

MEDIA RELEASE

FIRST-EVER JOINT EXHIBITION OF POST-INDEPENDENCE SINGAPOREAN ARTISTS SPOTLIGHTS GROUNDBREAKING PRACTICES OF SIX ARTISTIC INNOVATORS

National Gallery Singapore's latest exhibition provides a rich visual experience through six solo presentations that demonstrate the breadth and depth of post-independence artistic practices



Singapore, 29 April 2021 – National Gallery Singapore presents *Something New Must Turn Up: Six Singaporean Artists After 1965*, the first-ever joint exhibition comprising six solo presentations that explore the diverse artistic practices of six post-independence Singaporean artists: Chng Seok Tin (莊心珍), Goh Beng Kwan (吳珉權), Jaafar Latiff, Lin Hsin Hsin (林欣欣), Mohammad Din Mohammad (محمد دين محمد) and Eng Tow (杜瑛). Launching on 7 May, the show offers an in-depth and comparative examination of how these artistic innovators broke new ground and contributed significantly to the development of Singapore's modern and contemporary art in the post-independence era.

Featuring over 300 artworks and more than 100 archival materials and objects spanning across decades and disciplines from collage, printmaking and installations, to batik, cloth and digital art, the show provides a rich visual experience that demonstrates the breadth and depth of the artistic practices of post-independence Singaporean artists. The expansive solo presentations will also provide audiences with a deeper understanding of how this group of

artists actively expanded the boundaries of art in post-independence Singapore through innovative artistic practices and techniques that pushed the envelope on Singapore's modern art and contributed to the development of Singapore's contemporary art. Through the exhibition, audiences will not only be able to draw connections between the artworks and developments in Singapore's history and cultural identity in the post-independence era, but also to their own life through themes that remain resonant today, such as art and wellness, an individual's relationship to nature and the loss of the country's heritage due to rapid urbanisation and economic growth.

Dr. Eugene Tan, Director of National Gallery Singapore says, "Building on our previous exhibitions on Singapore artists in the 19th and 20th century, this show reflects our commitment to growing scholarship around Singapore artists in the post-1965 years and raising awareness of their critical contributions to not only the development of Singapore's modern and contemporary art, but also the construction of Singapore's cultural identity at a pivotal moment of the country's history. In learning about how the artists strove to be continuously "new", we hope audiences gain a better understanding of the important role art can play in society in contributing to nation-building efforts, and in reflecting the zeitgeist of the times."

Mr Yuen Kuan Moon, Group CEO of Singtel, the Lead Partner for the exhibition says, "As a champion of the arts, we're pleased to support these post-independence artists whose pursuits were crucial in shaping the cultural identity of our fledgling nation. We hope visitors will be inspired by their innovation and experimentation when capturing the spirit and history of Singapore in those early years."

A rallying call for the new in a time of flux

The exhibition title, *Something New Must Turn Up*, is taken from Ho Ho Ying's preface for the inaugural Modern Art Society exhibition catalogue in 1963. It highlighted cultural anxieties that were prevalent after Singapore's independence from Britain in the same year, followed by its separation from Malaysia in 1965. As the island city-state went through a period of rapid urbanisation and internationalisation, the need to construct a distinctive Singaporean cultural identity was paramount. Heeding Ho's rallying call, artists explored the role of art in the development of a nation's cultural identity, resulting in the multidisciplinary and experimental approach to artmaking that characterised post-independence Singaporean art and marking a new chapter in Singapore's art history.

Something New Must Turn Up: Exhibition Highlights

The exhibition is held in the Singtel Special Exhibition Gallery, which is comprised of three separate exhibition spaces. Each space holds two solo presentations, with artists brought together in consideration of their shared interests in concepts as well as materials. Pairing artists together also allows for a comparative approach, allowing audiences to make connections between the artist pairings and across the exhibition as a whole, while enhancing the understanding of how this generation of artists are significant in art history.



