

Media Release

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**SINGAPORE BIENNALE 2019 WILL BE TITLED
“EVERY STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION”**

SB2019, led by Patrick Flores and a team of curators, will take place at National Gallery Singapore, Gillman Barracks, and other cultural venues in Singapore



The Singapore Biennale 2019 Artistic Director and curatorial team. From left to right: Mr. John Tung, Ms. Goh Sze Ying, Mr. Renan Laru-an, Mr. Patrick Flores (Artistic Director of SB2019), Ms. Andrea Fam, Ms. Anca Verona Mihulet, and Mr. Vipash Purichanont. Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum.

Singapore, 24 January 2019 – The Singapore Art Museum (SAM) announces the title of the sixth edition of the Singapore Biennale – *Every Step in the Right Direction*. Through this title, Singapore Biennale 2019 (SB2019) will explore curatorial and artistic themes common to our human conditions and the catalytic role ‘hope’ plays in pushing for change. SB2019 will pivot on Southeast Asia, and from there, extend to the rest of the world. Taking place from 22 November 2019 to 22 March 2020, the four-month long international contemporary art exhibition is organised by SAM and commissioned by the National Arts Council, Singapore. SB2019 will feature several site-specific and commissioned contemporary works never seen before on the biennale circuit.

SB2019 Title – *Every Step in the Right Direction*

Helmed by Patrick Flores as SB2019 Artistic Director, and with a curatorial team of six members from Singapore, Southeast Asia and beyond, *Singapore Biennale 2019: Every Step in the Right Direction* focuses on the imperative of making choices and taking the steps to consider current conditions and the human endeavour for change and betterment.

SB2019 reflects on the potential and abilities of the artists to rework the possibilities of the world. It also invites the audience to be open to such works and to such a world that is made different through the making of these works, and, thus, also attempting to make the world right. Through the act of artistic exploration, SB2019 invites participation to transform the world around us, and to get things done the right way. This process begins with a step, from a crucial decision to make changes happen. The reiteration of this commitment leads to the right direction – a direction that each of us is entitled to move towards. Informed by such an impulse, SB2019 offers a sustainable, self-renewing project of change, and moves everyone to act – to make a step.

Patrick Flores, Artistic Director of SB2019 explains, “It may be said that the world is troubled. To sense such a state of flux is to acknowledge the situation and begin to face it. For Singapore Biennale 2019: we ask – what is the possibility of art, the artist, and the audience in light of this trouble? What is the responsibility of the artwork, its making, and its experience in the prospects of future action? As we believe, every effort to change the world for the better matters. SB2019 puts its faith squarely in the potential of art and its understanding to rework the world, expressed in the Biennale title: *Every Step in the Right Direction.*”

Singapore Biennale 2019 Teaser: Saturday, 26 January 2019 from 4pm – 9.30pm

During Singapore Art Week 2019, a special SB2019 Teaser programme featuring the Biennale curators and four SB2019 artists will offer the public a sneak preview of SB2019 through artist-curator talks, screenings, and experimental performances.

Artists who will be featured in the SB2019 Teaser include: Arnont Nongyao (Thailand), Dennis Tan (Singapore/Japan), Zai Tang (Singapore/United Kingdom), and Vandy Rattana (Cambodia).

A comprehensive list of participating artists will be released later in 2019.

SB2019 Curatorial Model

The SB2019 curatorial team, comprising curators with both independent and institutional backgrounds, come on board with a wide spectrum of interests and experiences that afford opportunities for invigorating conversations and deliberations.

The team consists of a combination of in-house and external curators, including SAM Assistant Curators Ms. Andrea Fam and Mr. John Tung, National Gallery Singapore Assistant Curator Ms. Goh Sze Ying, Manila-based independent researcher and curator Mr. Renan Laru-an, art historian and Seoul-based independent curator Ms. Anca Verona Mihuleț, and Bangkok-based independent curator Vipash Purichanont.

The members of the SB2019 curatorial team were chosen to address the goal of the Biennale: to create a more dynamic relationship between the art world and the larger social context. Born in the eighties and early nineties, the six curators offer an additional perspective from their generation, with an aim to enhance the potential of SB2019 to fully engage with the ‘current’ atmosphere of both discourse and expression.

The team will be led by Patrick Flores, the first external Artistic Director of the Singapore Biennale since SAM took over as organiser,¹ where previous editions were led by the Directors of SAM.

