



Education Folio

Ho Tzu Nyen

Singapore

**How to use this folio**

This education folio contains information about the featured artists in the Asia Pacific Breweries Foundation Signature Art Prize 2014, their artworks as well as artistic processes, giving visitors a better understanding and appreciation of the artworks displayed.

Questions and activities found at the back of the folio are meant for visitors to have a deeper engagement with each of the finalist artworks. The questions can be used for discussions when looking at the particular artwork, while the suggested activities are designed for educators or parents to explore with their students or children for further engagement beyond the museum visit.

The suggested reading and viewing lists also provide more information about the artist's practice, artwork themes and related ideas or issues, which are aimed at helping educators and readers make interesting and relevant connections to matters in their daily life.

## Introduction

The Asia Pacific Breweries (APB) Foundation Signature Art Prize is a premier juried prize inaugurated by the Asia Pacific Breweries Foundation and the Singapore Art Museum in 2008. It is a hallmark of distinction awarded to artists whose artworks represent a significant development in contemporary visual art in the Asia Pacific region.

A triennial competition, the APB Foundation Signature Art Prize seeks to highlight new developments in the visual arts, stimulate lively public discussion and critical debate, and provide a cross-cultural exhibition platform for established practitioners and significant emerging artists alike. Aimed at recognising the single most outstanding contemporary visual artwork produced in the preceding three years, the competition is open to all visual artworks, regardless of medium, subject matter and size.

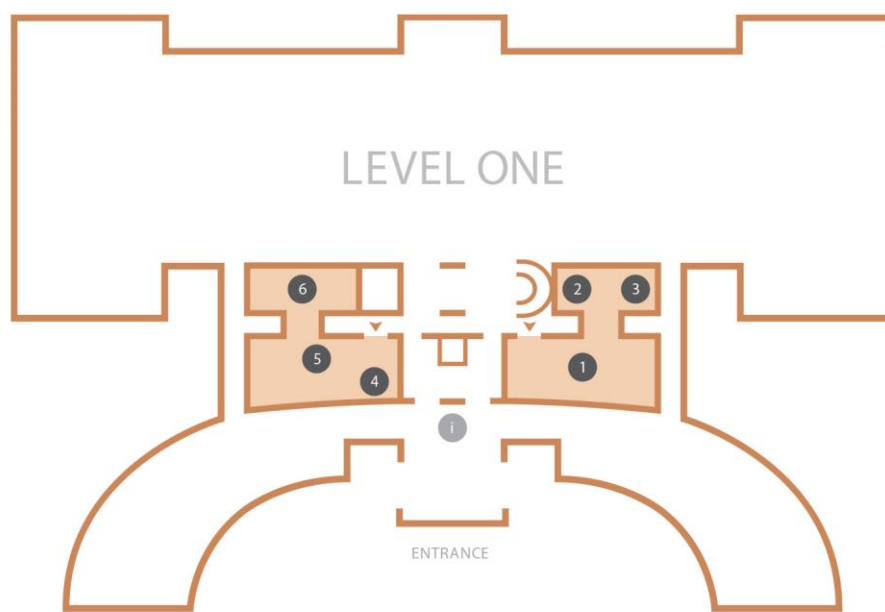
The inaugural edition in 2008 focused only on 12 countries: Cambodia, China, India, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam, and received a total of 34 nominations. The APB Foundation Signature Art Prize soon expanded its focus in 2011 to reach the entire Asia Pacific region, including 130 artworks from 23 Asia Pacific countries and territories. Nominations were received from new countries and territories including Indonesia, Philippines, Myanmar, Brunei, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Australia and other Oceania and Pacific islands. The 2014 edition includes nominations from all previous countries and territories, including a nomination from new entrant, Hong Kong.

Nominators from across the region with a wide range of specialties and backgrounds are specially invited to nominate specific artworks – instead of artists – that had been aesthetically, culturally and socially significant in their particular art scenes in the past three years. A diverse panel of distinguished judges, who mostly hail from the Asia-Pacific region, are also selected specially to evaluate the nominations, shortlist the finalists, and decide on the key award-winning works in the APB Foundation Signature Art Prize exhibition

All nominated works are assessed on a set of criteria: the strength of the idea and concept; creative and interesting use of medium and material; technique, expression and form; artistic insight and interpretation, and imagination and originality. The Grand Prize and two Juror's Choice Awards are chosen by the international jury of art experts, critics and curators, while the People's Choice Award will go to the artist whose work garners the most number of public votes.

The APB Foundation Signature Art Prize is a recognition of distinction and significance in artistic practice, presenting the best of contemporary art in the Asia-Pacific region.