L-R: Exhibition views of Chng Seok Tin: Drawn Through a Press and Mohammad Din Mohammad: The Mistaken Ancestor

Gallery A — Chng Seok Tin: *Drawn Through a Press* and Mohammad Din Mohammad: *The Mistaken Ancestor*

Singtel Special Exhibition Gallery A will explore the works of printmaker and multidisciplinary artist Chng Seok Tin and Mohammad Din Mohammad who worked at the intersections of art, music, traditional healing and Malay martial arts. The pairing explores how both artists drew upon spiritual and non-Western knowledge systems in conceptualising their art. Chng was often inspired by Buddhism and the I-Ching, the Chinese foundational text for Daoist and Confucian philosophical traditions. This was evident in works such as *Variations on I-Ching*, which references the text as a way of life that reveals humanity's moral and ethical dilemmas. Likewise, Mohammad Din Mohammad, a Sufi mystic, developed innovative approaches to painting and installation in order to address the spiritual and physical ailments arising from the struggles of urban life – a concept that feels especially pertinent in these times.



*L-R: Exhibition views of Goh Beng Kwan: *Nervous City* and Eng Tow – *the sixth sense**

Gallery B — Goh Beng Kwan: *Nervous City* and Eng Tow – *the sixth sense*

Artists Goh Beng Kwan and Eng Tow are paired together in Singtel Special Exhibition Gallery B, for their artistic sensitivity to the use of materials such as Goh's use of everyday materials in his collages, and Tow's cloth works. Key works include Goh's *Urban Renewal* painting series, which documents the architectural changes to Singapore's urban landscape as a result of its transformation into a developmental state, and the attendant loss of heritage and culture from the demolition of historical buildings – a theme that still resonates strongly today. Audiences can also look forward to Eng Tow's meditative works, which require viewers to deliberately slow down and observe minute details.



*Exhibition views of Jaafar Latiff: *In The Time of Textile* and Lin Hsin Hsin @*speed of thought**

Gallery C — Jaafar Latiff: *In The Time of Textile* and Lin Hsin Hsin @*speed of thought*

Abstract painter Jaafar Latiff and interdisciplinary artist Lin Hsin Hsin are paired together in Singtel Special Exhibition Gallery C, for their use of technology in innovating alternative ways of making and thinking about art, which was in line with the move towards automation and computerisation in 1980s Singapore. Jaafar's solo presentation traces the artist's trailblazing approach to painting in the batik medium. Audiences will discover how he had pushed the

limits of conventional techniques with innovative methods through decades of rigorous self-study and experiments. Technologically-savvy audiences will also gain an understanding of how Lin's training in mathematics and computer science has informed her artistic practice since the 1970s, and how it has led her to write her own equations and algorithms to develop new digital methods of artmaking.

Each solo presentation will be accompanied by a publication that will be available later this year. They offer a critical examination of the artist's engagement with concepts such as multiculturalism, developmentalism and modernisation in post-independence Singapore. Visitors can also experience the exhibition through English-language audio tours voiced by each solo presentation's respective curators, available on the Gallery Explorer app. The audio tour is also available in Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. There will also be talks and tours led by the curators and artists for those looking to gain deeper insights into the artists, their works and their influence on Singapore's art, history and cultural identity in the post-independence era.

Led by Dr. Seng Yu Jin, Deputy Director (Curatorial & Research), National Gallery Singapore, *Something New Must Turn Up: Six Singaporean Artists After 1965* is co-curated by Dr. Adele Tan (for *Lin Hsin Hsin @speed of thought*), Cheng Jia Yun (for *Chng Seok Tin: Drawn Through a Press*), Goh Sze Ying (for *Jaafar Latiff: In The Time of Textile*), Lim Shujuan (for *Eng Tow – the sixth sense*), Joleen Loh (for *Goh Beng Kwan: Nervous City*), Shabbir Hussain Mustafa and Teo Hui Min (for *Mohammad Din Mohammad: The Mistaken Ancestor*). It will be on show at the Singtel Special Exhibition Gallery from 7 May 2021 until 22 August 2021.