Dr June Yap, SAM's Director of Curatorial, Programmes and Publication says, "The Singapore Biennale is envisioned by SAM as an opportunity to engage with the public on matters of the human condition through contemporary art, its contexts and related discourses. The appointment of Patrick Flores as Artistic Director for SB2019 puts into practice SAM's commitment to enriching exchanges and championing aesthetic appreciation. As a contemporary art museum, the histories, developments and turns of the 'contemporary' are of great interest to us. Amongst such developments and interests of contemporary artists, which we observe and present in our exhibitions and programmes, is the reflection on common concerns. Such reflections are crucial to our understanding of the world and our intertwined experiences. We are thus encouraged by the Biennale's proposition as set forth by Patrick and the curatorial team – of the meaningfulness of the aesthetic act and its potential for positive transformation – and hope that this will be experienced by both artists and audiences alike."

In addition, an SB2019 Steering Committee comprising experts from different fields – from academia to arts practitioners such as playwrights, intellectuals, curators – has also been convened to share independent advice with the SB2019 curatorial team. The Steering Committee members care deeply about the positive role of art and artists in helping shape the way we see the world.

Key SB2019 Venues

SB2019 will take place from 22 November 2019 to 22 March 2020 in multiple nodes across a network of sites and will feature prominently at National Gallery Singapore and Gillman Barracks. Following the model of the 2016 edition, other cultural and heritage venues – including venues within the Bras Basah Bugis precinct – will also be explored to house SB2019 artworks.

The Singapore Biennale 2019 is an affiliate of the Singapore Bicentennial.

More details can be found in the Annexes.

Images can be downloaded at <https://suttonpr.egnyte.com/fl/c82AI06TvM>.

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¹ Singapore Art Museum organised the 2013 and 2016 editions of the Singapore Biennale.

Editor Notes:

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 presents and reflects the vigour of artistic practices in Singapore and the region within a global context, and fosters productive collaborations and deep engagement with artists, arts organisations, and the international arts community.

The Singapore Biennale cultivates public engagement with contemporary art 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. The NAC commissioned the Singapore Art Museum to organise the 2011, 2013 and 2016 editions. SAM will continue to do so for Singapore Biennale 2019 and 2022.

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 researched 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.

SAM was the organiser of the Singapore Biennale in 2011, 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

About the National Arts Council

The National Arts Council champions the arts in Singapore. By nurturing creative excellence and supporting broad audience engagement, our diverse and distinctive arts inspire our people and connect our communities. We preserve our rich, cultural traditions while we cultivate accomplished artists and vibrant companies for the future. 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, visit www.nac.gov.sg.

Annex A: Singapore Biennale 2019 Artistic Director's Statement

Annex B: Singapore Biennale 2019 Artistic Director/Curator Biographies

Annex C: Singapore Biennale 2019 Teaser Programming Details

Annex A: Singapore Biennale 2019 – Artistic Director’s Statement

It may be said that the world is troubled. To sense such a state of flux is to begin to face it. What is the possibility of art, the artist, and the audience in light of this trouble? What is the responsibility of the artwork, its making, and its experience in the prospects of future action? Every effort to change the world for the better matters. The Singapore Biennale 2019 puts its faith squarely in the potential of art (and its understanding) to rework the world, expressed in the Biennale title: *Every Step in the Right Direction*.

In this examination of act and action, the Biennale then considers the necessity of the step, that is prompted by the Biennale’s geography, itself spanning nodes and locations across the city of Singapore, thus inviting audiences to be inspired in an exploration. Furthermore, we observe this everyday but decisive act of walking in artistic practices, such as of Singapore artist, Amanda Heng. Utilising the act of walking in a number of performances (for example, *Let’s Walk*, first performed in 1999), Heng presents her audience with moments for moving forward, looking back, turning inward, venturing outward with others, in so doing, engendering reflection, the speculation or adoption of other perspectives, and the consideration of pasts.

As artistic director of the Singapore Biennale 2019 and a scholar of Southeast Asian art, in my effort to deepen the conversation on the need for an ethical gesture in our time and in history, I recall the words of Salud Algabre, who, in the 1930s in the Philippines, played a central role in a peasant movement that did not appear to achieve its immediate intentions. Responding to a scholar on the perception of its failure, Algabre reasoned that no movement fails, “each one is a step in the right direction.” This apparently counterintuitive reply opens up for rethinking the condition of failure and the chance at transformation. In relation to art and its investigation of material and its ecologies, it might then be that this counterintuition restores hope as a medium of continuous conversions and as a method of getting things done the right way, but only in light of steps taken and decisions made about the right direction. Informed by such an impulse, SB2019 offers a sustainable, self-renewing project of change, and moves everyone to act – to make a step.

