

MEDIA RELEASE

Singapore Art Museum Reveals Artist Impressions of New Building Design



*Artist impression showing Singapore Art Museum's new building design, featuring the front view of the former SJI building with a new purpose-built Sky Gallery and pedestrianised green space for art
© Singapore Art Museum*

Singapore, 17 January 2020 – The Singapore Art Museum (SAM) today revealed artist impressions of its new building design. Led by the team of architects from SCDA, the bold new design will bring contemporary architecture into the museum's heritage buildings – the former St. Joseph's Institution (SJI) building which is a gazetted national monument, and the former Catholic High School (CHS) building which is a conservation building - to create an architectural landmark in the heart of the Bras Basah Bugis precinct. The redevelopment will also introduce new spaces for the public to experience and engage with art, and increase accessibility for visitors with special needs. This will be the first time that SAM will undergo major works since it was opened in 1996. Slated for completion by 2023, the redevelopment will enable SAM to better fulfill its mission as a champion of contemporary art in Southeast Asia, in active dialogue and collaboration with artists, partners, and audiences.

The Building Design

Provenance for the design was shaped by SAM's vision to be a pivotal museum of contemporary art in the region, leading the global conversation of how art of the present affects our understanding of art from a Southeast Asian perspective. To accomplish this, there was an urgent need for more exhibition space to house the constantly evolving and multi-disciplinary nature of contemporary art.

The redevelopment is expected to increase the overall space in the museum buildings by about 30 per cent. A SAM Building Committee comprising industry experts and professionals has been established to provide oversight and advice on the redevelopment.

"The Singapore Art Museum is Singapore's first museum dedicated to the visual arts. Since we opened our doors in 1996, we have actively introduced visitors to art from Singapore, Southeast Asia and the world - a mission we will continue with our new museum buildings. The new building design will have public spaces that are open and welcoming to all, inviting engagement and collaborations with artists, curators, local and overseas museums, and the general public. We will also carefully preserve the histories and stories of the museum's buildings and reflect them in the new design. We hope to combine heritage, contemporary art and architecture that places SAM on the world stage and create an iconic museum space that Singaporeans and visitors will love." said Mr Edmund Cheng, Chairman, Singapore Art Museum.

Key changes that the public can look forward to will include **purpose-built gallery spaces**, suitable for the presentation of large-scale contemporary artworks and exhibitions. This will include the Sky Gallery which will overlook the former SJI building, as well as a new gallery spaces in front of the former CHS building. There will also be a **new Queen Street entrance for SAM** that will transform the inner courtyards of the museum - Queen and Waterloo courtyards - now encompassed below the Sky Gallery, into a large high-volume atrium to welcome visitors. Visitors arriving from Bras Basah MRT Station will be immediately greeted by a generous outdoor plaza, welcoming them into Singapore's new contemporary art museum.

"The design response was to float a large box above the existing courtyards of the former SJI building. This would provide the museum with a large, column-free exhibition space within the

box, thus liberating the historical school building from the stresses of displaying large artwork. The new façade on Bras Basah Road will feature a series of reflective glass panels running along its length, with each panel progressively angled towards the historical building's dome - creating multiple and displaced reflections that shift as one moves past it. The former CHS building on 8 Queen Street - previously separated from the main museum - is now connected with a link bridge, providing seamless access between the two buildings. A second floating box is also introduced there to increase the museum's much-needed capacity for art presentation." said Mr Chan Soo Khian, Founding Principal and Design Director of SCDA Architects Pte Ltd.

The original entrance of the museum and former driveway along Bras Basah Road will be transformed into a fully **pedestrianised green space for art** for the public to enjoy. The two SAM buildings - currently separated by Queen Street - will be linked by a **gallery-bridge** to create a seamless museum experience, as visitors view exhibitions, attend museum events and programmes across both buildings.

Preservation and Conservation Efforts

As custodian of the former SJI and CHS heritage buildings, SAM's redevelopment efforts will ensure that the historic integrity of these buildings is respected.

Preservation and restoration works will be carried out on the much older, former SJI building to ensure that its heritage architecture will be carefully maintained for future generations to enjoy. These works will include preserving in-situ key architectural features and materials that are intact such as the interior of the SJI building chapel which is highly ornamental which feature stamped metal ceilings and wall panels, and the 1903 pediment with the original *Signum Fidei* logo which was uncovered during the 1990s restoration. Certain sections of the building will be restored to their original presentation, for example, the ventilated upper floor verandah.

