

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

***On the Cusp: Early Contemporary Art Activities in Singapore (1976 – 1996),  
Documentation from the Koh Nguang How Archive Collection***



Selection of Art Ephemera, 1986 to 1996. Photographed by Koh Nguang How.

**SINGAPORE, 29 JANUARY 2018** – Launching on 1 February 2018, ***On the Cusp: Early Contemporary Art Activities in Singapore (1976 – 1996), Documentation from the Koh Nguang How Archive Collection***, is an archival presentation curated by and seen from the perspective of Singaporean artist and archivist Koh Nguang How. The exhibition pivots around Koh's involvement, activities, collection and recollection as Curatorial Assistant at the National Museum Art Gallery (NMAG) from October 1985 to February 1992, a position that launched his interest and commitment in documenting and archiving art activities in Singapore.

Koh's extensive archival collection is widely acknowledged as the most comprehensive on Singapore early contemporary to contemporary art. Using material which Koh personally documented or collected, the presentation explores early contemporary art activities through two lenses. The first gathers events, people and activities in a chronological order that, in Koh's view, were leaning towards the 'contemporary' in the 20-year period between the establishment of NMAG and SAM. The second offers a closer look at the events in, around and connected to NMAG and the former St Joseph's Institution (SJI) building.

Navigating around these two trajectories produces both expansive and specific insights - from the groundswell within the Singaporean art scene as it transitioned from the modern to the contemporary, eventually contributing towards the establishment of Singapore's first dedicated visual arts museum; to the relationships between artists, curators, organisers, collectives and communities in and around NMAG and the SAM-SJI building.

Dr. June Yap, Director of Curatorial, Programmes and Publications at the Singapore Art Museum, says, "This project befits the upcoming revamp of the museum buildings<sup>1</sup>. It marks SAM's efforts in looking back at its past and its place as a vital site of the generative energies that fuelled the developments of contemporary art in Singapore, thus marking where we have been, in order to chart our path into our future. Via Koh's keen eye and insightful chronicle, these historic moments are preserved, contributing to a finer understanding of the turns of the contemporary as it emerged."

***On the Cusp: Early Contemporary Art Activities in Singapore (1976 – 1996), Documentation from the Koh Nguang How Archive Collection***, includes rarely-seen documentation, such as that of the *Art Commandos* project (1988), initiated by Gilles Massot for the Singapore Festival of Art Fringe, which involved the LASALLE, NAFA and Baharuddin schools, with staged performances at the then-newly vacated SJI building, Sentosa and around the city; *More than 4...* (1988) by the artists Tang Mun Kit, Chng Chin Kang, Lim Poh Teck and Baet Yeok Kuan that involved installations and actions at SJI, with performances by Tang Da Wu (*Incident in the City* [1988] and *In case of Howard Liu* [1988]); all offering memorable vignettes of SJI before it opened as SAM.

The archival presentation takes place from **1 February 2018 to 25 March 2018** at **SAM Curve** (71 Bras Basah Road, Singapore 188555). For high-resolution images, please download them at [http://bit.ly/OntheCusp\\_KohNguangHow](http://bit.ly/OntheCusp_KohNguangHow). Image use guidelines apply.

www.singaporeartmuseum.sg  
www.facebook.com/singaporeartmuseum  
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<sup>1</sup> It was announced on 1 April 2017 that the Singapore Art Museum buildings will undergo a major revamp to address the growing needs of contemporary art in Singapore. The building works for both museum buildings will commence end 2018, and is expected to complete by 2021.

## **About the Singapore Art Museum**

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 for the 2013 and 2016 editions. 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)

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## Annex A Profile of Koh Nguang How



Koh Nguang How's (b. 1963, Singapore) artistic practice started in 1988 and encompasses photography, collage, assemblage, installation, performance art, documentation, archiving, curating and research. Koh worked with the National Museum Art Gallery (NMAG) as curatorial assistant from late 1985 to early 1992, which provided him with a learning environment to begin his documentation and archive collection practice on art in Singapore. Koh's membership and association with The Artists Village (TAV), a notable art collective in Singapore, from its early days in the late 1980s, also supported his practice as artist, photographer-documenter, and later on as art-researcher, curator and archivist. He documented many of the collective's early art activities, particularly those of TAV founder Tang Da Wu, as well as captured the activities and flourishing ideas of fellow young artists – many of whom were fresh graduates of LASALLE and NAFA art schools then – and older artists who were challenging prevailing practices at that time. Collectively, these activities sparked, reciprocally fed into and energized early contemporary art developments in Singapore. Today, his collection has become a treasure trove of the historical, critical and even the anecdotal, in the history of contemporary art in Singapore.

Koh has been involved in a research capacity with the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum from 1999 to 2002 and currently in 2018, and curated/co-curated various exhibitions in Singapore and Japan, such as *Remembering The Samsui Women: A Mixed Media Exposition*, an event of NOKIA SINGAPORE ART 2001, Singapore, in 2002; *Nanyang 1950-1965: Passage to Singaporean Art*, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan, in 2002; *"Shui Tit Sing - 100 Years of an Artist through his Archives"*, an exhibition by the "Singapore Art Archive Project (SAAP) @ CCA", NTU CCA Singapore, in 2014. His latest solo exhibitions are *Art Places*, Esplanade, Jendela Visual Arts Space, Singapore, in 2015, and *Singapore Art Archive Project*, International Exchange Program, Asia Culture Center, Gwangju, S. Korea, in 2015/2016. His latest group exhibition is *SUNSHOWER: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1980s to Now*, the National Art Center, Tokyo, in 2017.

