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National Gallery Singapore presents *Tropical*, world's first major comparative exhibition on Southeast Asian and Latin American Art

This landmark exhibition foregrounds solidarities between these seemingly distant regions, with compelling artworks by iconic artists such as Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, Latiff Mohidin, and Affandi from the 20th century.



Singapore, 15 November 2023 — National Gallery Singapore presents *Tropical: Stories from Southeast Asia and Latin America*, the world's first major comparative exhibition of artistic expressions from both regions, featuring over 200 paintings, sculptures, drawings, performances and immersive installations by more than 70 artists. Running from **18 November 2023 to 24 March 2024**, this exhibition spans the 20th century, and explores the vivid stories of artists, dreamers and writers who dared to threaten conventions, and fostered solidarities in the aftermath of colonialism.

Tropical offers new perspectives on the development of modern art. At the heart of this exhibition lies the unwavering quest of artists and thinkers who sought to claim their rightful position within the story of art and beyond. As a way to showcase this spirit of empowerment and change, the exhibition moves away from conventional methods of displaying paintings on walls. Drawing on the groundbreaking designs of legendary architect Lina Bo Bardi, visitors will uncover new possibilities in their encounter with artworks.

Dr. Eugene Tan, Director of National Gallery Singapore, says, “*Tropical: Stories from Southeast Asia and Latin America* is a pivotal exhibition that has been years in the making, and we are thrilled to be able to present it on such a scale. By focusing on affinities between 20th century Southeast Asian and Latin American artists, the Gallery spotlights the innovative ways through which they sought to stake a claim for art and representation on their own terms. *Tropical* embodies the Gallery’s efforts to drive greater understanding of Southeast Asian art, its histories and connections to global art histories. We hope that this exhibition will contribute to ongoing discourses on the reframing of modern art, made possible with the support of artists, colleagues and valued partners around the world.”

Mr Yuen Kuan Moon, Singtel’s Group Chief Executive Officer says, “For over 140 years, we have been connecting communities across the world, empowering generations of people to bridge geographical distance to share their experiences and build stronger relationships. Despite being quite literally on the opposite side of our planet, Latin America, with its rich cultural tapestry, shares many remarkable similarities with the people in Singapore, including incredibly diverse societies and a history shaped by colonialism. Through *Tropical: Stories from Southeast Asia and Latin America*’s iconic works of art at the Singtel Special Exhibition Gallery, we hope to help visitors explore the commonalities that bind us and spark meaningful new connections that transcend continents.”

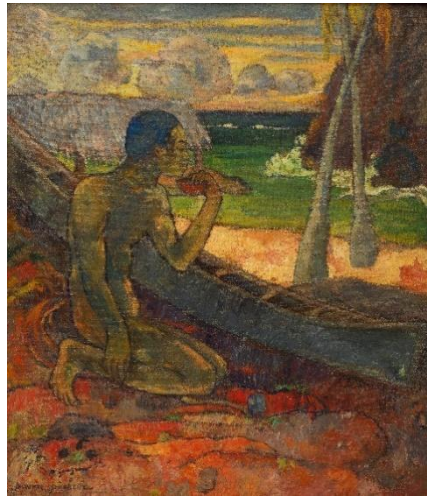
Tropical: Stories from Southeast Asia and Latin America is proudly supported by Strategic Partner, Singapore Tourism Board and Lead Partner, Singtel.

The exhibition is also supported by BBVA, Bracell, Screaming Comet Foundation and Tanoto Foundation.

Journey through stories of self-determination

Writing is as central to *Tropical* as are paintings, sculptures, film, prints and installations. The exhibition’s sectional titles across the Singtel Special Exhibition Galleries are borrowed from three legendary texts: *The Myth of the Lazy Native* by Syed Hussein Alatas, *This Earth of Mankind* (Bumi Manusia) by Pramoedya Ananta Toer, and *The Subversive* (El Filibusterismo) by José Rizal. These texts exemplify the elaborate links among writers, poets, architects and artists at the height of decolonisation, brought about by the historical, societal and economic contentions around art-making in these formerly colonised societies.

Demystifying the image of the tropics



Paul Gauguin. *Pobre Pescador* (Poor Fisherman). 1896. Oil on canvas. 75 x 65 cm. Gift of Henrik Spitzman-Jordan, Ricardo Jafet and João di Pietro. Collection of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand. Image courtesy of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand; photo by Eduardo Ortega.

The exhibition begins with *The Myth of the Lazy Native* in Gallery 1. As the title suggests, the stereotype of the “lazy native” was an invention of colonial rule. Visitors can view *Pobre pescador* (Poor Fisherman) by French painter Paul Gauguin, a piece painted during his time in Tahiti. The painting illustrates his pursuit of an untouched paradise, marked by his romanticised notions of simple living among the “natives” and the island's lush landscapes. While his exoticist paintings gained widespread exposure after his passing, they also sparked dialogues on the impact of Eurocentric perspectives in modern art, as well our contemporary perceptions of these regions.

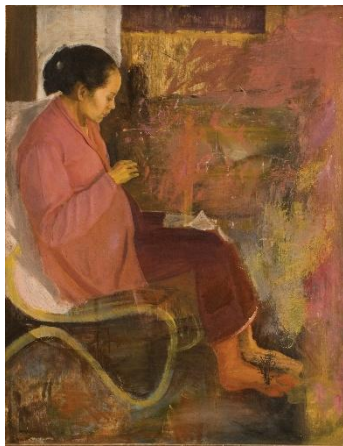


Victorio C. Edades, Galo B. Ocampo and Carlos “Botong” Francisco. *Mother Nature's Bounty Harvest*. 1935. Oil on canvas, 257.5 x 273 cm. Private collection. © Armin Christopher E. Cuadra.