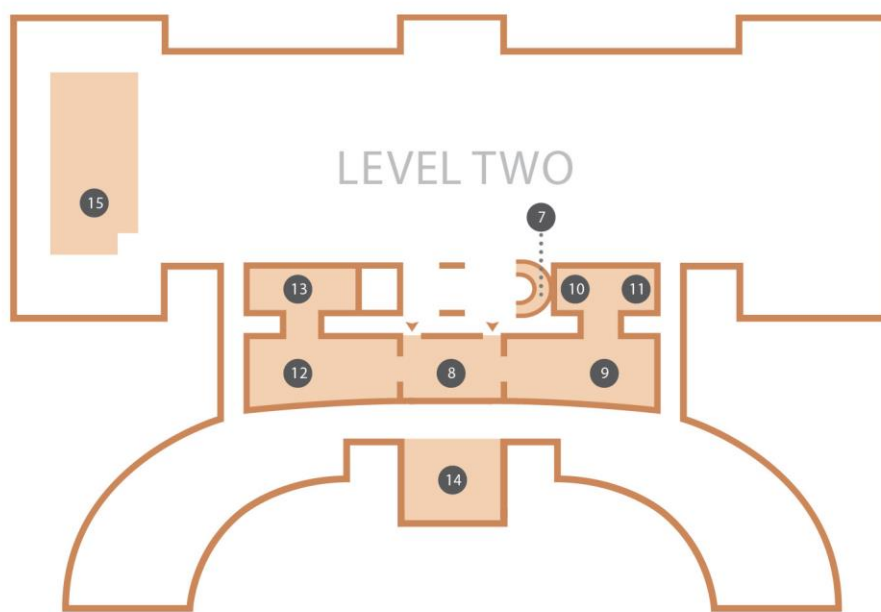
## Exhibition map



### LEVEL ONE

- 1 Nguyen Trinh Thi
- 2 Robert Zhao Renhui
- 3 Owen Leong
- 4 Farida Batool
- 5 Peng Wei
- 6 Yao Jui-Chung  
+ Lost Society  
Document (LSD)

## Exhibition map

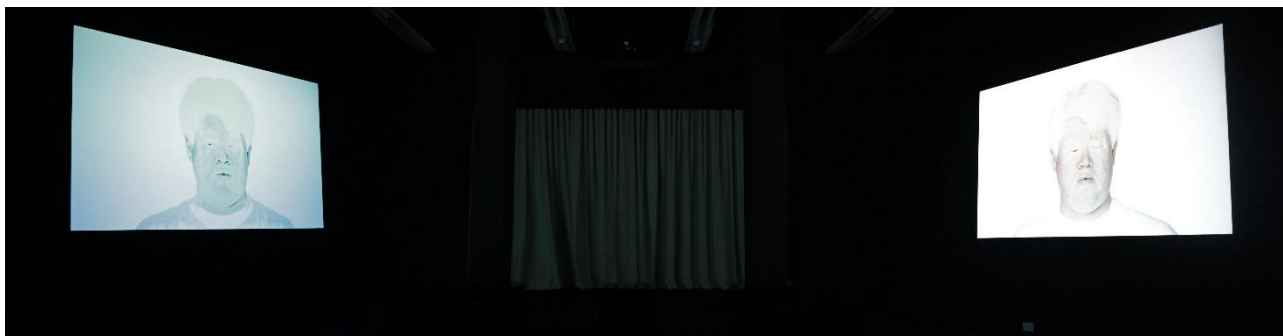


### LEVEL TWO

- 7 Liu Jianhua
- 8 Choe U-Ram
- 9 Go Watanabe
- 10 Lisa Reihana
- 11 Naeem Mohaiemen
- 12 Arin Rungjang
- 13 Ranbir Kaleka
- 14 Melati Suryodarmo
- 15 Ho Tzu Nven

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**Artwork*****PYTHAGORAS***

Ho Tzu Nyen

2013

Installation with 4-channel HD video, 8-channel sound, automated curtain track, fans, lights, and show control mechanism

Dimensions variable

Collection of the Singapore Art Museum

Image courtesy of the Artist, photograph by Russell Adam Morton

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## About the artwork and artistic process

*PYTHAGORAS* by Singaporean artist Ho Tzu Nyen is a video artwork built around four different works programmed to react to one another in a single space. These four works are *NEWTON*, *MILTON*, *GOULD* and *PYTHAGORAS*. *NEWTON* is a 2009 piece named after the scientist Isaac Newton, while *MILTON* was extracted from Ho's other work entitled *EARTH* and named after the poet of *Paradise Lost*. *GOULD* is a 2013 piece named after the pianist Glenn Gould and *PYTHAGORAS* is a new video work which involves the projection of closing and opening curtains onto a set of actual automated theatre curtains.