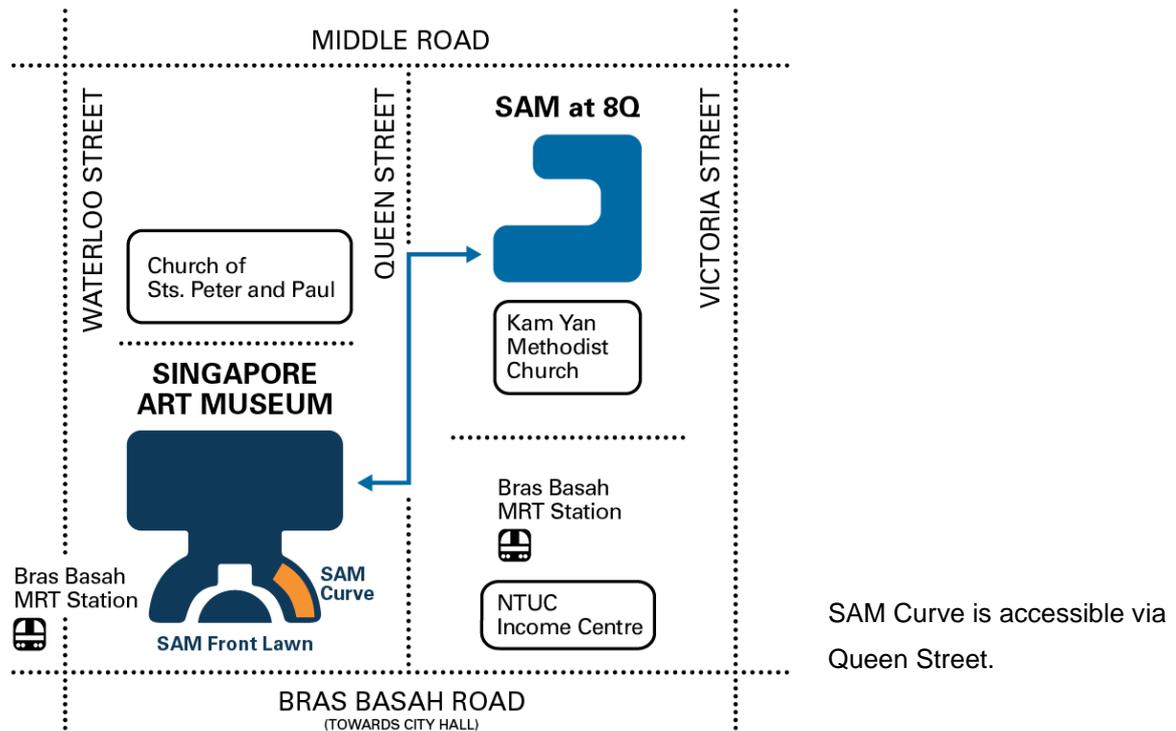
### Artist Statement – Koh Nguang How

In our time, the early 1980s, there was limited tertiary art education in Singapore. I was fortunate to have worked in the National Museum Singapore, from late 1985 to early 1992. The working environment especially with the National Museum Art Gallery allowed my learning about art in Singapore and building up a collection of art archives. This selection of art archives for the new Arch Gallery at Singapore Art Museum focused on 20 years of art events since the founding of the National Museum Art Gallery in 1976 until the opening year of Singapore Art Museum at the old SJI building in 1996. I hope the visitors to the exhibition of these archival materials can gain some insight into the roles played by the former National Museum as well as other art institutions and artist's initiatives.

**Annex B**

**Exhibition details & Series of Artists Talks**

**Exhibition Venue:** Sam Curve, 71 Bras Basah Road, Singapore 188555



**Exhibition Dates:** 1 February 2018 – 25 March 2018

**Opening Hours:** 10am To 7pm (Saturdays To Thursdays), 10am To 9pm (Fridays)

**Admission Charges:**

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

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

**SERIES OF ARTIST TALKS AT SAM CURVE**

**(Free admission)**

Join Singaporean artist and archivist, Koh Nguang How, and artist, Gilles Massot, for a series of talks as they share their knowledge and experiences of documentation and the processes behind archival collection. The talks will be held within the exhibition space, amidst extensive, rarely-seen documentation, pivoting around Koh's involvement, activities, collection and recollection in and around the National Museum Art Gallery (NMAG) and the SAM-SJI building.

**Session 1: Documenting Work with Koh Nguang How**

Date: Sat, 3 February 2018

Time: 2-3pm

**Session 2: Documenting Work with Koh Nguang How**

Date: Sun, 25 February 2018

Time: 2-3pm

**Session 3: Art Commandos with Gilles Massot**

Date: Fri, 9 March 2018

Time: 7-8pm

**Annex C**

**Artwork information**

**Title of Work:** *On the Cusp: Early Contemporary Art Activities (1976 – 1996)*  
*Documentation from the Koh Nguang How Archive Collection*

**Year of Work:** 2018

**Materials/Medium:** Installation work (with original art ephemera and photographic reproductions)

**Measurements:** Site-specific to the gallery

## **Annex D**

### **About the National Museum Art Gallery**

Prior to the establishment and opening of the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) at the vacated St. Joseph's Institution (SJI) building in January 1996, the main site for art activities that were ushering in the contemporary was the National Museum Art Gallery (NMAG). Established in 1976 as the visual art section of the National Museum, NMAG can be regarded as the forebear of SAM; the early SAM team was based in and operated out of NMAG.