days

The *President's Young Talents* is Singapore's premier and only mentoring, commissioning and award programme, which recognises promising artists aged 35 and below, whose practices chart new dimensions in Singapore contemporary art. Previous *President's Young Talents* include Boo Junfeng, Heman Chong, Charles Lim, Donna Ong, Tan Pin Pin and Vertical Submarine, to name a few, all of whom have gone on to develop outstanding work in and beyond Singapore.

Inaugurated by the Singapore Art Museum in 2001 to promote critically engaged practices through discourse and experimentation, the 2018 edition of *President's Young Talents* seeks to afford greater artistic and curatorial growth for the artists involved and curator-mentors respectively. Invited curator-mentors, ranging from past participating artists to independent curators, will form a curatorial committee to mentor artists for the programme. An independent jury – which will include members from SAM – will be convened to award the *President's Young Talents 2018* prize.

Artists

This edition's artists are Yanyun Chen, Weixin Quek Chong, Debbie Ding, Hilmi Johandi and Zarina Muhammad. Their commissioned artworks that span painting, sculpture, performance and new media will be on view at SAM at 8Q till 27 January 2019.

Curator-mentors

The Curatorial Committee members this year are: David Chan, Roger Nelson, Zaki Razak, Grace Tan and Jason Wee. The SAM curatorial team led by Andrea Fam, facilitated the selection and curating of the *President's Young Talents* exhibition.

Annex B

Accompanying Programmes for President's Young Talents 2018

A series of programmes will take place throughout the exhibition period, where visitors can further engage with the ideas and concepts explored in the artworks. More information may be found at www.singaporeartmuseum.sg

[PERFORMANCES]

KAMI / 神 by Irfan Kasban

Friday, 25 January 2019
7.30pm – 8.00pm, 8.30pm – 9.00pm
SAM at 8Q, Gallery 1.11 (Level 1)
Free, by registration only

KAMI / 神 (Us/ Gods) delves into how tourism inevitably changes sacred spaces, holy sites, and the faces of the otherworldly beings that inhabit them. Gathering inspiration from the poetry of Farid ud-Din Attar - *Conference of the Birds* and drawing from the themes and narratives explored in *Pragmatic Prayers for the Kala at the Threshold*, in this reinterpretation, the *Simurgh*, a wandering deity, finds that he has trouble constructing his own image. He is pulled through the ebb and flow of believers of varying faiths and non-believers alike. The performance involves Irfan inhabiting the spaces of the worlds between the hills, land and sea while seeking to find his image on reflective surfaces, including the audiences' eyes. Presented as a durational, multidisciplinary performance, the piece has elements of *Butoh*, Viewpoints, physical theatre, performance art.

Performed in Malay, with English and Japanese surtitles.

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A Closing Performance by Zarina Muhammad

**"Ku tahu asal usul mu
Yang laut balik ke laut
Yang darat balik ke darat"**

Sunday, 27 January 2019
5.00pm – 6.00pm
SAM at 8Q, Gallery 1.11 and Lobby (Level 1)
Free with museum admission

**I know your origins
Let those from the sea return to the sea
Let those from the land return to the land*

The final verse from *Ulek Mayang*, a song traditionally performed to appease the spirits of the sea marks the key reference point and final rite for this closing performance. Alongside invited guest artists and collaborators, experience Zarina Muhammad's artwork, *Pragmatic Prayers for the Kala at the Threshold* in its final moments. The closing performance is a tribute to the points of forgetting between the pre-colonial and the post-colonial and an expression of gratitude to the cosmological worlds of our making - spaces and places which we respectively belong and ultimately return to.

[FILMS]

Outdoor Movie Screening: "It's a Great, Great World"

Friday, 25 January 2019
8.00pm – 9.30pm
SAM at 8Q, Outdoor Plaza
Free

Fans of old-time Singapore, be prepared for a massive rush of nostalgia in this special outdoor screening of *It's a Great, Great World* ! Featuring an ensemble cast of Singaporean actors and singers, this local production by director Kelvin Tong harks back to Singapore in the 1940s and tells the stories of characters whose lives revolved around Great World, one of Singapore's famed amusement parks.