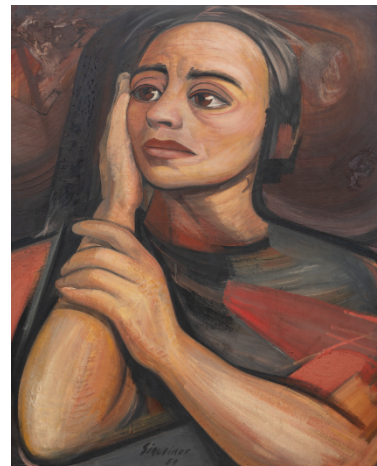


Diego Rivera. *La molendera* (Woman Grinding Maize). 1924. Oil on canvas, 90.5 x 117.2 cm. Collection of Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico / INBAL, Secretaría de Cultura. © 2023 Bank of Mexico Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo Museums Trust. Av. May 5. No. 2, col. Center, alc. Cuauhtémoc, cp 06000, Mexico City.

The section soon then pivots to artists from Southeast Asia and Latin America who actively strived to challenge exotic depictions by seeking to paint a more “truthful” representation. The works range from powerful paintings of farmers, labourers, and even mothers and wives – stories and subjects that resisted the narrative of the “lazy native”. Diego Rivera’s *La molendera* (Woman Grinding Maize), depicts the realities of everyday life and labour, and *Mother Nature’s Bounty Harvest*, a painting by Victorio C. Edades, Carlos “Botong” Francisco and Galo B. Ocampo, actively rejects the pastoral motifs (of serene scenes and peaceful farmers) that were prevalent in painting at that time, and aligned their art with the everyday struggles of the Filipino people.



S. Sudjojono. *Istriku (Ibu Menjahit)* (My Wife [A Mother Sewing]). c. 1950. Oil on canvas, 71 x 55.5 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Indonesia. © S. Sudjojono Center; courtesy of the National Gallery of Indonesia.



David Alfaro Siqueiros. *Presságio (Angélica Arenal de Siqueiros)* (Omen [Angélica Arenal de Siqueiros]). 1950. Vinyl on fibreboard, 100 x 83.5 cm. Gift of Don Emilio Ascárraga. Collection of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand. Image courtesy of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand; photo by Eduardo Ortega.

S. Sudjojono’s *Istriku (Ibu Menjahit)* (My Wife [A Mother Sewing]), is an intimate insight into daily life and its challenges, capturing a reflective moment where his then-wife is immersed in her sewing while pregnant with their first child. Her peaceful countenance contrasts against the expressive strokes of colour in the background, perhaps suggesting the tumultuous context of Indonesia’s independence during which time the painting was completed. *Presságio (Angélica Arenal de Siqueiros)* (Omen [Angélica Arenal de Siqueiros]) is a portrait of the artist’s wife, painted in preparation for a significant mural in Mexico City. In the mural *Tormento de Cuauhtémoc*, she transforms into a character that represents the entirety of the Mexican people and their lament about the plight of the last Aztec Emperor who is remembered as a symbol of resistance against the colonial powers.

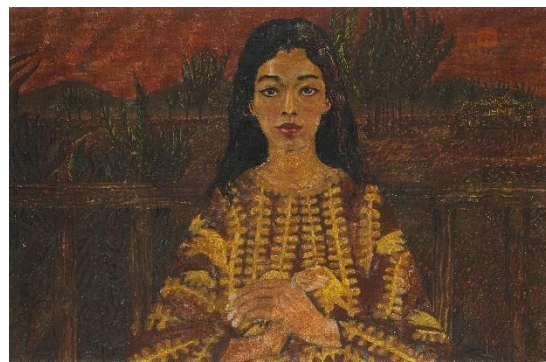
The artists thus shattered the narrow and objectifying lens through which colonised societies had been viewed, creating a fresh narrative that honoured the dignity and multifaceted identities of their subjects. Whether these artists resided in Southeast Asia or Latin America, their art became a means of reclaiming their cultural heritage, and “tropical” becomes an empowering attitude.

Reconstructing the self and hope in the wake of a new modernity

Tropical delves into the inner worlds of the artists in Gallery 2’s *This Earth of Mankind*. Many regions formerly under colonial rule were either gaining full independence or on the brink of transformative change in the 1940s. This manifests in an arresting series of self-portraits, through which artists sought to reclaim their identity and distinguish themselves as custodians of a new modern art narrative. Many of these works also clue visitors in on how the artists grappled with their own positions in relation to larger, burgeoning geopolitical issues of the time, as they stood on the cusp of change between a violent colonial past and the promise of a better, democratic and prosperous future.



Frida Kahlo. *Self-Portrait with Monkey*. 1945. Oil on masonite, 60 x 42.5 cm. Collection of Robert Brady Museum. © 2023 Bank of Mexico Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo Museums Trust. Av. May 5. No. 2, col. Center, alc. Cuauhtémoc, cp 06000, Mexico City; image courtesy of Humberto Tachiquín Benito “Tachi” / Tachiphoto.



Patrick Ng Kah Onn. *Self-Portrait*. 1958. Oil on paper, 49.3 x 75.3 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore. This acquisition was made possible with donations to the Art Adoption & Acquisition Programme. © Family of Patrick Ng. Image courtesy of National Heritage Board, Singapore.