The façade of the CHS building will also be conserved, with the historical school gate posts moved to a permanent position within the plaza where the legacy of the school will be celebrated. The former CHS building will also house the SAM Learning Gallery and workshop spaces for students and school groups, continuing its legacy of education for young museum visitors.

The redevelopment will also introduce new features to the building interiors to allow for greater accessibility for museum visitors with special needs. In addition, the new museum will feature learning studios and a library, new public spaces to experience the arts, as well as exciting retail and café spaces.

SAM Exhibitions in 2020

While the museum buildings close for redevelopment, SAM will continue to engage with audiences through contemporary art with partners both in Singapore and overseas. SAM's international exhibition partnerships include its first collaboration with Kuala Lumpur's **ILHAM Gallery**, and a co-curated presentation with **National Museum of Art Osaka** at Hong Kong's **Tai Kwun Contemporary**. In Singapore, the SAM Mini Mobile Museum will present Singaporean artist **Melissa Tan**, as well as a performance and multimedia work by Singaporean artist **Choy Ka Fai**.

For more information, please refer to the following annexes:

Annex A: Artist impressions of the new SAM building design

Annex B: SAM building design statement

Annex C: SAM exhibitions in 2020

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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 buildings are currently closed for a major building revamp, with museum programming continuing at partner venues until the buildings re-open.

SAM is the organiser of the Singapore Biennale in 2011, 2013, 2016 and 2019. 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

Annex A: Artist impressions of the new SAM building design

Images can be downloaded [here](#). Image credits as per file names.

Artist Impression	Credit
	<p>Artist impression showing Singapore Art Museum's new building design, featuring the front view of the former St. Joseph's Institution building with a new purpose-built Sky Gallery and pedestrianised green space for art © Singapore Art Museum</p>
	<p>Artist impression showing Singapore Art Museum's new purpose-built Sky Gallery © Singapore Art Museum</p>
	<p>Artist impression showing Singapore Art Museum's new building design, featuring the new Queen Street entrance and entrance plaza © Singapore Art Museum</p>



Artist impression showing Singapore Art Museum's new Queen Street courtyard
© Singapore Art Museum



Artist impression showing Singapore Art Museum's new Waterloo Street courtyard
© Singapore Art Museum



Artist impression showing Singapore Art Museum's new building design, featuring the new gallery-bridge
© Singapore Art Museum



Artist impression showing Singapore Art Museum's new building design, featuring the front view of the former Catholic High School building with new exhibition spaces and gallery-bridge
© Singapore Art Museum



Artist impression showing Singapore Art Museum's new building design, featuring the new pedestrianised green space for art
© Singapore Art Museum

Annex B: SAM Building Design Statement

Provenance for the design was shaped by SAM's vision to be a pivotal museum of contemporary art in the region, leading the global conversation of how art of the present affects our understanding of art from a Southeast Asian perspective. To accomplish this, there was an urgent need for more exhibition space to house the constantly evolving and multi-disciplinary nature of contemporary art.

The design response was to float a large box above the existing courtyards of the former St Joseph's Institution. This would provide the museum with a large, column free exhibition space within the box, thus liberating the historical school building from the stresses of displaying large artwork. The annex on 8 Queen Street, previously separated from the main museum, is now connected with a link bridge, providing seamless access between the two buildings. A second floating box is also introduced at 8Q to increase the museum's much needed capacity.

The new façade on Bras Basah Road will feature a series of reflective glass panels running along its length, with each panel progressively angled towards the historical building's dome – creating multiple and displaced reflections that shift as one moves past it. The overall ensemble recalls the memories of the structured order of the old, reinterpreted continuously by the multi-faceted dynamism of the new.

The box's relationship with the existing monument was carefully and strategically considered. Its footprint within the courtyards intentionally avoids the venerable monument structures, to ensure their preservation. Queen and Waterloo courtyards, now encompassed below the floating box, are consequentially transformed into a large high-volume atrium that connects the old wings. A new green space for art, occupying the old vehicular drop off, now befittingly fronts the museum. The main entry to the museum is now shifted to Queen Street, where visitors arriving from the MRT are immediately greeted by a generous outdoor plaza welcoming them into Singapore's new contemporary art museum.