Be sure to also pop by the ongoing *President's Young Talents 2018* exhibition and check out artist Hilmi Johandi's *An Exposition* to immerse yourself in his artwork that is also inspired by the defunct 'World(s)' – New World, Great World and Gay World (formerly Happy World).

[TOURS]

Art & Poetry: A Spoken Word Trail

Saturday, 19 January 2019

5.00pm – 6.00pm

SAM at 8Q Lobby

Free, by registration only

Explore the *President's Young Talents 2018* exhibition through an art and poetry trail, led by poets Manickavasagan Ashmita, Christine Chia, Chua Poh Leng, Shivram Gopinath and Charlene Shepherdson. From scars to nostalgia and spirituality, delve into the artwork topics and themes through live readings of multilingual poetry, written in response to the artworks.

This programme is co-curated with Poetry Festival Singapore and aims to promote poetry and literary excellence in a multilingual, multicultural and multi-generational setting.

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Seniors Day Out: Kopi, Teh and Contemporary Art

January 2019

SAM at 8Q

Discover how contemporary art is for everyone with these intergenerational and multilingual tours led by students from Nanyang Girls' High School. Specially catered for seniors and focusing on artworks referencing Singaporean places and history, these multilingual tours include refreshments.

[ARTIST TALKS & PANEL DISCUSSIONS]

Magical Objects and Modern Mantras by Alfian Sa'at and Faris Joraimi

Friday, 11 January 2019

7.30pm–9.00pm

SAM at 8Q, Moving Image Gallery (Level 2)

Free, by registration only

Magic Objects and Modern Mantras examines the legacies of 7 objects from Malay magic. These include love ointments, invincibility talismans, beautifying needles, blessed waters and trance-inducing incense.

In this presentation, Faris Joraimi will speak about the allure of magical objects, with their promise of instant solutions and desired transformations, matched by their demands on individual faith and sacrifice. He will be joined by Alfian Sa'at, who will share his English translations of Malay magical spells (the mantera or mantra) as well as his own original 'modern' renderings of these mantras.

This talk is a response to Zarina Muhammad's artwork, *Pragmatic Prayers for the Kala at the Threshold*.

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Contours of Singapore History: Urban Cognition and Spatial-formal Translations

Saturday, 19 January 2019

2.00pm – 3.30pm

SAM at 8Q, Moving Image Gallery (Level 2)

Free, by registration only

Join Dr Imran Tajudeen who will reveal fascinating insights into our histories as a people and our relationship to the land and with each other in this talk where he discusses the political, socio-economic and cultural histories that may be gleaned about urban and rural Singapore from cross-referencing vernacular/colloquial and official colonial place names, old European maps, accounts and records in the Malay language.

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In Conversation: Skin, Scars and Trauma

Wednesday, 23 January 2019, 7:30pm – 8:30pm

SAM at 8Q, Moving Image Gallery (Level 2)

\$15 (Tickets available at SAM at 8Q and ARACTIX)

Join this panel discussion with artist Yanyun Chen, writer Jeremy Fernando, and an art therapist, as they discuss the relationship between keloids, scars, trauma, images, narratives, and healing.

[WORKSHOPS]

Artist-led Workshops

Various dates

SAM at 8Q

Gain a deeper appreciation of contemporary art as you meet the *President's Young Talents 2018* artists. Through these workshops, discover their artistic processes, ways of thinking and choice of materials and medium. More information available at www.singaporeartmuseum.sg

Annex C

Artwork Descriptions and Artist Biographies

Yanyun Chen

The scars that write us

2018

Charcoal, chalk, gold leaf, steel plates (set of 10) and steel sheets (set of 6)

Steel plates 30 x 30 cm each; steel sheets 180 x 80 cm each

Collection of the Artist

Singapore Art Museum Commission

The scars that write us adopts the keloid scar as its reference and offers a narrative on wounds and scars, and those that bear them.

Entering into a dark, quietened space, a visitor's first perceives rather than sees the work directly, evoking a sense of anticipation, curiosity, and uncertainty for what lies ahead, obscured.