Visitors will be entranced by a captivating self-portrait of renowned artist Frida Kahlo, displayed in Singapore for the first time. Her works have become emblematic of female determination and power. In *Self-Portrait with Monkey*, the dark ochre tones depicting the withered tree stump in the background, combined with her choice of garment, a black velvet Tehuana Huipil, symbolises her identification with the matriarchal societal structure of Zapotec women in the south of Mexico. Coincidentally, the ochre colour palette extends into Patrick Ng’s *Self-Portrait*, as he reimagines himself as a long-haired, Malay female clad in

batik. The inclusion of batik here signifies a melding of old traditions with new adaptations, a profound representation of Malayisation, a sociopolitical programme that sought to establish a “homogenous” identity in the soon-to-be independent nation. The exhibition experience turns self-reflexive, as visitors place themselves in a sea of self-portraits of artists such as Affandi, Bagyi Aung Soe, Quamrul Hassan and more, in between landscape paintings that are symbolic of change and new forms of image making. This allows visitors to gain insight into how artists used their own bodies to rethink established systems in modern art, and ponder on the wider sociopolitical context, challenging gender, racial and class hierarchies.



Grace Selvanayagam. *Journey into Space*. 1969. Batik. 85 x 175cm. Private collection.



Installation view of Barbara Sansoni's textile works at *Tropical: Stories from Southeast Asia and Latin America*, National Gallery Singapore, 2023. Image credit: National Gallery Singapore

In the same gallery, visitors will also be introduced to the myriad of ways artists incorporated materiality into their work to synthesise a completely different language of making. This includes Grace Selvanayagam's batik paintings and Barbara Sansoni's woven textile works that draw visitors closer, as they walk through and around. By displaying these objects typically confined in the realm of craft or feminine-driven industries, the exhibition purposefully demonstrates the breadth of strategies and techniques of expression that contest the exotic iconographies of the tropics in modern art, as well as challenge the notion that these images were only produced by the West before the 20th century.

Strategies for change and taking control

The exhibition concludes with *The Subversive* in Gallery 3, tracing the perspectives of artists who used modern painting and sculpture as powerful tools for instigating change. Each artists' work unveils a new world of connections across time, distance, and artistic practice, as they contemplate the limitless potential for materials and ideas to evolve, mutate and

transform into novel forms, such that even the most limiting of circumstances give birth to the most innovative concepts.

These artists travelled widely and connected with like-minded individuals, and actively devised new ways of resistance and self-determination, breaking free from the idea that all artistic endeavours must defer to Western influences. Such unique strategies are the focus for this final segment of *Tropical*, foregrounding the artists who saw the tropics as a productive and dynamic space for creation, where the seen is bridged in the most marvellous ways with the unseen.



Wifredo Lam. *Sans titre* (Untitled). 1966. Oil on canvas, 114.5 x 147.35 cm, Private collection, courtesy of Ars Docet. © Wifredo Lam Estate, Adagp, Paris 2023



Latiff Mohidin. *Tumbuhan Tropika* (Tropical Growth). 1968. Oil on canvas, 99 x 89 cm. Private collection. © Latiff Mohidin

Visitors will be treated to 15 bold artworks that showcase the defiant and creative attitude of the time. This includes Cuban artist Wifredo Lam's *Sans titre* (Untitled), which showcases his unique style that fuses his Afro-Cuban and Cantonese heritage. He championed the empowerment of his people by incorporating symbols that combine different beliefs and schools of thought. *Sans titre* shows geometric figures reminiscent of totemic statues from the Afro-Cuban tradition, with a distinct pale figure dancing in the foreground. Malaysian artist Latiff Mohidin's *Tumbuhan Tropika* (Tropical Growth) depicts a vegetal mass becoming entangled with itself as it reaches for the sun. The growth, it seems, is an attitude, an urge to attach, add tension and bring physical cohesion to disparate forces which intercede, overlap, and tackle one another.

Piercing through rigid notions of painting, sculpture and video on walls and in white cubes, this final section forces visitors to be even more aware of their surroundings, as they navigate an ephemeral space of hopes and dreams.

Inspiring new ways of displaying and experiencing art

Visitors are also invited to explore the interactive and reading zones within each gallery.

Located within Singtel Gallery 1, the *Library of the Tropics* is a special zone within the exhibition that showcases an intriguing collection of books, films, paintings, posters and cultural objects revolving around the islands of Bali and Tahiti. These islands hold a pivotal role in the narrative of 20th-century art, especially when it comes to depictions of "tropical paradise". Visitors are invited to reflect upon the compelling and troubling intersections that persist between modern art, mass tourism and their combined appetite for the exotic, while taking in the scale of these often superficial and imagined representations via hundreds of books.

Tropical will also introduce visitors to artists who sought to push the boundaries of art-making by conceptualising artworks as moments for audience participation and engagement. Visitors can engage with Brazilian artist Lygia Clark's *Diálogo. Óculos* (Dialogue. Goggles) and *Máscaras sensoriais* (Sensorial Masks), which transcend traditional art boundaries by offering a multi-sensory experience that bridges the act of seeing. They are also encouraged to put on Hélio Oiticica's *Parangolés* and activate the artwork through their movements.

Complementing the impressive collection of artworks, the exhibition features innovative display techniques developed by the famed architect Lina Bo Bardi in the 1960s and 70s, which have been specially adapted by Singapore-based architecture firm WOHA. These designs incorporate recycled materials, offering novel perspectives on viewing paintings while emphasising sustainable design.

Visitors will see artworks taken off the walls and placed onto "crystal easels" in Gallery 1, while Gallery 2 presents an impressive grid structure with a wood-panelled display system that arranges artworks throughout the space in an open-ended layout.