Something New Must Turn Up is proudly supported by Lead Partner Singtel and Strategic Partner Cultural Matching Fund.

General Admission (free for Singaporeans and PRs) applies for *Something New Must Turn Up*. For more information, please refer to the attached annexes or nationalgallery.sg/somethingnewmustturnup for the latest updates on the exhibition. Media assets can be accessed via this [link](#).

- [Annex A: Biographies of featured artists](#)



- [Annex B: Something New Must Turn Up: Six Singaporean Artists After 1965 Exhibition Highlights](#)

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About National Gallery Singapore

National Gallery Singapore is a leading visual arts institution which oversees the world's largest public collection of Singapore and Southeast Asian modern art. Situated at the birthplace of modern Singapore, in the heart of the Civic District, the Gallery is housed in two national monuments - City Hall and former Supreme Court - that have been beautifully restored and transformed into this exciting 64,000 square metre venue. Reflecting Singapore's unique heritage and geographical location, the Gallery aims to be a progressive museum that creates dialogues between the art of Singapore, Southeast Asia and the world to foster and inspire a creative and inclusive society. This is reflected in our collaborative research, education, long-term and special exhibitions, and innovative programming. The Gallery also works with international museums such as Centre Pompidou, Musée d'Orsay, Tate Britain, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (MOMAT) and National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA), to jointly present Southeast Asian art in the global context, positioning Singapore as a key node in the global visual arts scene.

In 2020, the Gallery was the only museum in Southeast Asia that received a ranking in The Art Newspaper's annual global survey of attendance at art museums, taking 20th place. It was the first museum in Asia to receive the Children in Museums Award by the European Museum Academy and Hands On! International Association of Children in Museums in 2018. The Gallery also won the awards for "Best Theme Attraction" at TTG Travel Awards 2017, "Best Attraction Experience", "Breakthrough Contribution to Tourism" and "Best Customer Service (Attractions)" at the prestigious Singapore Tourism Awards in 2016 for its role in adding to the vibrancy of Singapore's tourism landscape.

ANNEX A: ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Chng Seok Tin

Chng Seok Tin 莊心珍 (1946–2019) trained as a printmaker from 1976 to 1985 and has become synonymous with the medium of print in Singapore. Despite the loss of clear vision due to an accident in 1988, she continually devised innovative strategies in print, sculpture and installation to further her practice.

Eng Tow

Eng Tow (杜瑛) (1947 -) is an interdisciplinary artist whose works span diverse media from cloth, paper to bronze. Her knowledge and dexterity with these materials stems from the experiences she has accumulated through her training in the United Kingdom and extensive travels including workshops and residencies overseas. Drawn to the ever-changing character of nature, many of her works manifest and channel the metaphysical beauty and inexplicable forces around us.

Goh Beng Kwan

Goh Beng Kwan (吴珉权) (1937 -) was one of the earliest post-war artists in Singapore to travel to the United States to pursue an art education at the Art Students League of New York. Today, Goh is recognised for his contributions in collage, particularly for his incorporation of a wide range of cultural materials and motifs used to explore issues around cultural representation, urbanism, and identity.

Jaafar Latiff

Jaafar Latiff (1937–2007) was an abstract artist known for his trailblazing approach in renewing the batik medium. A self-taught artist, he was also a lifelong art educator teaching in institutions such as Baharuddin Vocational Institute, LASALLE College of the Arts and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. He integrated the conventional techniques of batik with his abstract style, invigorating the medium for a contemporary audience.

Lin Hsin Hsin

Lin Hsin Hsin (林欣欣) is an IT visionary and inventor as well as an artist, poet and composer. She has explored diverse media in her five-decade-long career, and is most noted for her ground-breaking forays into media tools and techniques. Ahead of her own time, she launched

the first virtual museum in the world in 1994 and made the decisive move to discard traditional ways of painting by creating new technological paradigms since 1994.