The work unfolds in three types of spatial experiences: near, far, and wide. The sense of proximity – or distance – alludes to the complex relationships between the physical marking, the body, and the person who bears the keloid. The installation also endeavours to provide a space of contemplation for those who live with the ordeal of scars – the physical, and otherwise.

Of marks and scars, illness and injury, mind and body, ***The scars that write us*** is an installation that speaks of the most personal of experiences that every person holds.

Yanyun Chen (b. 1986, Singapore) is a visual artist and lecturer at Yale-NUS College. Her drawing practice deconstructs our role as witness-of-decay – depicting wilting flowers as a manifestation of time passing; researching nudity embroiled in historical spectacles and censorship; investigating the fictions and operations of etymology; and reading scars on skin. Grounded in stories and philosophical readings, her works incorporate a blend of classical Eastern and Western drawing techniques.

Chen is a PhD candidate at The European Graduate School in Switzerland/Malta, where she obtained her Masters in Communications. She has trained in the Czech Republic, Denmark, Singapore and Sweden, and was awarded the Special Jury Prize at the 15th Japan Media Arts Festival (2012). Her published works include *50 Drawing Exercises*, *Tracing Etymology: Origin and Time*, *Monsters and Demons* and *It's Fiction*. She manages illustration and animation studio Piplatchka, and co-founded Delere Press. She lives and works in Singapore.

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Weixin Quek Chong

sft crsh ctrl

2018

Silk twill, latex, wood, silicone, vinyl, faux fur, paper, screens, aluminium and stainless steel

Dimensions variable

Singapore Art Museum Commission

Collection of the Artist

Shaped by the concept of the contingency plan, ***sft crsh ctrl*** by Weixin Quek Chong invites visitors to engage with a range of objects and series of material encounters that seem to evade traditional inquiry. The work unfolds, unfurls, suspends, and drapes in ways that challenge the visitor's understanding and expectation of materials. Its components evoke a sense of precarity and the notion of non-occurrence. It is an installation of 'surfaces' as explored through material form and transformation, and challenges the viewer to disengage from their instinct to rationalise. ***sft crsh ctrl*** guides the visitor towards feelings of unease and uncertainty, and in doing so reveals the complexity of being dependent on logic.

Weixin Quek Chong (b. 1988, Singapore) is a visual artist whose practice explores the materiality of human experience and existence, and the relationships between the digital, organic and aesthetic. The effects and methods of manipulating images across materials are core to her practice.

She received her MFA from the Royal College of Art in London with a specialisation in printmaking, and was a recipient of the NAC Overseas Arts Scholarship (Postgraduate) (2012) and the Tan Ean Kiam Postgraduate Scholarship. Previously an artist-in-residence at the NTU Centre of Contemporary Art in Singapore, her works have been exhibited in Carrara, Istanbul, London, Paris, Santiago, Seoul, Taipei, Vienna and Yogyakarta. She lives and works in Singapore, the UK and Spain.

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Debbie Ding

Soil Works

2018

Mixed media installation

Dimensions variable

Collection of the Artist

Singapore Art Museum commission

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, soil is a 'biologically active, porous medium, that has developed in the uppermost layer of Earth's crust'. Yet what *is* soil? In ***Soil Works***, Debbie Ding unearths and isolates units of the composite excavated from concealed areas under expressways, overhead bridges, road triangles, carparks – public spaces which are usually overlooked as one travels through Singapore – and proposes, in her words, “a series of artistic investigations into soil in Singapore and its visibility and invisibility”.

The installation is presented in five parts: “Red Landscape”, “Home without a Shelter”, “Topsoil”, “Sand Weight”, and “Soil Column”. Each ‘station’ beckons the visitor to observe soil in a range of alternative investigative approaches.

Through ***Soil Works***, Ding considers the strategies of researching the physicality of soil in Singapore by highlighting both its perceptible and less perceivable qualities. In doing so, she destabilises the concept of the scientific laboratory by staging her own multi-station ‘testing’ gallery.