Installation view, *Tropical: Stories from Southeast Asia and Latin America*, National Gallery Singapore, 2023. Image credit: National Gallery Singapore

In Gallery 3, wooden lattice-like structures are used to introduce a free-standing approach to exhibition design. Stilts are employed to mount paintings, breaking down the conventional gallery space to create a more porous environment. Adopting Bo Bardi's philosophy of adaptive reuse and upcycling, WOHA has constructed wooden structures using planks salvaged from Jurong Shipyard in the 1980s, localising the design approach with a touch of Singaporean industrial history.

Step into the immersive world of “tropical”

The experience extends to the City Hall Chamber, where Hélio Oiticica's most influential installation, *Tropicália*, is realised in Southeast Asia for the first time.



Hélio Oiticica. *Tropicália*. 1966–1967, remade 2023. Wooden structures, fabric, plastic, carpet, wire mesh, tulle, patchouli, sandalwood, television, sand, gravel, plants, birds, television and poems by Roberta Camila Salgado, dimensions variable. Collection of Projeto Hélio Oiticica. Installation view, *Tropical: Stories from Southeast Asia and Latin America*, National Gallery Singapore, 2023. Image credit: National Gallery Singapore.

As a critique of popular constructions of Brazil as a "tropical paradise", the artwork interrogates complex realities of everyday life in the Global South. Visitors are invited to step into the artwork that features concrete slabs, plants, macaws, sand, gravel, and wooden structures, entering a multi-sensorial realm as they contemplate the stark juxtaposition between idyllic stereotypes and the harsh realities of Brazilian life.

Encountering “tropical” in the public spaces of the Gallery

For the duration of *Tropical*, other spaces of the museum will be activated by prominent artworks by Southeast Asian and Latin American artists that provide insight into the ideas presented in the main exhibition Galleries.

The Singapore Courtyard will be transformed by a new commission by the collective Dolores Zinny and Juan Maidagan. Titled *Vientos Alisios* (Trade Winds), the large-scale installation emerged from extensive discussions with the exhibition’s curators around materials gathered for the *Library of the Tropics*, a zone for reading, discussion, listening, and performance. In the same space, visitors will encounter more of Lygia Clark’s sensorial artworks, including *Bichos*, as well as David Medalla’s *Cloud Canyons No. 24*. Visitors will also be greeted by Eugenio Espinoza’s *Circunstancial (12 cocos)* (Circumstantial [12 coconuts]) at the Coleman entrance.

Exhibition programmes include performance-activations of several works, curator tours, talks, family programmes and more. For the full list of programmes, please view the annex.

Tropical: Stories from Southeast Asia and Latin America run from 18 November 2023 to 24 March 2024 at Singtel Special Exhibition Gallery, with installations that are free for public viewing at Singapore Courtyard and at the Coleman entrance. Standard Special Exhibition passes are available at \$25 (\$15 for Singapore Residents and Permanent Residents) Gallery Insiders enjoy free unlimited access to the exhibition. Tickets for *Tropical: Stories from Southeast Asia and Latin America* are now available at an early bird discount of 10% off till 31 December 2023 when tickets are purchased online. More information on the promotions can be found in the Annex.

More information can be found in the following annex or you may visit nationalgallery.sg/Tropical. Media assets are available via this [link](#).

- [Annex A](#): Other *Tropical* Artwork Highlights
- [Annex B](#): *Tropical* Exhibition Design Highlights
- [Annex C](#): Exhibition programmes

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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. For more information, visit www.nationalgallery.sg.

Annex A: Other *Tropical* Artwork Highlights


Gallery 1: The Myth of the Lazy Native

<p><i>Library of the Tropics</i></p>	<p>The <i>Library of the Tropics</i> is a special zone within the exhibition that showcases an intriguing collection of books, films, paintings, posters, and cultural objects revolving around two remarkable islands: Bali and Tahiti. The islands hold a pivotal role in the narrative of 20th-century art, especially when it comes to depictions of tropical paradise. Today, both Bali and Tahiti have become renowned tourist destinations, drawing visitors from around the world. As visitors browse through the materials, they are invited to reflect upon the compelling and troubling intersections that persist between modern art, mass tourism and their combined appetite for the exotic.</p>
<div data-bbox="352 1126 549 1630" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>Maria Martins. <i>Comme une liane</i> (Like a Vine). 1946. Patinated bronze. 112.5 x 54 x 30 cm. Photo by: Jaime Acioli.</p>	<p>Maria Martins was born in Minas Gerais, southeastern Brazil, a region known for its rich Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage. Though she primarily sculpted in bronze, Martins only garnered recognition in Brazil after making a name for herself in Paris, where she interacted with Surrealists like Marcel Duchamp. Martins set herself apart by drawing from Amazonian Amerindian mythologies, playing to the exoticism that captivated her European peers. Yet, she often found her works labelled as “too foreign” for Brazil and “too Brazilian” for global spectators.</p> <p><i>Comme une liane</i> is made of bronze, with its plant-like limbs suggesting a fluid, yet strong sense of a being transformed from within. By reimagining visual codes, Martins not only projects a distinctly Latin American future in both source and spirit, but also intertwines ideas of mimicry in nature and the body to rethink notions of gendered representation.</p> <p>Martins was among the founding members of the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro—which was established in 1948—and</p>