Mohammad Din Mohammad

Born in Malacca, Malaysia, Mohammad Din Mohammad (1955 – 2007) (محمد دين محمد) studied at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. He was an artist, traditional healer, guru silat (Malay martial arts master), writer and collector of Southeast Asian objects. Above all he was a Sufi mystic. This mystical form of Islam deeply informed all aspects of his life and art. His artworks harnessed the different facets of Sufi mysticism for the rejuvenation of the human body and spirit in contemporary Singapore.

ANNEX B: SOMETHING NEW MUST TURN UP: SIX SINGAPOREAN ARTISTS AFTER 1965

Highlights from Chng Seok Tin: Drawn Through a Press

Variations on I-Ching



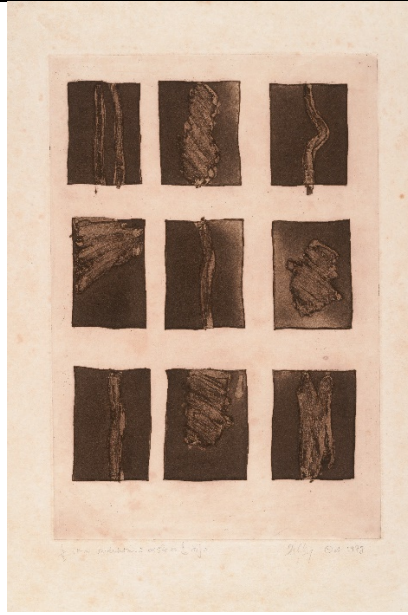
Chng Seok Tin. *Variations on I-Ching*. 1982–1992. Twine, stones, wire and paint fixed on card and mounted on canvas. 174 × 174 cm.

Each of these 64 squares corresponds to a hexagram in the ancient Chinese divination text I-Ching (易经), also known as the Book of Changes. A person seeking guidance from the I-Ching tosses three coins six times. Each toss determines one line in a hexagram, which is then looked up in the text and interpreted to form the answer to their question. Chng similarly created each square here according to her reading of the corresponding hexagram in the I-Ching. Based on her interpretations, she used plain materials like twine, sand and wire to create elemental shapes and forms.

Chng began incorporating the philosophy of the I-Ching into her work while she was in New Mexico State University, and even consulted the text herself to resolve personal issues. The work featured the 64 squares laid on the floor when it was first exhibited in New Mexico in 1983, and then at the National Museum Art Gallery in 1989.

In 1992, Chng decided to mount the squares on a black and white canvas, symbolising the interplay of chance and the Taoist concept of balancing yin and yang in life.

Mop Modulation II



Chng Seok Tin. *Mop Modulation II* 《地拖的变调二》. 1978. Etching on paper. 68.4 x 51 cm. Collection of the Estate of Chng Seok Tin

In *Mop Modulation II*, the labour of earning a living and the mechanical labour of printmaking coincide. Chng took on odd jobs for additional income during her art studies, including as a cleaning lady in the late 1970s. During that time, mopping floors was one of her daily tasks and the gesture of those repetitive motions resurfaced when she created art at night. She treated her pen like a mop and made brushstrokes with it.

This etching of nine black rectangles arranged in a three-by-three formation appears simplistic. However, a closer look reveals brushstrokes in the middle of each rectangle, painted in varying gradients of ink. Viewed from afar, these strokes resemble abstracted Chinese characters written on gridded sheets. Chng became fascinated by the possibilities offered by conceptual art during the late 1970s and made experimental prints such as this one, built from fundamental forms found in everyday life and nature.


