

THE
YOUTHS
TAKE
OVER

OUR **KOLEKTIF** JOURNEY
IN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

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Our Kolektif Journey in Youth Engagement





Reimagining the art museum for the future

That was the impetus for the National Gallery Singapore's Kolektif programme which started in 2020. Art museums are institutions which have remained largely unchanged for over a hundred years, but the Kolektif programme sought to co-create with the youths of today their visions for the art museum of tomorrow.

How are art museums relevant today? What is their role in our societies, and how can museums enable the re-envisioning and re-making of our world?

These were some of the questions that the Youth Engagement team wanted to address through an experimental collective that empowered young people to craft programmes and activations for their peers in the Gallery.

The Kolektif programme would not have been possible without the energy, imagination, tenacity, and dedication of the awesome Youth Engagement team at the Gallery. I would like to thank them for sharing and believing in the vision, and bringing it to life in ways that exceeded all expectations.


Eugene Tan

Director
National Gallery Singapore
Prefers smooth over chunky



Contents

NOT SURE WHERE TO BEGIN <i>But we've got to start somewhere</i>	06
1. BELIEVING IN YOUNG PEOPLE <i>Why youths? Why now?</i>	10
2. CRAFTING THE KOLEKTIF EXPERIMENT <i>From paper to people</i>	18
3. BRINGING US TOGETHER <i>From 20 strangers to one Kolektif</i>	28
4. BY YOUTHS, FOR YOUTHS <i>There's room for everyone here</i>	42
5. SCHOOLED BY YOUTHS <i>What did we learn?</i>	52
6. OUR NEXT EXPERIMENT <i>Where do we go from here?</i>	60
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	68



NOT SURE WHERE TO BEGIN

BUT WE'VE GOT TO
START SOMEWHERE

introducing...



From left to right: Heng Yeng, Shyen, Skyler, Vygesh, Ellyn

record scratch

Yup, that's us. The folks running an experimental youth engagement programme at National Gallery Singapore.

You're probably wondering how we ended up writing this report (which is more or less a word dump about all our efforts and learnings from working with youths these past three years). We're also not entirely sure what brought you here either, but thank you for turning the page!

In this report, we talk about **the genesis of the Kolektif—an experimental youth collective programme we launched in 2020** (yesss, right when the pandemic hit)—our philosophies, our research findings about Singapore's youth audience, our members' experiences and journeys, and the things we taught and learnt while we were at it. We end this report with what we hope the future of youth engagement might look like at the Gallery, wistfully mentioning our pipe dreams and aspirations.

It would be an understatement to say that running an experimental youth programme during a global pandemic was not easy. Somehow, we did it anyway, working with two batches of youth collective members and gathering ~~warnings~~ lessons for anyone mad passionate enough to embark on a similar journey. Mostly, we just wanted to document what we have learnt about youth

engagement in a museum context. We also hope this report can serve as a starter kit for anyone else looking to work with youths in authentic and meaningful ways!

It took many drafts (that were collecting metaphorical dust in our shared folders) to find the words to describe our experiences, to detail a work in progress, and to wrestle those words into a helpful framework for anyone considering or already working with this demographic. In the end, although there were many aspects of our work that we had no space to include, we did squeeze in some fun facts about the people behind the Kolektif programme, how we created Kolektif as a brand, and a whole host of other cool (we think) stuff we think you'd like to know.

If you're hoping for this to be a straightforward, step-by-step guide on "how to work with youths effectively," you might be reading the wrong thing (please hit us up if you do find a guide like that). But we hope this report might spark an idea, a conversation, or simply be a source of inspiration in your journey in youth engagement.

We also hope to hear from, create conversations, and exchange learnings with arts organisations, community spaces/ groups, partners and anyone else with a heart for young people and eager to provide platforms for young people to create magic and grow as a community.

CHAPTER 1

Believing in young people

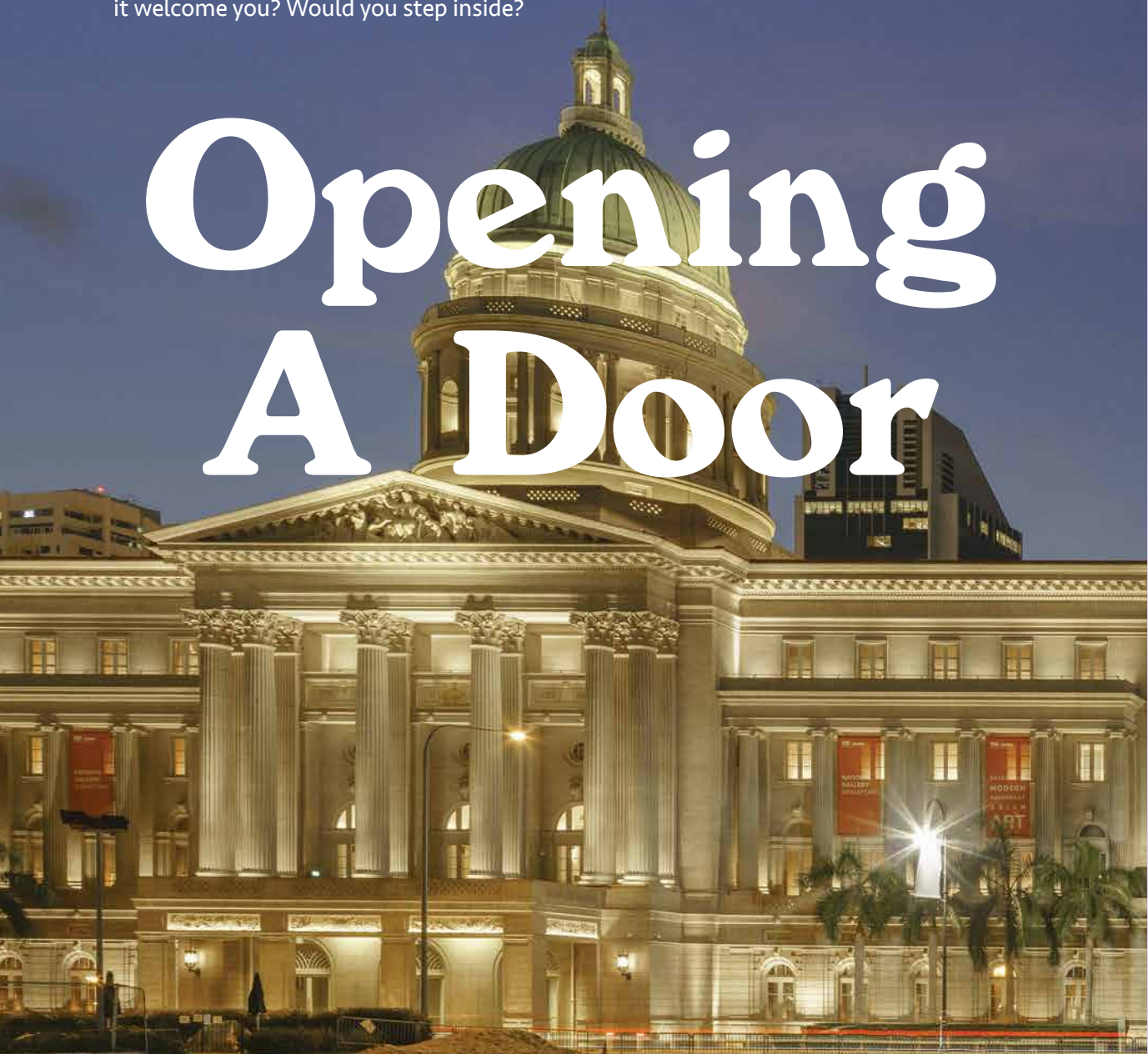
Why youths?
Why now?