Annex B: Singapore Biennale 2019 – Artistic Director/Curator Biographies



Photo Credit: Singapore Art Museum

Patrick Flores, Professor of Art Studies at the Department of Art Studies at the University of the Philippines and Curator of the Vargas Museum in Manila

Patrick Flores is Professor of Art Studies at the Department of Art Studies at the University of the Philippines, which he chaired from 1997 to 2003, and Curator of the Vargas Museum in Manila. He was one of the curators of *Under Construction: New Dimensions in Asian Art* in 2000 and the Gwangju Biennale (*Position Papers*) in 2008. He was a Visiting Fellow at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. in 1999 and an Asian Public Intellectuals Fellow in 2004.

Among his publications are *Painting History: Revisions in Philippine Colonial Art* (1999); *Remarkable Collection: Art, History, and the National Museum* (2006); and *Past Peripheral: Curation in Southeast Asia* (2008). He was a grantee of the Asian Cultural Council (2010) and a member of the Advisory Board of the exhibition *The Global Contemporary: Art Worlds After 1989* (2011) organized by the Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe and member of the Guggenheim Museum's Asian Art Council (2011 and 2014). He co-edited the Southeast Asian issue with Joan Kee for *Third Text* (2011). He convened in 2013 on behalf of the Clark Institute and the Department of Art Studies of the University of the Philippines the conference "Histories of Art History in Southeast Asia" in Manila. He was a Guest Scholar of the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles in 2014. He curated an exhibition of contemporary art from Southeast Asia and Southeast Europe titled *South by Southeast* and the Philippine Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2015.



Andrea Fam, Assistant Curator, Singapore Art Museum

Andrea Fam is an Assistant Curator at the Singapore Art Museum where she oversees the Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam portfolios. She holds a B.A. (Hons) degree in Criticism, Communication and Curation in Art and Design from Central Saint Martins, London, UK. She has curated and co-curated several exhibitions at SAM, namely, the 2016 Singapore Biennale, *An Atlas of Mirrors*, *Imaginarium: Over the Ocean*, *Under the Sea*, *Odyssey: Navigating Nameless Seas* and *A New Horizon, a Yellow Ribbon Community Art Exhibition*. Her research interests include investigations into the implications and impact of borders.

Photo Credit: Singapore Art Museum



Photo Credit: Singapore Art Museum

John Tung, Assistant Curator, Singapore Art Museum

John Tung oversees the Thai contemporary art portfolio at the Singapore Art Museum. He holds a BA (Hons) in Arts Management conferred by Goldsmiths, University of London (LASALLE) and an MA in Cultural Management from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where he graduated on the Dean's List. His research interests include post-colonial theory, cultural policy and cultural theory. His artistic interests span varied genres, and exhibitions he has curated at the Singapore Art Museum include *Imaginarium: Over the Ocean, Under the Sea* and *Odyssey: Navigating Nameless Seas*, and most recently, *Cinerama: Art and the Moving Image in Southeast Asia*. He is also one of the co-curators of the Singapore Biennale 2016 – *An Atlas of Mirrors*.



Photo Credit: Singapore Art Museum

Anca Verona Mihuleț, Art Historian and Independent Curator based in Seoul

Anca Mihuleț has been supporting artists to research on topics such as the implications of knowledge, history, margins or landscape, with a focus on hidden stories, post-colonialism and invisibility. Between 2006 and 2013, together with Liviana Dan, she curated the exhibition program of The Contemporary Art Gallery of the Brukenthal National Museum in Sibiu. In 2013, she was the curator of *Reflection Center for Suspended Histories. An Attempt*, presented as one of the two Romanian Pavilions at the Venice Biennale. In 2015 and 2016, together with Patrick Flores, Mihuleț curated the exhibition *South by Southeast*, which was showed at Osage Gallery in Hong Kong and at The Guangdong Times Museum. Between 2015 and 2017, in collaboration with Diana Marincu, she curated *The White Dot and The Black Cube*, hosted at The National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest.



Photo Credit: Singapore Art Museum

Goh Sze Ying, Assistant Curator, National Gallery Singapore

Goh Sze Ying is an Assistant Curator at National Gallery Singapore. At the Gallery, she has worked on exhibitions *Minimalism: Space. Light. Object.* (2018), *Lim Cheng Hoe: Painting Singapore* (2018), and *Listening to Architecture: The Gallery's Histories and Transformation* (2017). Her research focuses on photography and art in Singapore in the mid-twentieth century, with an interest in how artistic practice relates to mobility and place. She graduated from Goldsmiths, University of London with a MA in urban sociology in 2015. Formerly based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, she has worked on exhibitions and public programmes with a focus on artistic interventions located within the urban public space. Her past projects include *Between States* (2017), *ESCAPE from the SEA* (2017), and *more than one (fragile) thing at a time* (2016).