Highlights from Goh Beng Kwan: Nervous City

Geomancy



Goh Beng Kwan. *Geomancy*. c. 1980s. Household paint, ink, Chinese tea-wrapping paper, rice paper, decorative paper, fabric, string, soil, wax and glue on canvas. 89.4 x 84.3 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

Goh often created collages such as *Geomancy* that were informed by local cultures, traditions and customs. The practice of geomancy or feng shui, a system of organising the built environment based on good qi or energy, is embedded into Chinese culture and was a key part of everyday life in the artist's own neighbourhood of Chinatown. During the 1980s, Goh often derived inspiration from the bustle of Chinatown, creating works that were ritualistic, symbolic, and easily accessible to local

		<p>audiences. Geomancy demonstrates Goh's interests in Chinese cosmological traditions. This circle divided with threads into four quadrants alludes to the luopan compass used in Chinese geomancy, a form of divination. Suggestions of ritual are made through simple yet evocative materials such as tea-wrapping paper, and the use of Chinese calligraphy and dramatic reds and blacks.</p>
<p><i>Urban Renewal (Sun and Moon)</i> <i>《市区重建：太阳与月亮》</i></p>	 <p>Goh Beng Kwan. <i>Urban Renewal (Sun and Moon)</i> 《市区重建：太阳与月亮》, c. 1970s. Acrylic on canvas. 103 × 103 cm. Collection of the artist.</p>	<p>From the 1970s on, Goh began to capture Singapore's strained and rapidly changing cityscape in the series titled <i>Urban Renewal</i>. He took particular interest in the changes underway in Chinatown, where he lived and worked, a district that would be the subject of heated public debates over its conservation status for several decades.</p> <p><i>Urban Renewal (Sun and Moon)</i> presents an aerial perspective of the district, evoking the coming together of the old and the new through patchworks of rhythmic patterns in an exuberant colour palette. The kitschness of this urban mosaic is heightened through doodle-like brushstrokes and scribbles that create the impression of chaotic change.</p>

Highlights from *Jaafar Latiff: In the Time of Textile*

Vision 7/86



Jaafar Latiff. *Vision 7/86*. 1986. Acrylic on canvas. 109 × 109 cm. Collection of the artist's family.

The *Vision* series expresses the chaotic energy of urban life during the mid-1980s, a period of rapid development in Singapore. Jaafar's acrylic paintings are characterised by a sense of movement, reflecting his ability to express himself more freely in acrylic. In contrast, Jaafar's batik paintings seem constrained by the labour of the process.



This work showcases a masterful balance between freedom and control. The interplay between the bold curved brushstrokes and the meticulous angular ones in the composition suggests continuous motion progressing with clockwork precision. Jaafar's acrylic paintings often have grey backgrounds, instantly differentiating them from his batik works with darker backgrounds as a result of the multiple dye layers.



Wandering Series 8/79





Jaafar Latiff. *Wandering Series 8/79*. 1979. Batik. 90 × 120 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

The *Wandering* series is Jaafar's first batik painting series, which he started shortly after his return from a study trip to Nagoya, Japan. From the late 1970s until the early 1980s, he refined his technique of batik painting to develop more expressionistic compositions. His early abstract paintings from the *Wandering* series often feature fluid, graceful shapes.

Highlights from <i>Lin Hsin Hsin @speed of thought</i>		
<p>Ahead of Time</p>	 <p>Lin Hsin Hsin. <i>Ahead of Time</i>. Time Series. 1991. Oil on canvas. 138 × 178 cm. Collection of Singapore Art Museum.</p>	<p>Time is a continuous concern in Lin's work and formed the basis of her exhibition <i>From Time to Time</i> at National Museum Art Gallery (NMAG) and a volume of poetry with the same title in 1991. Time manifests in different ways across her practice from Lin's penchant for doing things at speed and being ahead of the curve, to her philosophical expressions of history and memory, or the pacing of her music compositions.</p> <p>Time is a continuous concern in Lin's work and formed the basis of her exhibition <i>From Time to Time</i> at National Museum Art Gallery (NMAG) and a volume of poetry with the same title in 1991. Time manifests in different ways across her practice from Lin's penchant for doing things at speed and being ahead of the curve, to her philosophical expressions of history and memory, or the pacing of her music compositions.</p>
<p>Conversation</p>	 <p>Lin Hsin Hsin. <i>Conversation</i>. <i>Man and His Universe</i> Series. 1982. Oil on canvas with mixed media. 128 x 88 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.</p>	<p>Lin's enduring fascination with the solar system manifested in a group of paintings from the late 1970s to the early 1980s about the laws, mechanics and phenomena of outer space. <i>Man & His Universe</i> is one of Lin's most significant series on this theme. <i>Conversation</i> explores man's dialogue with the cosmos, with the blue hues representing the atmospheres of icy hostile planets. The painting features heavily textured surfaces, with relief created via shapes of torn jute or canvas adhered to the surface, reflecting the complexity and density of</p>