National Gallery Singapore is a visual arts institution which oversees the world's largest public collection of Singapore and Southeast Asian modern art. It occupies a 64,000-square-metre venue in two restored natural monuments—the former City Hall and the former Supreme Court, two buildings that bore witness to the nation's transformation.

Now, imagine this. You're standing at the entrance of the Gallery, looking up at this massive, formal structure filled with so much art and history. You haven't encountered art that much before and you're not sure what you can do in the space. Would it welcome you? Would you step inside?

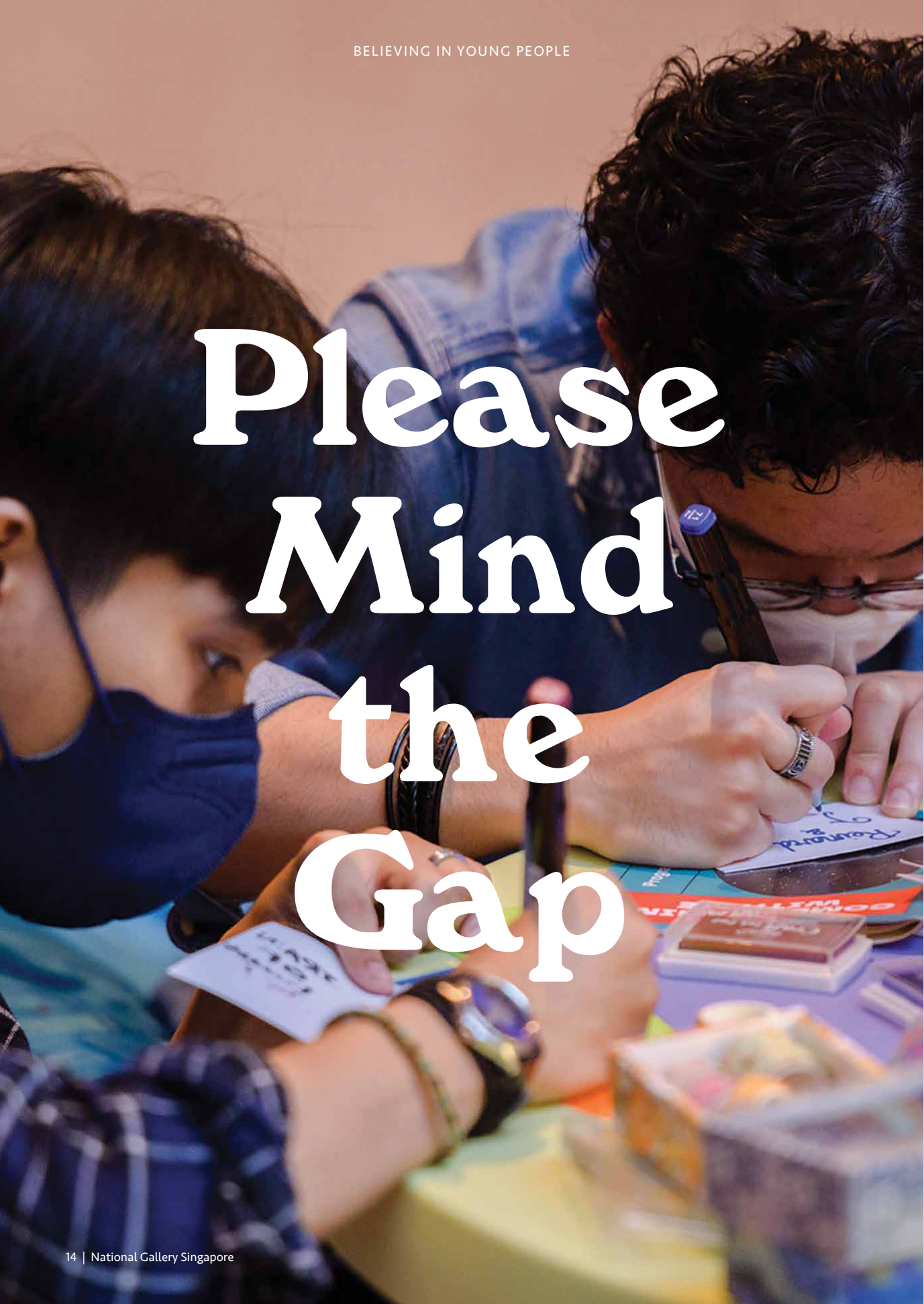
Opening A Door



As a visual arts museum, we believe in the power of art to inspire, challenge and evoke new ways of seeing and understanding the world. We also believe in the impact that young people have on their community, the value that they bring to the table and the importance of empowering their voices.

The fact is, the youths of today are not just our audience, but our future cultural leaders and art patrons as well. How, then, can we meaningfully make space for them in our large (and to be honest, rather imposing) arts institution?

In a bid to answer this question, the Youth Engagement team was created in November 2018 to develop a central Youth Engagement Strategy for the Gallery. This team aimed to craft a strategic vision of what meaningful, authentic youth engagement might look like, as well as provide a foundation for the development of opportunities for young people within the context of the Gallery and our artwork collection. By 2019, this team was just us four Gallery staff (Hi!) from different teams across the Gallery.



Please Mind the Gap

“...amid conversations about mental health and wellness in the wake of a global pandemic, how can we provide them with a third space outside the home or school where they can creatively explore and express themselves through art?”

We started with research on the youth demographic in Singapore and in general, as well as the local ecosystem of youth communities and organisations.

Generally, we observed that it could be hard to engage with young people. Due to the large variance of life stages within the age bracket—including multiple academic milestones, enlistment in the military (which all male Singaporeans and Permanent Residents must go through), transitions between schools and colleges, etc., “youths” can be, well, a hard demographic to pin down.

With constantly changing trends and technological advancements, the youths of today are growing up in an environment that is very different from the ones their parents may have grown up in. So, **how can we capture their attention and engage them meaningfully?** Youths today are also more politically and socially connected to their local and international communities. **How can we translate the transformative power of the arts into something that is relevant to them?** Lastly, amid conversations about mental health and wellness in the wake of a global pandemic, **how can we provide them with a third space outside the home or school where they can creatively explore and express themselves through art?**

When we took a closer look at the Gallery’s offerings, we found that public programmes and engagement platforms that catered to youths outside family or school settings were, for the most part, ad-hoc and lacked sustained engagement. To fill this gap, we aimed to be more intentional. We wanted to create engaging, relevant programmes where youths could experience art and make the Gallery more accessible to young people. **This strategy became the basis on which we crafted our pilot experiment to form a museum youth collective, focusing on young people between the ages of 17 and 25.** Members of this new youth collective would also have the chance to develop and lead a youth takeover at the Gallery, creating programmes for their peers.