The title of the artwork is derived from Pythagoras of Samos, the Ionian Greek philosopher, mathematician and founder of Pythagoreanism. Pythagoreanism was a system of **esoteric** and **metaphysical** beliefs in which disciples were required to sit in absolute silence while listening to their master's voice from behind a veil. This practice was the starting point for Ho's work. The notion of the veil is exemplified in *PYTHAGORAS* through the use of curtains, both projected and actual. Ho describes his fascination with curtains, "They are screens that veil but are, at the same time, screens for the projection of desires. They make known the presence of wind, passing through openings and cracks. But I'm also obsessed with the voice – voices in the head, voices hidden behind veils, disembodied voices, voices of authority and trickery." *PYTHAGORAS* thus centres on the notion of the voice as a force that cannot be escaped, but has the power to seduce, animate or compel.

Featured in the videos are **personages** from film and literary history, such as the Wizard of Oz, Fritz Lang's Doctor Mabuse, Stanley Kubrick's Hal 9000 and Jean-Luc Godard's Alpha 60. Intercut with these are historical figures portrayed or evoked in Ho's earlier works. All these characters use the effect of 'voice' for their own purposes: the Wizard and Mabuse conceal their **visages** like Pythagoras to give their words more authority, while the artificial intelligence systems of Kubrick and Godard's sentient machines allow them to speak and be understood by humans. At the same time in this installation, we witness the portrayed musician, poet, and scientist each struggle with the various manifestations of what can be read to be the voice of genius, or inspiration. *PYTHAGORAS* is a multi-layered work that disconcerts the viewer through a spectrum of sounds, and ideas about the nature of voice, power and deception that resonate powerfully within the different aspects of the work.

## About the artist

Ho Tzu Nyen (b. 1976, Singapore) earned a Bachelor of Arts in Creative Arts from Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne (2001), and a Master of Arts in Southeast Asian Studies from the National University of Singapore (2007).

He has written extensively on art and his practice spans video, painting and theatre. His works are frequently related to historical and philosophical texts and artefacts. Recently, Ho has focused on immersive multimedia installations, an apt vehicle for combining his personal interests in film, text, image and music.

Ho has exhibited widely both locally and internationally in museums, galleries, film and performing arts festivals. He held solo exhibitions at the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia in Adelaide (2007, 2010), the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo (2012), and represented Singapore at the 54th Venice Biennale (2011). Selected group exhibitions include the 26th Bienal de Sao Paulo in Brazil (2004); the 3rd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale in Japan (2005); the 6th Asia Pacific Triennale in Brisbane, Australia (2009); *No Soul for Sale* at London's Tate Modern (2010), and *No Country: Contemporary Art for South and Southeast Asia*, a travelling exhibition by the Guggenheim Museum, New York (2013).



## Discussion and suggested activities

### Questions for discussion

- Watch the four-channel video. Do you recognise any of the scenes you see and can you identify them from the films they have been borrowed from?
- Watch the four-channel video again carefully. Do you notice a recurring motif across all four channels? What do you think this recurring motif represents, and why?
- Listen to the sounds employed by the artist in the artwork. How do these sounds make you feel? Why do you think the artist arranged these sounds in such a way?
- Observe the lighting effects that accompanied this video. How would it differ if another colour was used? What does the colour of this lighting remind you of?
- The video installation draws upon elements of theatre and film. Make a list of all these elements. [automated curtain tracks, elaborate stage lighting systems, 360-degree audio effects, etc]
- [FOOD FOR THOUGHT] Ho's work draws upon the notion of the voice in one's head that has the power to seduce, animate or compel. Do you think this happens in real life? Have you ever wondered about the idea of inspiration and how you, and other creative people get inspired?

### Suggested activities

- The artwork is based on the idea of the "acousmatic sound", which refers to sound one hears without seeing its original cause. Can you think of any instances of "acousmatic sounds" in your everyday life? Use a voice recorder to record these sounds and ask your friends if they can guess where these sounds are from!

**Glossary****Esoteric**

Intended for or likely to be understood by only a small number of people with a specialised knowledge or interest.

**Metaphysical**

Pertaining to or of the nature of metaphysics, which is concerned with abstract thought or subjects, such as existence, causality, or truth.

**Personages**

Key characters in a play or other work.

**Visages**

Faces or facial expressions.

**Further reading and viewing****Book on Pythagoras the Greek philosopher**

*The cult of Pythagoras: math and myths.* Available [here](#).

**Video with samples of acousmatic music**

*FUJI acousmatic music festival 2013 富士電子音響芸術祭 2013.* Available [here](#).