		<p>phenomena occurring in the universe.</p>
<p>Highlights from <i>Mohammad Din Mohammad: The Mistaken Ancestor</i></p>		
<p><i>Earth Energy</i></p>	 <p>Mohammad Din Mohammad. <i>Earth Energy</i>. 1994. Wood, shell, animal bone and gouache on board. 150 × 120 cm. Collection of the Estate of Mohammad Din Mohammad.</p>	<p>This wall assemblage reflects Mohammad Din Mohammad's interest in exploring and recording every possible meaning associated with the diverse natural elements in the Malay world.</p> <p>In <i>Earth Energy</i>, he deliberately applied colours which are said to hold therapeutic properties. Mohammad Din Mohammad deployed these panels in a couple of lectures he delivered at art conferences in Singapore. He also used them to engage his patients in a conversation about the mystical and talismanic properties of wood.</p>
<p><i>Talking About Birds</i></p>	 <p>Mohammad Din Mohammad. <i>Talking About Birds</i>. 2000. Acrylic on canvas. 90 × 90 cm. Collection of the Estate of Mohammad Din Mohammad.</p>	<p>Mohammad Din Mohammad maintained a lifelong interest in the epic theatre of the Southeast Asian wayang and often incorporated the motifs into his artworks.</p> <p><i>Talking About Birds</i> references the famous poem "The Conference of the Birds" by Persian mystic Farid-ud-Din Attar, which describes birds of the world coming together to find their leader, Simorgh. Upon congregating, the birds discover that this search involves a formidable journey. Many birds die upon just hearing this news. Others, under the guidance of the wise hoopoe bird, persevere through numerous obstacles, with many perishing along the way. Eventually, just 30 birds make it to the home of Simorgh, only to realise that they themselves are the Simorgh. In Persian, si means 30 and morph means birds.</p>

		<p>Like Mohammad Din Mohammad's wayang kulit, Attar's birds are mystical symbols. They highlight how the search for truth is not unchanging. It evolves, just as we do.</p>
<p>Highlights from Eng Tow – the sixth sense</p>		
<p><i>Eclipse</i></p>	 <p>Eng Tow. <i>Eclipse</i>. 1983. Triptych on spray-dyed acrylic on stitched cloth relief. 72 × 226 cm. Collection of Tang Wee Sung.</p>	<p><i>Eclipse</i> is a later example of the cloth reliefs that first distinguished Tow and evolved into new interpretations of the cloth surface, extending its potential as an art medium. Tow creates the effect of “relief” in cloth using sewing techniques such as tucking and ribbing, with colour acting as a catalyst and accent.</p>
<p><i>By the Fireflies Light, Sungei Johor</i></p>	 <p>Eng Tow. <i>By the Fireflies Light, Sungei Johor</i>. 1997. Chinese ink, watercolour and acrylic on paper made by artist. 29 × 29 cm. Private Collection.</p>	<p>In the late 1990s, Tow continued her explorations into the concept of the infinite and the fluid through a series of ink, watercolour and acrylic brush works. These works signal a departure from the meticulous constructions of her earlier works. Absorbed by the velvety smoothness and depths of Chinese ink, Tow was drawn towards a freer expression.</p>