	<p>played a crucial role in co-founding the São Paulo Biennial in 1951.</p>
 <p>Candido Portinari. <i>O lavrador de café</i> (Coffee Agricultural Worker). 1934. Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm. Gift of José Maria Whitaker. Collection of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand. Image courtesy of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand; photo by Eduardo Ortega.</p>	<p>The son of Italian migrant workers, Candido Portinari grew up on a coffee plantation near Brodowski in São Paulo, Brazil. He studied at the National School of Fine Arts in Rio de Janeiro, where his painting style was predominantly academic and realist. After winning the European travel prize at the 35th <i>General Exhibition of Fine Arts</i> in 1928, he exhibited his works in Paris and travelled across Europe. In 1931, he returned to Brazil, and became captivated by the red earth of its coffee plantations and the toiling bodies of labourers and miners. This fascination led Portinari to depict the harsh realities of their work environment on large canvases and murals.</p> <p>In subsequent years, Portinari garnered more accolades. In 1940, he held a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York and undertook large-scale commissions for the United Nations, and the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. Despite the international acclaim, when asked about his artistic philosophy, Portinari described himself as “a son of the red earth,” signifying his deep connection to his Brazilian heritage.</p>
 <p>Hendra Gunawan. <i>Tjitji</i>. 1949. Oil on paper laid on masonite. 64 x 49 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore. Image courtesy of National Heritage Board, Singapore.</p>	<p>Hendra Gunawan was a painter and activist who played a pivotal role in the evolution of modern art in Indonesia. Gunawan was associated with various artist associations all throughout his life. In the 1940s, drawn to <i>wayang golek</i> puppetry from West Java, he founded the Pusaka Sunda (Sundanese Heritage) Association. Simultaneously, he joined Sukarno’s anti-Japanese movement, Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (Putera, Centre of the People’s Power). Sukarno later became Indonesia’s first President.</p> <p>After the end of the Second World War in 1945, Gunawan fought against the Dutch as a member of Pelukis Front (Painter’s Front) and Pelukis Rakyat (People’s Painters). He was also instrumental in Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (Lekra, Institute of People’s Culture), which was closely linked to Indonesia’s leftist movement. This affiliation ultimately resulted in his arrest due to his involvement in the Thirtieth of September Movement in 1965. Despite this,</p>

	<p>Gunawan persisted in painting during the 12 years he was imprisoned, creating works with vivid colours and fluid forms that consistently challenged the boundaries of the medium.</p> <p>These revolutionary impulses were mirrored in Gunawan's art. He chose to depict everyday subjects and developed a style that drew inspiration from the flat, elongated forms of Javanese puppets. Additionally, he employed vivid colours, prioritising expression and impact over realism. In the introspective portrait <i>Tjitji</i>, a freedom fighter flips through a pamphlet, her gaze extending beyond the canvas's confines. The uncanny green of her face contrasts against a swirling red sky, underscoring the unease and necessity for resilience amidst an uncertain future.</p>
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Gallery 2: This Earth of Mankind

 <p>Bagyi Aung Soe. <i>Self-Portrait</i>. 1986. Oil on plywood. 59 x 44 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore. © Maung Maung Soe, Bagyieain Foundation, Yangon, Myanmar.</p>	<p>Bagyi Aung Soe was part of a wave of painters from the 1950s to 1970s who attended Rabindranath Tagore's Visva-Bharati University in Śāntiniketan, India. There, he was exposed to the poet Rabindranath Tagore's pan-Asian ideals. After returning to Burma (today, Myanmar) in 1952, Aung Soe travelled his home country to learn about popular artforms such as wood carving and lacquer painting. This experience complemented his exposure to various popular and folk art forms at Śāntiniketan.</p> <p>Aung Soe envisioned himself as a bridge between old traditions and new ideas in art, laying the ground for modern Burmese art that integrated both. This integration is evident in how Aung Soe frequently used Burmese arts and crafts as subjects.</p>
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Tan Oe Pang. *Woman in Struggle*. 1984. Ink and colour on paper. 137.5 x 68.5 cm. Collection of the artist. © Tan Oe Pang. Image courtesy of Tan Oe Pang.

Tan Oe Pang is acclaimed for his interpretation of Chinese ink aesthetics across diverse styles and mediums. After training under the classical ink artist Fan Chang Tien in Singapore, he rapidly forged his own artistic language, continuously exploring newer methods of advancing the medium of ink. A versatile artist, his art spans calligraphy, figurative and abstract compositions in ink, as well as oil works on canvas and aluminium. In the 1980s, Tan played a pivotal role in shaping the art education syllabus in Singapore.

In 1985, Tan's *Insect of Ice* was presented at the prestigious 18th São Paulo Biennial in Brazil. He was invited to contribute to the International Biennial of Arts Valparaiso, Chile in 1989. With his submission of *Woman in Struggle*, Tan became the first ink artist to be featured at this event.

Tan's interest in locating the links between life and art resulted in expressive colour and bold line work, drawing parallels between the fluidity of the world around us and the singularity of line in ink painting. In his compositions, Tan frequently cites Afro-Cuban artist Wifredo Lam's hybrid beings—figures that blend human, animal, and vegetal elements—as a pivotal reference in his art. Works by Lam can be seen in the next gallery.



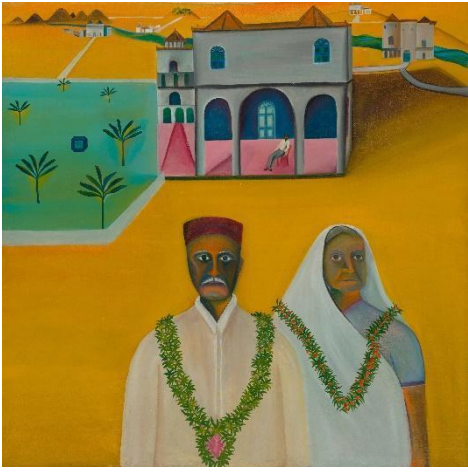
Cheong Soo Pieng. [Not titled] (*Lumba Jong*). 1955. Oil on canvas. 82.6 x 119.4. Singapore Mo Yuan Tang Collection.