Annex C: SAM Exhibitions in 2020

Images can be downloaded [here](#). Image credits as per file names.

Exhibition Title and Details	Exhibition Synopsis
<p>Singapore Biennale 2019: <i>Every Step in the Right Direction</i></p> <p>Dates: 22 Nov 2019 to 22 Mar 2020 Venue: 11 venues across Singapore – National Gallery Singapore, Gillman Barracks, LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore Management University de Suantio Gallery, Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore Art Museum (Hoarding), SAM at 8Q (Hoarding), Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, National Museum of Singapore, National Library, Far East Plaza and WILD RICE @ Funan</p> 	<p>Singapore Biennale 2019 (SB2019) returns for its sixth edition, with 77 artists and art collectives from 36 countries and territories. Titled <i>Every Step in the Right Direction</i>, the international contemporary art exhibition invites the public to engage with the act of artistic exploration, drawing on the importance of making choices and taking steps to consider the conditions of contemporary life and the human endeavour for change. Commissioned by the National Arts Council and organised by the Singapore Art Museum (SAM), the Singapore Biennale is running until 22 March 2020 across 11 venues in Singapore.</p>
<p>ILHAM x SAM Project: <i>The Body Politic and the Body</i></p> <p>Dates: 8 Dec 2019 to 12 Apr 2020 Venue: ILHAM Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia</p> 	<p>Various bodies populate this exhibition: individual and collective bodies, physical and absent ones, metaphorical and fleshly bodies. Due to its complex structure, the body is able to assume such diverse representation with ease. It is therefore not surprising that the body's capacity for the symbolic includes its potential for political reference.</p> <p>Presented at ILHAM Gallery in Kuala Lumpur, <i>The Body Politic and the Body</i> explores the many facets of contemporary art and its genealogies in Malaysia. Featuring artworks from SAM's collection alongside a new commission, artwork adaptations and loans from Malaysian artists, the exhibition examines the socio-political body of contemporary society alongside the individual, subjective body. Like corporeal bodies, the parts make up the whole, and the whole is present in every part. Just as each member of a community is a part of the collective, a community, too, is both one body and many.</p>

SAM Mini Mobile Museum: *is there any way i can be in your arms tonight* by Ezzam Rahman

Dates: 15 Jan to 23 Feb 2020

Venue: Tampines Regional Library



Inspired by the bed as a gateway to sleep and dreams, *is there any way i can be in your arms tonight* is a site-responsive installation that draws parallels between the dream realm and the worlds of possibility contained within books. In dioramas set within bed frames of varying sizes, Ezzam presents whimsical landscapes of flora and fauna, inhabited by miniature creatures like insects and birds.

While alluring on first sight, a closer look reveals that these objects have been sculpted from unconventional and yet not-unfamiliar materials: dead skin, nails, anti-inflammatory plasters, and depleted tubes of analgesic balm. Keenly associated with the artist's breathing body, these ephemeral materials present the paradox of absence and presence while capturing certain long-running themes of Ezzam's practice: of beauty and the abject, of vulnerability and impermanence, and of longing and desire. The installation invites audiences to enter an intimate viewing space, offering room for mental wanderings.

Ezzam Rahman's commission for the SAM Mini Mobile Museum responds to an existing work by the artist in the National Collection, titled *Here's who I am, I am what you see* (2015).

They Do Not Understand Each Other

Dates: 16 Feb to 17 May 2020

Venue: Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hong Kong



They Do Not Understand Each Other draws from the title of an artwork by Tsubasa Kato, in which the artist, who speaks in Japanese, attempts to cooperate with a collaborator from Korea. Despite being unable to understand each other's languages, it would appear they find some measure of connection, even if in humorous miscommunication, finally completing their task of installing a sign on the small island set in the vastness of a sea that separates (or, one might say, connects) these two nations.

If the premise of culture is representation, then the promise of cultural exchange is understanding.

Showcased by Tai Kwun Contemporary, and presented by the National Museum of Art Osaka (NMAO) and the Singapore Art Museum (SAM), the exhibition comprises artworks from both museum collections, as well as new commissions, in a consideration of the premise of cultural exchange and the understanding it promotes.