We knew that we had a treasure trove of resources: artworks in the National Collection, lots of galleries and public spaces, buildings full of historical significance, as well as staff behind the art experiences who could inspire youths to see the world afresh. We also knew that the existing lack of a creative and constructive space in which youths could express themselves, exercise their own agency, try new things and experience public reception to their creations meant that the Gallery was perfectly positioned to **support, champion and empower youths.**

"I feel a lot more comfortable being in museums and the gallery specifically. It does feel so much less intimidating."

—Naazym, 2020 batch, Animal Supremacist



Manifest!

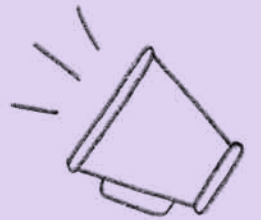
Our Youth Engagement Vision

To become an inclusive, empowering and relevant space for the youth segment through the implementation of imaginative visual arts-based programming.

This vision was led by three main goals:

To empower youth voices

Involve youth leadership in the creative and decision-making processes at the Gallery



To create relations and draw relevance

Create authentic, dynamic and meaningful connections between the Gallery's collection and issues that matter to young people



To interweave accessibility

Cultivate accessible opportunities and pathways into visual art for youths of diverse identities—particularly marginalised ones—with the aim of creating an inclusive Gallery experience





CHAPTER 2

CRAFTING THE KOLEKTIF EXPERIMENT

FROM PAPER TO PEOPLE

Our Hypothesis



LEARNING FROM INDUSTRY PEERS LOCALLY AND ABROAD

As we were youth engagement newbies, we first tried to understand how other institutions and peers approached youth engagement. We also observed what the existing ecosystem of youth programming was like, especially in the museum/arts and culture industry here in Singapore and abroad.

Local observations

Youths are time-starved • Art is very much a socio-political thing for young people • Massive demand among youths for a sense of community

Key pedagogies that underpin youth-centric work in institutions

A deep belief in the value of young people • Empowerment • Co-creation • Youth-led • Mentorship • Interdisciplinary engagement • Creative modes of learning • Diversity

Broad challenges of youth engagement

Youths' perception of the arts industry as elitist • An extremely resource intensive endeavour with seemingly little corresponding output • Extensive mentoring of young people needed

TAILORING A PROGRAMME TO FIT OUR VISION AND GOALS

The more we asked about what youth today want, the more we realised we didn't know, and the only way to find out was **to ask them directly**.

Through our research into youth engagement methods in arts, culture, and museums, we learnt about the idea of a youth collective that could invite youth voices into arts spaces.

We found this to be the most effective model as it is built on the principle of the inclusion of different voices, and also serves as a platform for these different voices to be heard. We hoped to achieve our youth engagement vision through the pillars of this model: youth empowerment, establishing connections between the art of the Gallery and issues that matter to young people, and creating opportunities for youths to gain meaningful experiences in the arts space.

This also gave us a **direct feedback channel** so youths could speak for themselves and advocate for what they and their peers are concerned about.

We then set out to test the feasibility of a **youth collective model** within the Gallery.

Our Design

THE WHO

Youths between the ages of 17 and 25

No arts background or experience required

No programming background or experience required



THE WHAT

A youth collective with 20 members of diverse identities in each batch

Focus on equipping youths with the knowledge and skills to become arts programmers



Sharing knowledge about the inner workings of a museum

Firmly undergirded by a "by youth, for youth" philosophy

Members to programme a public youth event at the end of their term

THE WHEN

June to February of the following year (9 months)

Takes into consideration the academic calendars of various local educational institutions



Integrated into the Gallery's annual Light to Night Festival which shares a similar target youth demographic



THE WHERE

Super strict restrictions in the midst of a lockdown?

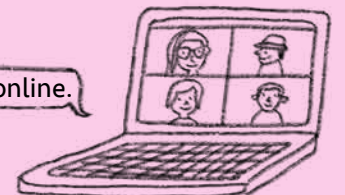
We did the meetings online.

Slightly looser restrictions where some could gather?

We went hybrid!

When things calmed down (kind of?)

Let's meet up at the Gallery in-person please T__T



Our People

We wanted our Kolektif members to:

1. Be diVERSE
2. Be Committed
3. Be collaborative
4. Have that **🔥FIRE🔥** to make things happen!!

PART I: OPEN CALL

First, we put out an open call to all youths aged 17 to 25. Recruitment and publicity were done online and on-site, including social media publicity and in-person outreach during Gallery events and festivals. We also reached out to multiple post-secondary educational institutions to introduce the programme and encourage students to sign up.

We put up an online sign-up form that was accessible to the public and created

a digital information pack to answer any common questions, such as the timeline of the Kolektif programmes and compulsory meeting dates.

We made sure to address the needs of youths of diverse backgrounds and identities as we crafted the form. We also recognised that individuals would express creativity in different ways, so we let them tell us about themselves through all kinds of mediums: voice recordings, essays, illustrations, slides, videos, etc.

After that, we shortlisted applicants based on their “tell me about yourself” segments, their desire to contribute to a community of creative and diverse individuals, their passion for wanting to make something happen at the Gallery, as well as how closely their values and goals matched what we wanted to see in our Kolektif members.



CREATING OUR BRAND

As a wise person once said, “pics or it didn’t happen!” Seeing how social media saturates our daily lives, and the exponential reliance on social media and digital connections when the pandemic hit, we knew we couldn’t begin our work without going to where the youths lived: online.

But first, our programme needed a name and a brand. We finally landed on **Kolektif**—Malay for “collective”—as a nod to our Southeast Asian roots and our commitment to creating a diverse and inclusive community for youths. We drew inspiration from the artwork *Tikar-A-Gagah* by artist Yee I-Lann, worked together with a youth designer, Natalie Tan (@nattytme), and used vivid shades of purple, green, yellow and pink in our logo.

With this fresh new look, we began posting anything and everything we could to spread the word about Kolektif!



Our logo

PART 2: CASUAL COFFEE CHATS

The second stage of the recruitment process was a chat at the Gallery. Shortlisted applicants met us in a casual, neutral space in the Gallery café over a drink, and we took this opportunity to get a better sense of their personalities beyond their submissions.

We asked scenario-based questions to understand their past working styles, reactions to failure, and experiences with working with their peers. This was also a chance for applicants to ask us questions and find out more about the programme and its commitments.

Each coffee chat ended with the Kolektif Coordinators going over our first impressions of the applicant and filling in a post-interview form.



PART 3: ASSEMBLING OUR FINAL 20

The last stage of our recruitment had us picking out 20 people whom we thought could work well together. We wanted these people to be a balance of all the elements that we evaluated in their post-interview forms, taking into consideration their personalities and dispositions, any other commitments which would take place during the programme, as well as the different roles we felt they could perform in the team. We knew that if we wanted community, we had to build it intentionally, instead of going for pure merit. Based on all these elements, we chose the 20 applicants we felt were the most suitable for the programme.