Cheong Soo Pieng was a central figure associated with artists in Singapore and Malaysia in the 1950s and 1960s. Cheong's art combined classical Chinese ink aesthetics with the nuances of Impressionism, Cubism and expressionism, which he had acquired from his training in China during the 1930s. After settling in Singapore in 1946, Cheong immersed himself in the cultural fabric of the Malay world, journeying across the newly established nations of Indonesia and Malaysia. Paying keen attention to material culture and crafts, architecture and urban landscapes, he cultivated a distinct and progressively stylised approach to figuration.

[Not titled] (*Lumba Jong*) is a striking example of Cheong's early ventures into colour, line and composition. The faces of the central figures are reminiscent of ceremonial masks, likely drawing inspiration from Javanese or Balinese theatre. In

	<p>Malay, <i>lumba jong</i> refers to a lightweight sailing boat. Racing these <i>jongs</i> was a significant social pastime in Singapore that lasted well into the 1970s, and people would gather along the coastline to compete with their crafted boats. The formal experimentation in the painting speaks to Cheong’s aspiration to cultivate a distinct vocabulary capable of capturing the essence of this cherished craft tradition.</p>
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Gallery 3: The Subversive

<p>Lygia Clark. <i>Máscaras sensoriais</i> (Sensorial Masks). 1967. Proposition; cotton canvas masks with herb sachets, shells, sponge and steel wool. Courtesy of Associação Cultural “O Mundo de Lygia Clark”, Rio de Janeiro.</p>	<p>Lygia Clark’s masks integrate art with sensory exploration. Made of heavy canvas, they obscure the sight of the wearer while introducing other stimuli, such as the aroma of cloves or the touch of shells. Just as masks have historically allowed individuals to adopt new identities and transform like mutants, each of Clark’s mask prompts self-reflection and heightened self-awareness.</p>
 <p>Bhupen Khakhar. <i>Portraits of my mother and my father going to Yatra</i>. 1971. Oil on canvas, 106.5 x 107 cm. Collection of Queensland Art Gallery Gallery of Modern Art. © Estate of Bhupen Khakhar; image courtesy of Queensland Art Gallery. Gallery of Modern Art; photo by Natasha Harth</p>	<p>Bhupen Khakhar’s astute depictions explore the way modern life intersects with pageantry and popular rituals, illuminating society’s drive to maintain social appearances. At first glance, the painting seems to portray the artist’s parents embarking on a pilgrimage. Yet, it is a work that is fraught with contradictions. Khakhar’s father died when the artist was four, yet the painting shows him as an imagined projection. The figure of the mother is missing her bindi, a sign that she is a widow. Additionally, the artwork shows the family home while an adult Khakhar stands on the patio dressed in office attire.</p> <p>Khakhar’s interplay between the house, symbolising material wealth, with the pilgrimage, emblematic of worldly renunciation, underscores a central conundrum of modern existence: the desire to possess and renounce material goods.</p>



Rubem Valentim. *Objeto Emblemático 1* (Emblematic Object 1). 1969. Oil on wood, 152 x 102 x 25 cm. Private collection. Photo by Jaime Acioli.

Rubem Valentim combined geometric patterns with symbols from Afro-Brazilian religions like Candomblé and Umbanda, which synthesise West-African customs with indigenous Brazilian practices. He frequently drew inspiration from *orixás*—revered deities that symbolised natural forces and ancestral spirits—using them to craft intricate, stacked permutations. In 1966, Valentim began constructing sculptural reliefs using 15 recurring symbols. *Objeto Emblemático 1* exemplifies this shift in his practice, with the meticulous application of blue and white paint onto stacked symbols that evoke a totemic quality. The work offers a glimpse into Valentim's life-long quest in channelling the intangible realms of Afro-Brazilian thoughts and experience through the transformation of abstract forms.

City Hall Chamber



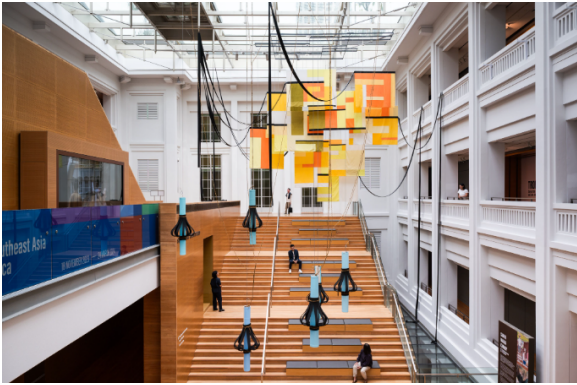
Hélio Oiticica. *Tropicália*. 1966–1967, remade 2023. Wooden structures, fabric, plastic, carpet, wire mesh, tulle, patchouli, sandalwood, television, sand, gravel, plants, birds, television and poems by Roberta Camila Salgado, dimensions variable. Collection of Projecto Hélio Oiticica. Installation view at Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 1969. Image courtesy of Projeto Hélio Oiticica and Lisson Gallery.

Originating in Brazil in the late 1960s, the *Tropicália* movement celebrated the country's culture, merging music, art and writing. While music is often the focal point when discussing *Tropicália*, the visual arts played a pivotal role. "*Tropicália*" is also the title of a song by celebrated Brazilian musician Caetano Veloso.

The word "*Tropicália*" was first coined by the artist Hélio Oiticica, who used it as the title for one of his most iconic interactive artworks. *Tropicália* was presented for the first time in Rio de Janeiro in 1967. At first glance, the artwork paints Brazil as a vivid tropical haven replete with sand, palms, live birds and vibrant makeshift structures. But as one delves deeper, a poignant irony emerges. These structures echo the architectural nuances of Rio de Janeiro's favelas or informal settlements, presenting a stark juxtaposition between idyllic stereotypes and the harsh realities of life.