Photo Credit: Singapore Art Museum

Renan Laru-an, Independent Researcher and Curator based in Manila

Renan Laru-an is a researcher, a curator and the Public Engagement and Artistic Formation Coordinator of the Philippine Contemporary Art Network at the Vargas Museum and Filipiniana Research Center. In his research-oriented curatorial work, Laru-an studies 'insufficient' and 'subtracted' images and subjects at the juncture of development and integration projects through long-term inquiries, such as *Herding Islands, Rats, and the Anthropocene* (2015), *Lightning Studies: Centre for the Translation of Constraints, Conflicts, and Contaminations (CTCCCs)* (2016), *The Artist and the Social Dreamer* (2017), and *Promising Arrivals, Violent Departures* (2018). He has been (co-)curator of festivals and exhibitions, including the 8th OK.Video – Indonesia Media Arts Festival, Jakarta(2017) and *A Tripoli Agreement*, Sharjah (2018). Between 2012 and 2015, he directed the self-organized, multidisciplinary platform and 'virtual' organisation Disclab | Research and Criticism.



Photo Credit: Singapore Art Museum

Vipash Purichanont, Independent Curator based in Bangkok

Vipash Purichanont is an independent curator and a co-founder of Waiting You Curator Lab, a curatorial collective based in Chiangmai. Purichanont received his doctoral degree in Curatorial/Knowledge from the Department of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths, University of London. Purichanont's practice has its roots in collaboration. Most of his theoretical work focused on notions of collectivity and community as well as caring and sharing. Although most of Purichanont's curatorial projects are structured around Southeast Asia, his main objective is to initiate a meaningful conversation between the region and the globe. He was an assistant curator for the 1st Thailand Biennale (Krabi, 2018). Purichanont is shortlisted for the ICI Gerrit Lansing Independent Vision Curatorial Award in the same year. He is currently a lecturer at the department of Art History, Faculty of Archeology, Silpakorn University, Bangkok

Annex C: Singapore Biennale 2019 Teaser Event Details

Sat, 26 Jan 2019

Singapore Biennale 2019 Teaser

SAM at 8Q Plaza | 4PM - 9:30PM

Get a sneak peek into the upcoming Singapore Biennale with a teaser line-up of panel discussions, screenings and experimental performances by SB2019 contemporary artists.



Image courtesy of Dennis Tan

In Conversation: Singapore Biennale artist, Dennis Tan with Biennale Curator, John Tung

SAM at 8Q Plaza | 4PM | Free with registration

The Kolek is a traditional Southeast Asian racing yacht that was once a common sight off the coast of Singapore. Exploring the possibility of rebuilding a Kolek and sailing it to the Riau Islands for racing is SB2019 artist, Dennis Tan. Join him and SB2019 Curator, John Tung in this conversation, as they dive into the reasons and impetus behind his proposal, while also examining the cultural, anthropological, and historical implications of reviving this traditional sport.

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MONOLOGUE - Image courtesy of Vandy Rattana

Screenings: *MONOLOGUE* and *Funeral* by Vandy Rattana

SAM at 8Q, Level 2 Moving Image Gallery | 5PM | Free with registration

Singapore Biennale 2019 artist Vandy Rattana presents his moving image works *MONOLOGUE* and *Funeral*, set in Cambodia and centred around Khmer people, that show a deeply personal side to the themes of loss, trauma, death and the afterlife. Uncover the story behind *MONOLOGUE*, through Vandy's documentation of a small plot of unmarked land where his sister and grandmother were discarded and buried, alongside five thousand others during the Khmer Rouge regime in 1978. As a follow-up to the themes explored in *MONOLOGUE*, the screening of *Funeral* looks at the paradoxes of civilisation through a fictional narrative that will leave you thinking about the metaphors of life, death and rebirth.

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Funeral - Image courtesy of Vandy Rattana

In Conversation: Singapore Biennale artist, Vandy Rattana with Biennale Curator, Andrea Fam
SAM at 8Q, Level 2 Moving Image Gallery | 6PM | Free with registration

After the screening, join Vandy, and SB2019 Curator, Andrea Fam, in this insightful conversation where conceptual topics such as the artist's philosophical approach to art-making, and technical considerations about working with the moving image in a rapidly-changing Khmer landscape will be discussed.

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Poem from Nowhere - Image courtesy of the Heritage Space Team.

Experimental Performance: Zai Tang & Arnont Nongyao
SAM at 8Q Plaza | 7.30PM - 9.30PM | Free

Immerse yourself in a night of experimental performances blending sound and moving images by artists Zai Tang and Arnont Nongyao. From using field recordings of the 'voices' of creatures from various habitats in Singapore threatened by human-centred development, to reassembled archival footage and audio recordings of weekly markets in the northern part of Thailand, these sneak peeks to both artists' proposed installation for the upcoming Singapore Biennale are not to be missed! Both artists will wrap up the performance with an improv jamming session.