Debbie Ding (b. 1984, Singapore) is a visual artist and technologist who researches and explores technologies of perception through personal investigations and experimentation. She uses prototyping as a strategy for artistic production, and to iteratively explore potential dead-ends, in the pursuit of knowledge. This has led to a series of archive and map-based works under the moniker ‘Singapore Psychogeographical Society’, as well as computer-aided investigations into archaeological and historical finds.

Ding received a BA in English Literature from the National University of Singapore, and as a recipient of the NAC Arts Scholarship (Postgraduate), an MA in Design Interactions from the Royal College of Art, London. She has presented in Singapore at The Substation (2010, 2012, 2015, 2017), NUS Museum (2016), the Singapore Biennale (2016) and National Museum of Singapore (2017). She has exhibited her work internationally in France, Germany and the UK. She lives and works in Singapore.

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Hilmi Johandi

An Exposition

2018

Oil on canvas, three-channel video, digital print on vinyl sticker mounted on wood, synthetic polymer paint, plywood and mild steel

Installation: dimensions variable; video: 16:9, colour, silent

Singapore Art Museum Commission

Collection of the Artist

An Exposition tells the story of the defunct 'World(s)' – New World, Great World and Gay World (formerly Happy World) – through fragments of material and memory. The schemas of these bygone era amusement parks are used to introduce audiences to an assemblage of fragmentary elements. In doing so, Hilmi attempts to establish a speculative dialogue that traces the systems of production, consumption, pleasures and entertainment of these 'World(s)'.

Visitors are welcomed to traverse a space marked out by components that together appear to resemble a deconstructed theatrical set. These range from wooden sculptures and silent animated videos, to standees and mounted printed vinyls featuring images and scenes captured at the 'World(s)'.

The installation is immersive whilst reminding the viewer of the void that exists within the theatricality of set designs and amusement parks. In a presentation of decontextualised signs and symbols, **An Exposition** engages with the local history and collective memory of Singapore.

Hilmi Johandi (b. 1987, Singapore) primarily works with painting and explores interventions with different mediums that are associated within the domain of framing, fragmentation (deconstruction) and compression (reconstruction). His explorations set in the context of Singapore, range from the familiar to symbolic motifs. He composes and synthesises images from film, archival footages and photographs into a fragmented montage that hints at the social effects of rapid development, and the personal desires and contempt of those who embrace modernisation.

Hilmi has been involved in exhibitions in Japan, London, New York, Paris, Singapore and Thailand. He was a recipient of the NAC Arts Scholarship (Postgraduate) (2017), LASALLE Scholarship (2017) and the Goh Chok Tong Youth Promise Award. He lives and works in Singapore.

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Zarina Muhammad

Pragmatic Prayers for the Kala at the Threshold

2018

Bamboo, sandalwood, clay, stone, turmeric powder, sandalwood powder, saffron, nine grains and spices, rose water, incense, glass jars and paper

Dimensions variable

Collection of the Artist

Singapore Art Museum commission

Pragmatic Prayers for the Kala at the Threshold by Zarina Muhammad takes the *penunggu* or 'guardian at the gate' as its departure point and charts out a space that traverses beyond the physical.

The installation is laid out as three distinct divisions that serve as the hills, land and sea of Bukit Larangan, Bras Basah, as well as Kallang and the coastal areas of Singapore, respectively. Within each designation are a selection of material objects and modes of presentation that reflect and respond to the history, culture and memories of the zones they are housed in. These objects act as coordinates in which to map the histories and paths that the spirits of these realms may have resided and roamed in.

Historic and mythic, ***Pragmatic Prayers for the Kala at the Threshold*** aims to, in the artist's words, "disrupt and irrupt time and move beyond the single narrative of place".

Zarina Muhammad (b. 1982, Singapore) is an artist, educator and writer whose practice is deeply entwined with her decade-long multidisciplinary research on the shapeshifting forms and cultural translations pertaining to Southeast Asian ritual magic and its mythological roots. In the various incarnations of her work, she is particularly interested in the broader contexts of myth-making, gender-based archetypes, and the region's tenuous and tentative relationship to mysticism and the immaterial against the dynamics of global modernity.

She has presented her work in Australia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore and Thailand. She lives and works in Singapore.

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