To help the final members bond while working within the confines of pandemic restrictions, we split the 20 members into four teams, each led by a Kolektif Coordinator. When forming these teams, we made sure that the make up of each team took these factors into consideration:

- The personality of each individual member (Were they introverted or extroverted?)
- The dynamics of multiple members placed in different groups (Were they someone that could be a leader or a follower? Were they action-oriented or idea-oriented?)
- Their experience and knowledge level in the arts and/or their own creative practices
- Their experience and knowledge level in events management/programme creation
- Their identity markers and backgrounds—whether it was their race, age, or educational background





CHAPTER 3
BRINGING
US TOGETHER

FROM 20
STRANGERS
to
ONE
KOLEKTIF

KOLEKTIF

The Art of Forging Connections

We all search for spaces where we can belong, and for people who are just like us.

As the team that designed the programme, we understood that this Kolektif journey would be a tough one, made even tougher by the fact that all Kolektif members would come into the programme as strangers. Plus, we had to deal with the complexities of working within a large institution and all the nitty gritty details of arts programming.

While we were not expecting the members to make lifelong, ride-or-die friendships, we did want them to have an honest appreciation for one another. Their Kolektif journey would only be more fun, more memorable and more precious if they were able to genuinely connect with one another.

So, we decided to build the Kolektif programme on these four pillars:

1. DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND ACCESS
2. COMMUNITY BUILDING
3. LEARNING TOGETHER
4. CO-CREATION

DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND ACCESS



In recruiting a diverse youth collective, it is important to draw from a diverse pool of applicants instead of just selecting youths from diverse backgrounds. We avoided restricting applications to just students with a background in the arts, history or heritage studies, and encouraged applicants without any experience to apply. Just as enthusiastically, we ensured that at every level of the Kolektif journey, diverse needs and perspectives were considered and given space to be heard.

As we selected Kolektif members, we made sure to balance out representation among the batch. We wanted our 20 members to mix with others who were different from themselves. We hoped this would help them expand their perspectives, understand the

needs of others and learn how to navigate new relationships.

At key moments in the programme, we found ways to formally and informally capture the different needs of our members to better tailor our plans. From the important things like bubble tea and dessert preferences, to considerations like their level of comfort with meeting in-person (because COVID-19), access to devices to go online, and if they had a conducive space for online meetings. We believed that the more we could focus on equity and consideration towards our members, the more they could flourish and do their best work, and the more they would extend that consideration towards ensuring their programmes were as accessible as possible to their peers.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

We prioritised the building of rapport and strengthening of relationships between the members. Sure, us Coordinators did our best to provide direction and insight, but our experience of the programme would be so different from theirs. Going through the programme together with a peer, a person they trusted, on the other hand, would be equally, if not more, crucial. Friendship is magic.

Of course, that begs the question: how do you turn a group of young people into friends? It's already scary enough to meet a room full of strangers!

To be honest, we did what we could and let time do the rest.

We intentionally placed community building first, designing our meetings to always include some element of getting

to know one another better. We scattered workshops and special projects across the nine months so all 20 members would have opportunities to interact and work outside of their assigned teams. We tried to mix up the combinations of members to widen their circles within Kolektif, even making sure that they had different mealtimes while running their programmes at the Light to Night Festival.

We did our utmost to provide opportunities for sparks to fly, but it was really the members who took the plunge with us to create space in their lives to fit 23 new people (19 other members plus 4 Coordinators) along with new perspectives and personalities.

The next few pages will showcase the Kolektif journey. So, if you're ready, go ahead and turn the page.



A KOLEKTIF MEMBER'S JOURNEY



ONE ONBOARDING

This is when we welcome our members and help them navigate the things they will need to prepare for the next leg of their journey!



TWO KOLEKTIF 101 INDUCTION PROGRAMME

Our members finally get to meet and connect over a series of learning and development sessions by the Coordinators, other Gallery staff, and each other!



THREE KOLEKTIF SATURDAY MEETINGS

The planning for their final programme happens throughout all these beautiful Saturdays, where members take their ideas and bring them to life through refining proposals, doing trials and taking in feedback. This is also the time when they get to embark on passion projects and continued scaffolded learning sessions.

FOUR THE KOLEKTIF TAKEOVER

The Kolektif members' ideas are now real and ready for their peers! These programmes bring together contemporary social issues and National Collection artworks and come in a variety of formats! (Psst, find out more in Chapter 4!)



FIVE GRADUATION

Graduation is three things: A celebration of the Kolektif members' efforts, a review of their programmes with participant feedback and a night to reminisce.

SIX ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

This covers all the ways we keep in contact! We find chances to gather to keep up with their lives and plug volunteer or work opportunities within the Gallery!





LEARNING TOGETHER

We started with the intention of inviting youths into the Gallery to craft their dream museum experiences for their peers, while also working towards the goal of empowering youths. But to get to that point, both the Kolektif members and Coordinators had a lot to learn, especially given the experimental nature of the programme.

KNOWLEDGE GROWTH

Across two batches, we recruited members with a whole range of experience in the arts and/or arts management. Some had just graduated from Arts Management degrees, while others had already ventured out into the art world as artists and administrators in their own right. Some had never even stepped into the Gallery before but were still curious about the arts.

To level out these variances and to create a common pool of knowledge for members to draw from, we conducted an induction programme called Kolektif 101. This induction included tours of the Gallery's long-term exhibitions and artwork handling areas, sharing sessions by colleagues from various departments and hands-on workshops on different art mediums, all aimed at giving the Kolektif members a better idea of the inner workings of a visual arts museum.

Another thing we worked on was developing their skills when it came to engaging with artworks and learning how to develop and execute an arts event. We demonstrated how to engage with social issues by taking them through panels and tours that connected art to issues of race, sexuality and identity.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

With the Kolektif curriculum—as well as the creative freedom afforded within projects and support from us Coordinators—we witnessed many of the members becoming more confident in conceptualising ideas and bringing them to life while working with budget and time restrictions. The members learnt a lot during this time, whether it was learning how to work with peers, the skills they picked up, or even just appreciation of art.

Many members have since found employment and volunteering opportunities because of their experience in Kolektif. Several members have also become part of the Gallery's staff and/or have continued to volunteer with us in varying capacities, while three have altered their original paths to become part of the wider arts industry. The rest continue to be enthusiastic contributors, arts event attendees and creatives in their respective fields, whether it be pottery or photography.

A BACK-AND-FORTH CONVERSATION

Working closely with 20 youth members over a period of nine months definitely created a rapport between Coordinators and members. Instead of being “do-as-I-say” authority types, we were partners in our members’ journeys! We dispensed knowledge only when we thought it helpful and held our tongues whenever we felt that the members could learn more by solving problems on their own.

We also checked in with the members regularly through casual chats or more formal conversations. We wanted to centre our relationships around authentic ties and transparent communication and become part of their support system during their time in the Kolektif programme.

Additionally, we observed how the members responded to our methods. We exchanged notes among ourselves about how best to deal with different interpersonal issues. We periodically asked the members about their thoughts so we could learn how to be better Coordinators for them.

