

MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

**SOWING STORIES FROM THE EDGES OF SINGAPORE
ON NATIONAL GALLERY SINGAPORE'S ROOFTOP**

On display until 27 October 2019, the Gallery's latest Roof Garden Commission shines a light on lesser-known aspects of Singapore's landscape through plants found on reclaimed sites.



Singapore, 22 April 2019 – Singapore has grown substantially over the years, not only in terms of population and urban development, but also physically through land reclamation. As a contribution to conversations on this intrinsic aspect of the country's development, National Gallery Singapore has commissioned critically acclaimed artist Charles Lim Yi Yong to transform its Ng Teng Fong Roof Garden into a social space that facilitates deeper understanding of the complexity and intricacies of the reclamation landscape. Titled ***SEA STATE 9: proclamation garden***, it is the Gallery's first Roof Garden Commission by a Singapore artist, and also Lim's first extensive foray into re-designing a physical space for his work.

From now until 27 October 2019, visitors will encounter over 30 lesser-known plant species that thrive in reclaimed areas around Singapore, including Changi, Tuas and the Southern Islands. The title of this living art installation references the act of proclamation made by the Presidents of Singapore over the past five decades, in which reclaimed sites are officially declared as state lands. For Lim, each proclamation sets in motion a chain of developmental changes that can quickly obscure other types of life, activities, knowledge and histories forming at the margins of Singapore, which are indexed by the plants found there.

Dr Eugene Tan, Director of National Gallery Singapore, said, “SEA STATE 9: proclamation garden reflects our commitment to broaden perspectives and provoke new ways of thinking through art. This artistic intervention of an existing physical space offers an accessible way to inform our visitors on the intricacies of the reclamation landscape prior to urbanisation – a complex yet important concept to help us better understand the environment around us.”

Working with the Gallery’s Senior Curator Dr Adele Tan, and esteemed local botanical consultant Mr Veera Sekaran, founder of the urban greening company Greenology, Lim has assembled an eclectic collection of plants that brings increased biodiversity to the landscaping of the Gallery’s roof garden. They are spread across the planter boxes around the rooftop and in a nursery at the heart of the garden that creates an open and welcoming environment for visitors to learn about these plants. The resulting work also serves as a microcosm of the thriving plant ecosystems found in newly reclaimed land areas, which are often perceived as barren.

Beyond encountering species expected to be found in coastal and mangrove areas near reclamation sites, visitors may further expand their botanical vocabulary with unusual plant varieties — the prickly Sandbur (*Cenchrus Echinatus*), the parasitic Seashore Dodder (*Cassytha Filiformis*) that survives by taking over a host tree, and even a date palm (*Phoenix Dactylifera*) that is thought to have propagated in the sand from a date seed that was discarded after eating.

The narratives generated by these plants express a metaphoric representation of Singapore’s journey as a City in a Garden, mirroring the country’s efforts to transform sea to land, and subsequently a city landscape through land reclamation.

Charles Lim said, “The dynamics between the land and sea continue to inform my work on the SEA STATE series. This latest installation further challenges me to share my inquiry into the multi-layered reclamation history in unconventional ways, where the plants’ transplantation and adaptation to thrive in the roof garden reflect Singapore’s urban and coastal development. I hope that they will spark renewed interest in the environment around us, and enable visitors to gather fresh insights.” garden

In addition to allowing visitors access to unique and uncommon plant species, *SEA STATE 9: proclamation garden* also serves as a public platform that facilitates a dialogue on the larger issues brought up by the exhibition. Therefore, to complement the visitor experience, Lim has conceived a 30-minute podcast and visual essay. These will feature insights and anecdotes from various specialists in botany, geography, constitutional and legal history, and land reclamation, helping visitors paint a more vivid picture of the process of land reclamation and transformation over the years. This podcast will be hosted on the Gallery’s website and the Gallery Explorer App. A richly illustrated catalogue featuring full-colour profile images taken by the artist of the new plants at the roof garden will also be published to accompany the Commission.

The Ng Teng Fong Roof Garden Commission series invites one leading international artist each year to present a site-specific work that reflects upon Southeast Asia’s rich cultural heritage and complex histories from a contemporary perspective. Previous artists commissioned for the series include Danh Vo and Rirkrit Tiravanija. The Ng Teng Fong Roof Garden Gallery Commission is made possible through a gift by Far East Organization.

Admission to the Ng Teng Fong Roof Garden Gallery is free. For more information, please visit: www.nationalgallery.sg/charleslimiyong

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Annex A: Highlights of plant species
Annex B: Biography of Charles Lim

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About National Gallery Singapore

National Gallery Singapore is a leading visual arts institution overseeing the largest public collection of modern art in Singapore and Southeast Asia. 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 metres 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 initiatives, long-term and special exhibitions, and innovative programming. The Gallery also works with international museums such as National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (MOMAT), National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA), Centre Pompidou, Musée d’Orsay and Tate Britain to jointly present Southeast Asian art in the global context, positioning Singapore as a key node in the global visual arts scene.





In 2018, the Gallery was the only museum in Southeast Asia that received a ranking in The Art Newspaper’s annual global survey of attendance at museums and took the 38th place. It is also 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. It 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 <https://www.nationalgallery.sg>.