The exhibition thus presents art about exchange, communication, miscommunication, connections, tolerance, representation, as well as revelations on desires and expectations of the familiar, unfamiliar and new. In essence, of situations and conditions of unevenness, between individuals, peoples, and things.

<p><i>Cosmic Wander: Expedition</i> Process Presentation by Choy Ka Fai</p> <p>Dates and venue: Details available soon</p>	<p><i>Cosmic Wander: Expedition</i> is a research project exploring spiritual and shamanic dance culture in Asia. Seeking to capture “the movements of the Gods”, multi-disciplinary artist and choreographer Choy Ka Fai traces historical lineages, cultural contexts and contemporary evolutions of spiritual movements through dance.</p> <p>The multi-part <i>Cosmic Wander: Expedition</i> is a multimedia archive and research project featuring video documentary and performance. In particular, Choy focuses on a religious, cultural hybrid unique to Singapore, spirit-medium worship of both the Chinese-Buddhist deity Guan Yin and the fearsome Hindu goddess Kali.</p> <p>The presentation of research findings serves as a conceptual travel agency, facilitating an expedition into different realms of ancient wisdom and folk tradition, questioning broader cultural, historical and theatrical narratives of rituals, cultural practices and belief systems. Considering the relationship between choreographic expression and spiritual presence, <i>Cosmic Wander: Expedition</i> aims to map the cosmologies of dance in Asia and generate possibilities, interactions with and connections to other realms.</p>
<p>SAM Mini Mobile Museum: <i>Back to where we’ve never been</i> by Melissa Tan</p> <p>Dates: 27 May to 12 Jul 2020 Venue: Woodlands Regional Library</p> <p>Dates: 15 Jul to 30 Aug 2020 Venue: Jurong Regional Library</p> <p>Dates: 2 Sep to 18 Oct 2020 Venue: Tampines Regional Library</p> 	<p><i>Back to where we’ve never been</i> is a reflection of the urban landscape in Singapore. Roads, pathways, bridges and features we encounter during our daily commute undergo extensive reparation such that it constantly feels brand new. The constant upgrading of the island’s infrastructure almost feels as if we are a self-regenerative city. It is only upon closer inspection can one see hints of a patchwork of cement on the sidewalk or the darker shade of tarmac on the road. With so much change occurring, it gives a strange sense that the same ground we tread on might have been grafted from another land we have never been to before, making the pathway familiar and yet not so.</p> <p>Trained as a painter, Tan also works with video, sound and objects. Her works are based on nature and themes of transience and the beauty of the ephemeral. Her recent projects revolve around landscapes and the process of landscape formation. She explores the geography and textures of rocks to translate the visual language through different media. By employing methods such as paper cutting and silk-screen techniques, she is interested in materiality and how the medium supports the work.</p>

Think! Contemporary Preschool Exhibition 2020

Dates: Jul 2020

Venue: Details available soon



Think! Contemporary Preschool Exhibition 2020 is the culmination of the Think! Contemporary Preschool Programme, a museum-based school programme that advocates learning through art at SAM. It features artworks inspired by SAM's exhibition at The Learning Gallery, located at Level 4 Theatre Project Space, National Gallery Singapore. The various themes explored in the preschoolers' artworks include home, community, identity, memory, and environmental sustainability.

SAM's Singapore Night Festival 2020
commission by Sam Lo / SKLO

Dates: 21 to 29 August 2020

Venue: Details available soon



As part of the Singapore Night Festival 2020, Singapore Art Museum has commissioned Singapore Artist Sam Lo / SKLO to create an experiential installation that responds to the contemporary in the space of tradition to celebrate our rich cultures and identities; providing an engaging experience for collective memories that form the heritage of our future.

Think! Contemporary Exhibition 2020

Dates: Oct 2020

Venue: Details available soon



The Think! Contemporary 2020 exhibition is the culmination of a year-long partnership between SAM and several primary schools in Singapore. Featuring artworks by pupils who were a part of the Think! Contemporary Programme, the exhibition includes themes related to home, community, identity, and the environment – responses to issues and ideas investigated through contemporary artworks featured in SAM exhibitions.