A lot of the time when we faced setbacks or doubts, we based our practices off three questions:

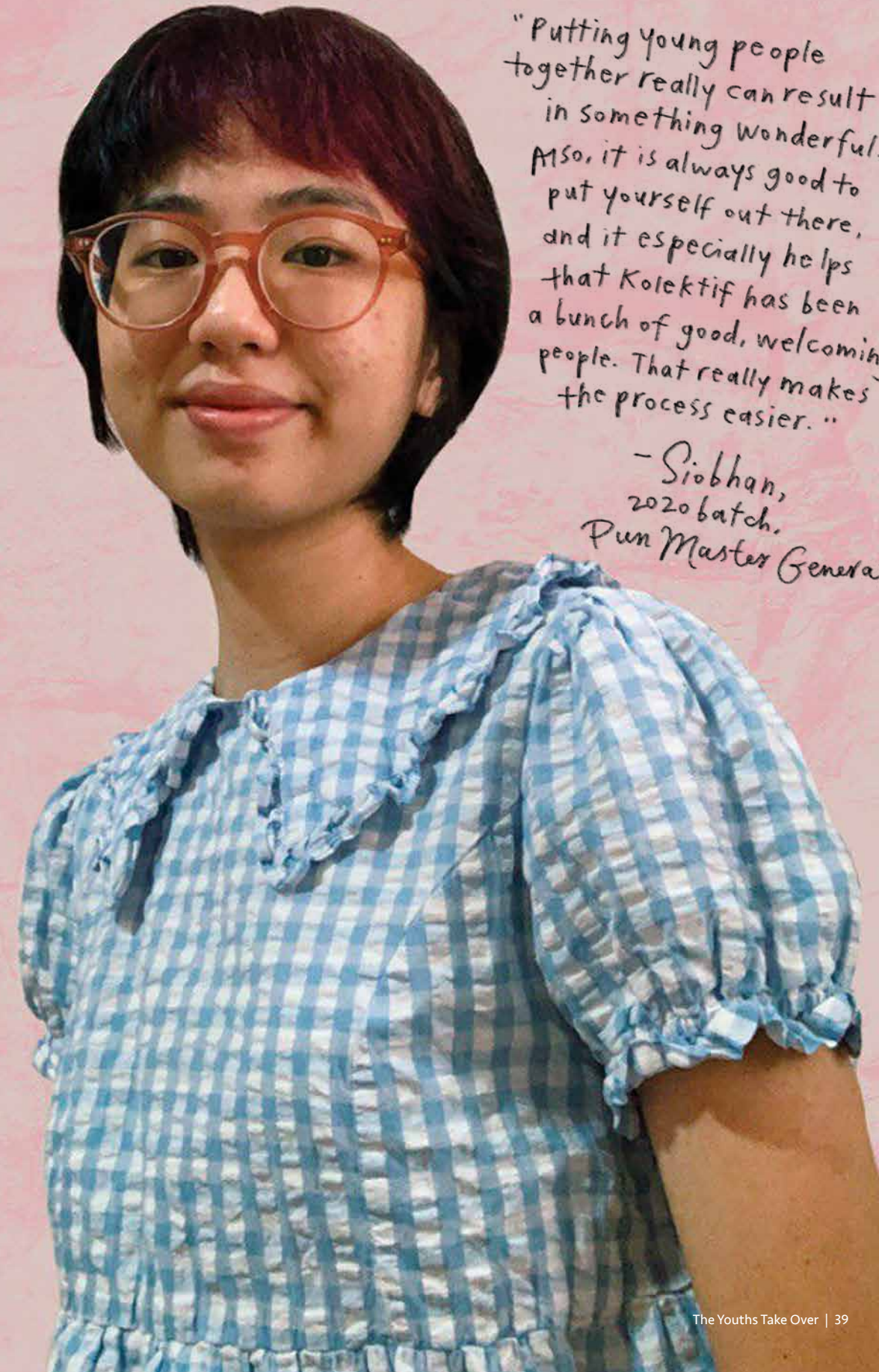
1. What would be most in line with our empowerment and co-creation philosophy?
2. How can we communicate this to the members with fairness and transparency?
3. Is this really what youths/our members want? Can we ask them?

Generally, these questions helped us through a lot of tricky situations. In a sense, we were like first-time parents scrambling around while their baby screamed from the cot (okay, our members didn’t actually scream and ask for more snacks... *or did they?*). But the more we did our best to listen and believe in them, the more they could believe in themselves and execute their plans with confidence.



“Putting young people together really can result in something wonderful. Also, it is always good to put yourself out there, and it especially helps that Kolektif has been a bunch of good, welcoming people. That really makes the process easier.”

— Siobhan,
2020 batch,
Pun Master General



"I've been going to the gallery for years but never knew that I'd be able to really engage with the space more than as a visitor! It makes me so reassured that even as a young individual, I have so much potential and that our generation is actively contributing to our developing arts scene. I think having a sense of agency is what I really appreciate and makes me confident for our country's future."

— Toh Ling
2021 batch,
Evermore-era
Swiftie



CO-CREATION

Co-creation is infused into all aspects of Kolektif. Because we believe in the value of empowering youth voices, we believe that the reins of control should be handed over to youths so they themselves can dictate the creative direction and execution of youth programming that happens at the Gallery. Whether it was youth programmes at The Kolektif Takeover, or the Saturday meetings we had with the members, even down to the Kolektif programme itself, many plans were tweaked after the members' feedback and evaluation of their experiences and interests.

This pillar of co-creation, however, required us Coordinators to have a solid framework and step-by-step process for Kolektif members to rely on as they moved through the programme:

1. Having a scaffolded programme brief
2. Submitting three proposals with a provided template
3. Presenting their proposals for evaluation
4. Choosing and developing one proposal
5. Conducting programme trials
6. Executing final programme

This framework gave Kolektif members enough space to brainstorm as much as possible before narrowing down their options. That way, they could think through different aspects of their programme before finally reaching their biggest programme milestone, the Light to Night Festival, where they get the full experience of executing their programme as part of The Kolektif Takeover and connecting with their peers!



CHAPTER 4

BY YOUTHS FOR YOUTHS



When Kolektif Takes Over

The Kolektif journey culminated in The Kolektif Takeover at Light to Night Festival 2021 and 2022. In these two years, our youth members connected National Collection artworks and contemporary social issues at the forefront of youth minds through eight programmes that varied in both formats and topics.



Blind Frenship Dates
A fun experience bringing pairs of strangers together through art-inspired activities in the Gallery



Pantun Pitstop
An exploratory workshop where participants learn about the pantun (a form of Malay poetry) and get to craft one of their own



The Inconvenient Tour
An interactive tour of artworks discussing climate destruction and social justice



IM/BALANCED
A facilitated programme about hustle culture leading participants to discover their relationship with work and rest



the spacebar
A cozy installation and card game addressing the human connection crisis during the pandemic



Come Imagine with Me
A reflective walk through the galleries with conversations about a community-centric future, followed by a creative journaling session



The Unessential Guidebook
A playful zine-making workshop providing room for self-expression and creativity



The Art of Letting Go
A curated audio tour of the galleries delving into grief and vulnerability rounded off with a cathartic letter-writing session

We'll be diving into two programmes, **The Inconvenient Tour** and **the spacebar**, that were very different in terms of their formats, aesthetic and themes in the following pages to better illustrate the thought process of Kolektif members, as well as the experience of programme participants!