Annex A


Highlights of plant species

There are 36 lesser-known plant species featuring in *SEA STATE 9: proclamation garden*. These plants thrive in the various reclaimed areas around Singapore, including Changi, Tuas and the Southern Islands.

Here are some interesting plants that you may not know about.

	<p><i>Ageratum conyzoides</i> / White Weed</p> <p>This herbaceous weed grows on waste grounds. Its leaves have medicinal properties and are pounded and applied to cuts, sores, wounds and swellings in Indonesia, the Philippines and Taiwan. It is also used to treat fever, diarrhoea and gonorrhoea.</p>
	<p><i>Barringtonia asiatica</i> / Fish Poison Tree</p> <p>A large sea shore tree native to this region, it provides excellent shade. The seeds of this species also release a toxic compound called <i>saponin</i> when crushed, which can be used to stun and poison fish.</p>
	<p><i>Casuarina equisetifolia</i> / Common Rhu</p> <p>In regions where the climate is dry and receives a little rainfall, the Casuarina is planted for land reclamation and as a source of fuelwood. Tanjong Rhu Road was named after the species as it was once lined with many of these impressive trees.</p>
	<p><i>Lantana camara</i> / Chicken Dung Flower</p> <p>Introduced as an ornamental plant from tropical America, the Lantana has since become been seen a nuisance weed, as it is poisonous to cattle and has few insect enemies. However, the plant is still sometimes cultivated and its fruit can be eaten by humans. The Lantana's pounded leaves can also be used to treat wounds and ulcers.</p>

	<p><i>Mimosa pigra</i> / Giant Sensitive Tree</p> <p>Compared to the smaller touch-me-nots that everyone is familiar with the <i>mimosa pigra</i> is a stout, stiff, and prickly shrub. Its stems are densely grown, branching 1 to 6 metres long, and while it is usually erect, can also have a habit of creeping. The plant is gathered from the wild for local medicinal use, and has been cultivated to counter soil erosion and provide material for green manure as well.</p>
	<p><i>Pennisetum Polystachion</i> / Mission grass</p> <p>This wild species has been used primarily for grazing. Recently, however, it is used as part of an agricultural strategy in Africa, as it attracts stemborer moths (a main cause of yield loss in Africa) away from important crops such as maize.</p>
	<p><i>Hibiscus tiliaceus</i> / Sea Hibiscus</p> <p>The fibre-plant used to be easily found in kampongs as they were very important to Singaporean fishermen in the past. Its fibres were used to create cords for nets, fishing lines, and bags; while its timber was used to build boats, household implements, and support houses. Its mature leaves, shoots and roots are also used in Malay medicine for fevers and respiratory ailments.</p>
	<p><i>Coccoloba uvifera</i> / Sea Grape</p> <p>The tree is recommended for buffer strips around parking lots, strip plantings in the highway, and even as a shade for residential streets. The tree can also be grown in the harshest of environments, such as urban areas where air pollution, poor drainage, compacted soil and droughts are common. In addition, its grapes are often used to make a delicious jelly and are also popular with birds and squirrels.</p>
	<p><i>Cassytha Filiformis</i> / Chemar Hantu, Seashore Dodder</p> <p>This parasitic herb steals water and nutrients by latching onto host plants. A team of scientists has also discovered that the plants can pass warnings amongst co-hosts to brace themselves in the event of insect attacks, thus helping to reduce their losses.</p>

	<p><i>Phoenix dactylifera</i> / Date Palm</p> <p>Date Palms can be found along the shoreline as they are highly tolerant to salt in the soil. However, salt still reduces growth and results in poor quality fruits.</p>

ANNEX B

Biography of Charles Lim Yi Yong



Charles Lim Yi Yong (b. 1973, Singapore) studied Fine Art at Central Saint Martins School of Art and Design, London, graduating in 2001. As a former professional and Olympic sailor, Lim's artistic practice stems from an intimate engagement with the natural world, informed by field research and experimentation, drawing, photography and digital video. His long-term SEA STATE project, begun in 2005, examines the political and biophysical contours of the nation-state through the visible and invisible lenses of the sea. Lim's work has been exhibited widely across Europe and the Asia-Pacific, at Documenta11 (with the collective tsunamii.net) and Manifesta 7, at biennials in Shanghai, Singapore and Osaka, and more recently in the Biennale of Sydney, Australia, the EVA International in Ireland, and the Aichi Triennale in Japan. His recent solo exhibitions have been held at the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art, Singapore (2016) and the Johann Jacobs Museum, Zurich (2017), and in 2015 he represented Singapore at the 56th Venice Biennale. Lim's 2011 film, *All the Lines Flow Out*, premiered at the 68th Venice Film Festival where it won a Special Mention Award. His work is held in the collections of the Singapore Art Museum, M+ Museum for Visual Culture (Hong Kong), and in private and corporate collections around the world.

About SEA STATE Project

SEA STATE is a series of ten chapters initiated in 2005 by Charles Lim with the premise of inverting perceptions of sea and land in the island city-state of Singapore.

It explores the biophysical, aspirational and cerebral contours of the Southeast Asian city, through the visible and invisible lenses of the sea. Its structure is inspired by the World Meteorological Organization's code for measuring sea conditions, which numbers the varying states ranging from calm, to moderate, to the phenomenal. Considered together, SEA STATE is an index of this extreme oscillation and a call to attention.