	<p>Through this installation, Oiticica navigates the fine line between celebration and critique of the trope of a tropical paradise. The artwork serves as a stage where myth and reality can dance together, compelling the onlooker to step into a realm where perceptions are constantly challenged, and everything is more than it seems.</p>
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Singapore Courtyard

 <p>Dolores Zinny for Zinny Maidagan. <i>Tigresses</i>. Handsewn banners and synthetic leather.</p> <p>Juan Maidagan for Zinny Maidagan. <i>Trees</i>. Acrylic on canvas, rubber and coconut coir rope.</p> <p>Dolores Zinny and Juan Maidagan. <i>Vientos Alisios</i> (Trade Winds). Digital print on organza and canvas.</p> <p>2023. Dimensions variable. Collection of the artists. Commissioned by National Gallery Singapore.</p>	<p><i>Vientos Alisios</i> consists of two parts. The first is <i>Tigresses</i>, a set of ten handsewn banners composed in a precise, overlapping formation. The text on the banners shifts as you move through this space. <i>Tigresses</i> explores the ecological phenomenon of disruptive colouration, a camouflage strategy employed by animals that conceals them from predators. From certain vantage points, the word “<i>Tigresses</i>” emerges, almost like an incantation, reminding us that language carries with it the potential to unlock realms beyond our grasp.</p> <p>Swaying gently beside them are the <i>Trees</i>, a collection of vertically suspended canvas cylinders. These are not just canvases; they act as portals, each crowned with propulsion-like pods made of dark rubber. Bathed in varying shades of ethereal blue, they beckon with tales of <i>Á Bao A Qu</i>, the tentacled mythological being from the pages of <i>The Book of Imaginary Beings</i>. Penned by the Nobel Laureate Jorge Luis Borges, the book describes <i>Á Bao A Qu</i> as a radiant blue creature that trails behind pilgrims as they journey upward towards the <i>Vijaya Stambha</i> (Tower of Victory) within the ancient walls of Chittor Fort in Rajasthan, India. In this space, myth and reality dance together, inviting onlookers to step into a world where everything is more than it seems.</p>
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David Medalla. *Cloud Canyons No. 24*. 2015, first version in series: 1964. Wood, perspex, compressors, timer, water and detergent. 310 x 150 x 150 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore. Image courtesy of National Heritage Board, Singapore.

David Medalla created the first *Cloud Canyons* artwork in 1964, and it is considered a landmark work of kinetic art. In *Cloud Canyons No. 24*, water and soap interact to generate foam. This foam, almost spirit-like, ascends through the tubes, cascading outward, forming transient puddles. Then, as if ensnared by a spell, it auto-destructs, vanishing into thin air through evaporation.

This work materializes the unseen, portraying how matter metamorphoses into energy, seamlessly weaving the tangible with the ethereal. The ephemeral foam expands and contracts in response to the ever-shifting environment around it, reminiscent of magical beings that change form with the day's ebb and flow.

Medalla's inspiration for the work sprang from a confluence of memories, not least of which was the comforting vision of his mother making *guinataan*, a Filipino dish made with coconut milk that foams.

Annex B: Exhibition Design Highlights

In 1968, the renowned Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi unveiled her "crystal easels," a groundbreaking design approach for displaying paintings at the São Paulo Museum of Art. At that time, Brazil was undergoing a period of rapid industrialisation, and Bo Bardi chose glass, steel and concrete to manifest this new reality within the museum.

Bo Bardi announced, "It was my intention to destroy the aura that always surrounds a museum, to present artworks within everyone's reach. To revitalise painting, liberating it from the role of a mummy."

In preparation for the exhibition, National Gallery Singapore invited Singapore-based architecture firm WOHA to engage with Bo Bardi's designs. WOHA has been at the forefront of innovations in tropical urbanism, and have designed futuristic buildings that remind us that we exist within the natural world, not outside of it. Many of the design systems visitors will encounter in this exhibition are WOHA's tribute to Bo Bardi's designs. They have been specially adapted with the support of Instituto Bardi / Casa de Vidro in São Paulo.

Besides the adaptations of the crystal easels, nearly all of the exhibition's structures are built with recycled timber planks salvaged in the 1980s from Singapore's Jurong Shipyard, which serve as a poignant bridge between industrial histories, material expertise and distinct building techniques from the tropics.

Gallery 1	The artworks in this section are presented on "crystal easels," a groundbreaking approach for the presentation of paintings developed by the Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi in 1968 for the São Paulo Museum of Art.
Gallery 2	<p>In 1970, Lina Bo Bardi designed a grid system using locally sourced Brazilian wood for an exhibition featuring paintings by fellow artist Candido Portinari, which aimed to highlight the struggles of coffee plantation workers in southeastern Brazil. This design approach is similar to the crystal easels featured in a previous section of this exhibition titled "The Myth of the Lazy Native."</p> <p>Paying tribute to Bo Bardi's determination to deviate from the convention of hanging paintings on walls, the architecture firm WOHA has adapted this system for the current gallery. This adaptation uses recycled timber planks salvaged in the 1980s from Singapore's Jurong Shipyard.</p> <p>As visitors move through the space, they can take note of how these grid-like structures allow multiple artworks to be viewed from various vantage points, a feat that would otherwise be impossible with conventional walls.</p>
Gallery 3	This gallery presents fifteen interconnected propositions, each reflecting the artists' contemplation of the limitless potential for materials and ideas to evolve, mutate and transform into novel forms, such that even the most limiting of circumstances give birth to the most innovative concepts.