The Inconvenient Tour

What was the tour about?

The Inconvenient Tour was an on-site tour of three "inconvenient" artworks by Southeast Asia artists that confront humankind's relationship with the natural world, reflecting on themes of environmental destruction and social justice through a 27.2-second looking session and creative exercises.



What did it look like?

The programme featured a unique activity at each artwork to create more opportunities for participants to interact with each other and build up to the planned topic of discussion. The end of the tour featured an interactive artwork installation, with a life-sized tree structure at its centre. Participants were asked to write their post-tour reflections on paper leaves and hang them onto the branches of this tree structure. Over two weekends during the Light to Night Festival 2021, the tree "grew" leaves with the contributions from participants.



the proposal:



bringing the sketch to life!

"As discussions on climate change become more mainstream, trying to learn more can feel overwhelming. We hope to bring such social issues into the museum and encourage personal responses and expressions through art."
—Team Social Realist 2020

An excerpt from the tour script



This is our first artwork, a woodcut print by the Indonesian arts collective known as Taring Padi. A woodcut print is produced by carving the design onto a flat piece of wood, applying paint and then printing the design onto a surface. One of the most striking things about this print is how detailed it is despite its size.

So for our first activity, we're going to try to sketch as much of this artwork as we can onto our papers, in just 27.2 seconds—that's the average amount of time a museum visitor spends looking at an artwork.

Ok, time's up! Let's see what we've managed to draw. What captured your attention first when you began drawing? What made you draw the detail(s) that you did? If you had to pick one key part of this work that tells you what it's about, what would it be?

The Spacebar

What was it about?

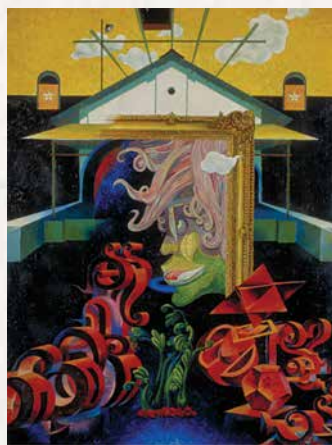
During the 2020 “circuit breaker” period in Singapore, many people experienced feelings of isolation and major disruption to the places they sought out for solace, comfort and recovery. Enter **the spacebar**, an immersive safe space inspired by artworks in the Gallery’s collection where people could **share their stories and find comfort in others.**

The proposal:



Wu Guanzhong
An Indoor Scene of a Pub in England
1992
Oil on canvas, 45 x 64 cm
Gift of the artist
Collection of National Gallery Singapore

faking our inspiration
to the Auditorium Foyer
(see next page)



M. P. P. Yei Myint
Daydream (Self Portrait)
1983
Oil on canvas, 86.5 x 66.1 cm
Collection of National Gallery Singapore



Khoo Sui Hoe
Rendezvous in Space
Undated
Oil on canvas, 140 x 111.5 cm
Gift of Times Publishing Limited
Collection of National Gallery Singapore

“How has the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing measures put in place by the government affected the human condition, relationships and social experiences—especially when there is no clear end to social distancing measures in sight? This project is conceived in response to the current pandemic and how it has affected our human relations, and in a larger scope, Singapore’s arts and entertainment scene.”
— Team Impressionist 2020

What did it look and feel like?

The project transformed the Auditorium Foyer into a cosy, intimate space, with 3D renderings inspired by two artworks from the National Collection projected onto a wall to create an immersive environment. The team collaborated with TableTalk, a locally created card game that prompts deep sharing and reflection from its players, to create a special card deck for the spacebar. They also worked with local musician Kin Leonn to craft a unique soundscape for the space.



Adaptations of *Daydream (Self Portrait)* and *An Indoor Scene of a Pub in England* as bathroom and bedroom interiors by youth artist Annie Hung, presented in the spacebar



Parts of the foyer were decked out in different props reminiscent of common reflection spots in the home, like the bathroom or the bedroom, to further bring comfort to participants when talking about difficult subjects. Scan the QR code to listen to Kin Leonn’s work!



THE FEEDBACK from KOLEKTIF TAKEOVER

The vibes and how friendly people were! I loved the cozy sitting space and the intention behind this programme - to meet and talk and enjoy art - something we rarely see in SG!



SUPER INTENTIONAL! IT WAS ALSO REALLY GREAT TO EXPLORE THE PERMANENT EXHIBIT WITH NEW EYES. THE WHOLE TEAM WAS ALSO INCREDIBLY FRIENDLY AND WERE CLEARLY PASSIONATE ABOUT THEIR WORK



Love this! Plus anything else that celebrates diversity (not just race if possible) and anything that young adults care about haha. Lastly I LOVE that you ask for pronouns on this form!!!



I loved the creative aspect of the programme (the journalling) and the opportunity to take our time and navigate the gallery. The ice breaker questions and prompts were also amazing!



ANYTHING Y'ALL DO I'LL SUPPORT <333



CHAPTER 5

SCHOOLED BY YOUTHS

WHAT DID WE LEARN?



The TL;DR of Working with Youths

DEMAND for YOUTH ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMMES in the ARTS in SINGAPORE

We can say this with all our hearts: there is definitely a demand for youth and youth-led programmes within the arts in Singapore. Over the course of working with two batches of Kolektif members, we have seen an increase in:

1. the number of applicants for the Kolektif programme;
2. the number of engaged participants who attend the programmes organised by Kolektif members; and
3. our social media engagement and interactions with our followers.

For young people who want to work in the arts or in a creative industry, the chance to work with a large institution like the Gallery to develop and execute a large-scale public programme is exciting. This opportunity to do so might not come by easily or be accessible to many youths. This is especially so for those without any background in the arts or affiliation with local art schools, but who nevertheless have a creative streak they want to develop in a safe and supported environment. Getting the chance to work with the Gallery to develop programmes for their peers is a sought-after opportunity that serves as their chance to learn about, experience and potentially enter the arts industry in various roles.

EMBODIMENT of VALUES IMPORTANT to YOUTHS

For Kolektif members to be meaningfully and deeply engaged in the institution, the youth collective model needs to be anchored by principles and values that are important to young people. Values such as authenticity, honesty and belief in diversity and access need to be embodied by the staff interacting with Kolektif members, and these values need to be carried through consistently throughout the Kolektif programme and its execution.

If you ever come across as fake or “sus,” that trust can be destroyed in an instant. We can’t emphasise enough how important it is to be genuine, inclusive, accessible and relevant.

EFFECTIVENESS of ONLINE MODES of ENGAGEMENT

It’s no surprise that a large portion of youth engagement happens on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. We have seen the effectiveness of this digital reach and have consistently seen our online following grow since we started our accounts in 2019. Our youth empowerment philosophy also extends to social media and digital content production as we make it a point to work with young creatives in the creation of our campaigns and content. While restricted by various pandemic protocols in the past few years, learning to pivot, engage and bond individuals through digital means proved to us that it is possible to craft safe, creative spaces online.

IMPORTANCE of a CREATIVE COMMUNITY and CONNECTION to YOUTH CONCERNS

Despite being just a nine-month programme, Kolektif came to be a platform where our youth members could act on their passions and creative explorations in a way that led to a very tangible output that was visible to their peers and the wider public. It also became a safe space for youths outside of home and school. In fact, one of the biggest motivations for youths to want to join Kolektif was the chance to be a part of something bigger than themselves and having their voices heard, while also being a part of a community of creative individuals, all eager to create something meaningful.

Things We Can't Unlearn

A POSITIVE RIPPLE EFFECT

One of the most magical things to witness in the Kolektif programme is the strong sense of camaraderie. Many of the members reflected that they treasured the community and felt less alone in their creative pursuits, whether as part of their education or career.

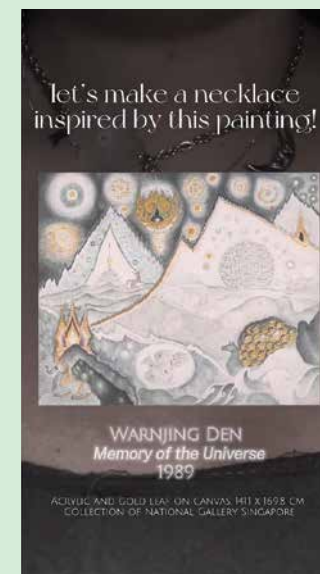
Our taking risks by having youths take the lead in some decisions really pushed the boundaries for the Gallery. But our risk-taking paid off. Our “by youth, for youth” programmes have consistently received high participant satisfaction rates, our social media content has resonated well among our followers and more importantly, we have seen how our members and their peers have been bolstered and connected through this experience.

The youth collective model and its impact at the Gallery also created valuable learning in youth engagement that we shared, and continue to share, with multiple organisational peers in the arts, culture and museum ecosystem both locally and abroad. Kolektif members themselves also had the opportunity to share about their experiences

in the programme and its impact on them at the International Museum Day Symposium 2022.

Another kind of ripple effect we saw was the engagement we got from our social media efforts with the general youth public through the Kolektif Instagram account, where we posted recruitment callouts for Kolektif members, collaboration campaigns with local youth creatives and featured multiple National Collection artworks. We also started a TikTok account documenting funny and candid moments from the Kolektif members’ journey as well as featuring new exhibitions at the Gallery. There were many adorable interactions with our followers, and we also had a lot of fun collaborating with cool youth creators that breathed new life into our artworks!

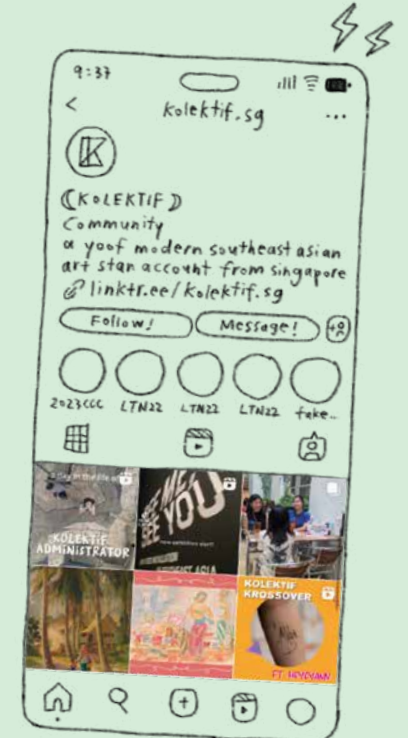
We found ways to reintroduce our National Collection in new, youth-friendly contexts, and (hopefully!) managed to use social media as a means of breaking down our intimidating façade and people’s pre-conceived notions of who can access art.



Warnjing Den
Memory of the Universe
1989
Acrylic and gold leaf on canvas,
141.1 x 169.8 cm
Collection of National Gallery Singapore



Kolektif Krossover is a social media campaign that invites local youth creators working in different mediums of expression to reinterpret National Collection artworks.



ENGAGING with VOLUNTEERS

The nature of working with volunteers meant that Kolektif members were driven by their individual choice and desire to be fully present and engaged. The passions that led to their wanting to be a part of the Kolektif programme are vital, and their individual needs must be considered alongside—and sometimes above—the organisation's needs.

Working with youth volunteers who are in school, serving in the army or just starting out in the working world also meant having to cater for a dip in response and productivity during peak academic/work periods.

Aside from the unexpected extent of emotional and mental labour that came along with the work, the success that we enjoyed also came with many, many hours spent not just rehearsing, liaising, planning, and executing the programme, but also getting to know the members and guiding their progress.

We were really pleased about Kolektif's successes and its impact, but we also needed a nap and a vacation...maybe for a whole year.

INTENSE RESOURCE USE

Working with young people in a meaningful and sustained way requires the commitment of resources—such as emotional and mental labour—in the dedicated mentorship of youths over a nine-month period. Compounded by the effects of COVID-19 restrictions, the burnout was truly like no other, especially for us Coordinators.

As they venture into the most formative stages of their lives, youths explore questions of identity and direction within and outside of the context of our programme. In order to have deep, meaningful engagement, museum workers who wish to work with youths need to be properly equipped with specific skills like psychological first aid, counselling, and knowledge of support resources (commonly found in social/youth workers).

PROGRAMME SUSTAINABILITY

The original form of the Kolektif programme did raise questions about its sustainability. For sure, it meant investing a lot more in each member than in any average visitor. But that's what makes Kolektif's heart beat: that creation of deep, meaningful engagement with young people.

Another thing we had to consider for future editions was the programme duration, as the original model took up nine months of a year. For us, this meant that the graduation of one batch led straight into the recruitment of the next, which left hardly any time for a considered programme evaluation. Without sufficient time to review and evaluate our efforts, it reduced our ability to be flexible and responsive to the feedback given by our members, and to improve in the future.



CHAPTER 6

OUR NEXT EXPERIMENT

WHERE DO WE
GO FROM HERE?

KOLEKTIF





Keeping it Going

After working closely with youths and crafting programmes for this demographic for three years, there are **four elements** that we feel will help to shape the future of Kolektif and youth engagement at the Gallery:



- Tuning in 
- Building connections 
- Trying out **NEW IDEAS** and ways of doing things 
- Making sure this lasts !!



TUNING IN

As the Youth Engagement team continues our efforts, being open to what youths have to say will absolutely be key. In fact, any institution that wishes to engage with this demographic will need to apply their methods while paying close attention to youth trends, conversations, and current affairs with a genuine interest in what matters to youths, ready to adapt as the zeitgeist morphs. Through using tools like social media and building connections with other youth workers, both local and international, the Youth Engagement team has deepened our understanding of the youth landscape. This understanding has provided us with an authentic starting point for creating touchpoints and opportunities for youths to connect with our National Collection.

TRYING OUT NEW IDEAS AND WAYS OF DOING THINGS

The word we have constantly used to describe our Kolektif programme is “experimental.”

There are two main reasons for this:

- There is no set formula for how to carry out this programme; and
- It is a reminder to ourselves not to be complacent.

There isn't just one way with which to collaborate with youths. There is always a need to experiment with different ideas, methods, and techniques, which means that there is also a constant need to review, evaluate and adapt our methods. We are very thankful that the Gallery has given us the opportunity to experiment and provided the support and resources we need, while also recognising that youths are “unpredictable” (in a good way!).