	<p>The artworks in this section are displayed on freestanding structures, arranged to resemble a constellation of these aspirations.</p>
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Annex C: *Tropical* Exhibition Programmes

For an updated listing of programmes, please visit nationalgallery.sg/tropical

Programmes	
Stories Artists Tell Us Forum Opening weekend programme	
Date and Time:	18 November 2023, Saturday, 2pm
Venue:	National Gallery Singapore, City Hall Wing, Level 2, Singapore Courtyard
Admission Details:	Free, registration required. Link: https://bit.ly/TropicalForum
Description:	<p><i>Tropical: Stories from Southeast Asia and Latin America</i> explores the vibrant narratives of artists, dreamers, and writers who challenged conventions and fostered solidarities across these two regions. Their unwavering quest to reclaim their rightful position within the story of art forms the core of this exhibition. Featuring over 200 artworks, it is the world's first large-scale exhibition to take a comparative approach between artistic expressions from Southeast Asia and Latin America.</p> <p>Join us for the opening weekend as the participating artists and our collaborators tell stories, read poetry and celebrate the coming together of these two regions.</p> <p>Featuring Boedi Widjaja, Circe Henestrosa, Dolores Zinny and Juan Maidagan.</p>
Stories Artists Tell us Richard Hassell, co-founder of WOHA	
Date and Time:	25 November 2023, Saturday, 4.30 pm
Venue:	National Gallery Singapore, City Hall Wing, Level B1, The Ngee Ann Kongsi Auditorium Free, registration required
Admission Details:	Free, registration required. Link: https://bit.ly/TropicalRichardHasell
Description:	<p>In 1968, the renowned Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi unveiled her “crystal easels”, a groundbreaking design approach for displaying paintings at the São Paulo Museum of Art. For <i>Tropical: Stories from Southeast Asia and Latin America</i>, National Gallery Singapore actively engaged with Bo Bardi’s designs within the exhibition as a strategy to bridge industrial histories, material expertise and distinct building techniques from the Global South.</p> <p>To bring this vision to life, the Gallery has collaborated with the architectural firm WOHA to engage with Bo Bardi’s designs. WOHA has been at the forefront of innovations in</p>

	<p>architecture and urbanism through their futuristic buildings that remind us we exist within the natural world, not outside of it.</p> <p>In this wide-ranging talk, Hassell, co-founder of WOHA will offer insights into the exhibition's design ethos, and reflect on burgeoning questions around postmodern tropicality, urbanism and architecture. The lecture will be followed by a discussion with the exhibition's co-curator Shabbir Hussain Mustafa.</p>
Workshops	
Lygia Clark's <i>Elastic Net</i>	
Date and Time:	13–14 Jan, 17–18 Jan 11am–noon, 2.30–3.30pm
Venue:	City Hall Wing, Level 2, Singapore Courtyard
Admission Details:	\$5 per participant, book at nationalgallery.sg/tropical
Description:	In this guided workshop, participants are invited to take part in a session of collective making as part of the activation of Lygia Clark's artwork and participatory proposition, the <i>Elastic Net</i> .
Performances	
Parangolés	
Date and Time:	Sun, 3 Dec, 2.30–3pm
Venue:	Level 1, Padang Atrium
Admission Details:	Free
Description:	Join us for a participatory performance, <i>Parangolés</i> , inspired by Hélio Oiticica's series, which was developed from 1964 to 1973. Audiences are invited to dance and move along with the sounds and rhythms of samba.
Resonates with Residency	
Date and Time:	27 Jan, 24 Feb, 23 Mar
Description:	Join Latin pianist and composer Alina Ramirez and her collaborators as she presents a series of workshops and performances responding to the shared musical histories of Southeast Asia and Latin America. For more information, please visit nationalgallery.sg/resonateswithresidency .
Family programmes	
Art Alive!	

Date and Time:	Sat–Sun, 13–14 Jan, 2.30–3.15pm, 3.30–4.15pm
Venue:	City Hall Wing, Level 1, Keppel Centre for Art Education
Admission Details:	\$10 per adult-child pair
Description:	Immerse yourself in the world of art and let your imagination soar with Art Alive! The programme offers families a fun and exciting journey with drama and storytelling activities that bring different artworks from the exhibition to life.
Family Art Tour	
Date and Time:	Sat–Sun, 3–4 Feb 2.30–3.15pm, 3.30–4.15pm
Venue:	City Hall Wing, Level 1, Keppel Centre for Art Education
Admission Details:	\$10 per adult-child pair
Description:	Through guided discussions led by our facilitator, families will deepen their connections with the selected paintings as they discuss the artist’s inspirations and themes addressed in the exhibition.
Family Art Workshop	
Date and Time:	Sat, 17 Feb 2–3.30pm
Venue:	City Hall Wing, Level 1, Keppel Centre for Art Education
Admission Details:	\$12 per person
Description:	Learn charcoal drawing techniques from artist Dahlia Osman and create your own masterpiece inspired by the exhibition.
Tours	
Docent-led Tours	
Date and Time:	English Thu–Sun 2pm Mandarin Sat–Sun 1.30pm
Venue:	Level 1, Padang Atrium, Visitor Services Counter
Admission Details:	Free for <i>Tropical</i> ticket holders, registration required
Tour by Boedi Widjaja	
Date and Time:	Sat, 3 Feb 11am
Venue:	Meet at Singtel Special Exhibition Gallery 1 (near Lift Lobby B)
Admission Details:	Free for <i>Tropical</i> ticket holders, registration required

Description:

Boedi Widjaja is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice draws on his early family history in Indonesia, and revolves around the themes of house, home and homeland. In this tour led by Widjaja, hear directly from the artist about his work and practice as well as his take on the exhibition.