BUILDING CONNECTIONS

Everyone wants to belong, to be a part of a group of trusted individuals with whom we can share our feelings and experiences as we navigate the complex world we live in. The confidence and sense of security that comes from belonging to a circle that believes in you is a very powerful motivator for anyone, especially for youths going through a formative phase of their lives.

As the name suggests, Kolektif is about like-minded yet diverse individuals coming together to work on something bigger than themselves. This community spirit extends beyond the members—anyone who is and has been a part of youth engagement is included. Regardless of how the programme transforms to accommodate future challenges, the way we prioritise the friendships and connections that have developed as a result of this programme will not change. For us, witnessing the youths

meet and seeing their friendships blossom into companionship for art exhibitions, festivals and music gigs will always be magic.

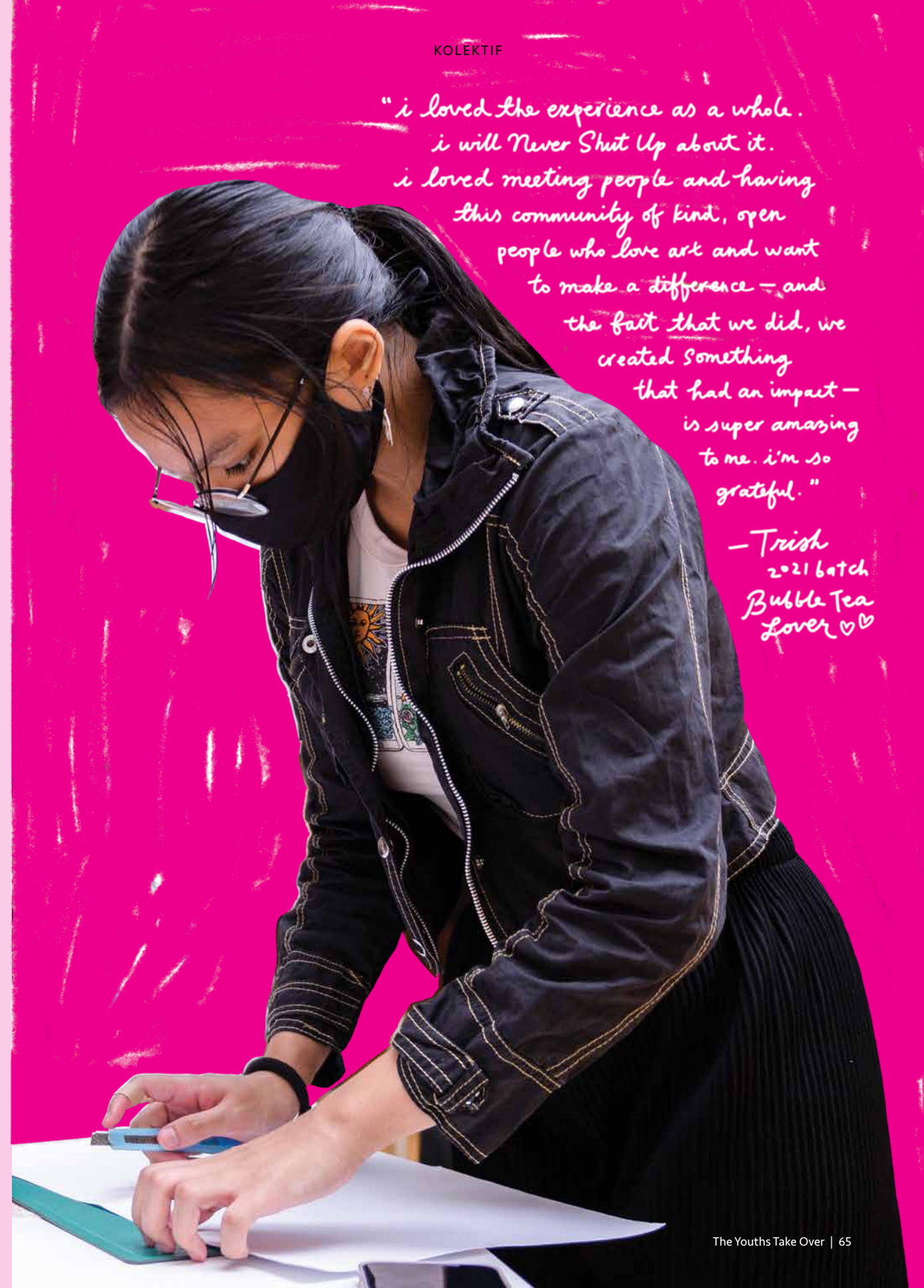
MAKING SURE THIS LASTS

Nothing about working with youths is easy or temporary.

Whether it's the ties between members and Coordinators, the programme's impact on developing future art practitioners, patrons, appreciators and administrators, or the responsibility we have towards this demographic, we will continue to build a version of the Gallery and the wider arts industry that embraces, supports and empowers youths. With the reality of intense resource use hanging over our heads, Kolektif does not have an expiration date; its spirit will continue as long as there is demand and interest from young people.

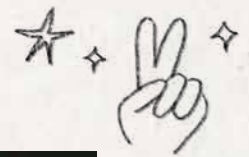
"i loved the experience as a whole. i will Never Shut Up about it. i loved meeting people and having this community of kind, open people who love art and want to make a difference — and the fact that we did, we created something that had an impact — is super amazing to me. i'm so grateful."

*—Trish
2021 batch
Bubble Tea
Lover ♡♡*



So there you have it. Our beginnings, journey, and aspirations all laid out.

The way that young people look and behave may shift based on social, political and economic conditions, but their need for autonomy, creativity and a sense of belonging will always remain. Our experience in running the Kolektif programme has anchored our belief in the need for sustained, meaningful engagement with young people that prioritises their voice within an uplifting and supportive environment. This engagement must possess depth, whether in their connection with art or their relationships with one another, in order to achieve long-lasting, transformative impact within this demographic.



+ Youths of today are the **CHANGERS** and **SHAPERS** of tomorrow. +

Why not give them a head start? While we have taken our first step by opening our doors, we recognise that there is so much left to do. Creating inroads for opportunities, expanding our offerings and seeking out potential collaborators are all exciting next steps that we hope to take in our future experiments. In our experience in meeting and working with different creatives, institutions, museums, communities and youth workers, we recognise that the future for youth engagement is full of hope and opportunity. It has been heartening to know that not only is there a consistent interest for programmes like Kolektif from young people, but many institutions, like the Gallery, are invested in youth voices.

We are relieved that we are not alone on this path. We are super glad that you've found your way here. And we hope (in any small or big way) that this report has and will help in your journey working with and empowering young people. If you would like to continue this wonderful conversation, hit us up at youth@nationalgallery.sg. We'd love to hear from you!

Stay groovy,
the **KOLEKTIF**
TEAM

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Shout out to the following people who have truly uplifted us and supported us through this journey!

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Our first two batches of Kolektif members

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Everyone at National Gallery Singapore <33

Everyone who has come for our Kolektif Takeovers!!

Everyone whom we've crossed paths with on this journey

You, for dedicating your time to youths (and this report!)

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