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Media Release

***unrealised* expands the Gallery Experience into Digital Space**

Commissioned works by three Singaporean artists use innovative platform to disrupt and add a dynamic dimension to the Gallery's long-term exhibitions



Erika Tan, *Apa Jika, The Mis-Placed Comma (I, II, III)*, 2017

15 August 2017 – National Gallery Singapore is bringing art experience to a different level with the launch of *unrealised*, a digital extension of the Gallery's long-term exhibitions accessible only via the Gallery Explorer app. Developed in dialogue with artists Heman Chong, Ho Tzu Nyen and Erika Tan, it links digital artworks to the two long-term displays, *Siapa Nama Kamu?* and *Between Declarations and Dreams* featured in the DBS Singapore Gallery and UOB Southeast Asia Gallery respectively.

"*unrealised* is an unconventional project that showcases the Gallery's continuous efforts in experimenting and employing the digital to engage with our public. The projects we encounter here by all three artists are part of their extensive engagements with questions around modern art. With *unrealised* we use digital to break down boundaries and explore new possibilities in telling the stories of Singapore and Southeast Asian art. We are thankful for the multi-year collaborations with Heman, Tzu Nyen and Erika, and we hope that the public will join us in the journey as we continue to look for new ways to engage with pertinent issues of the day," said Eugene Tan, Director, National Gallery Singapore.

The three artists respond to three different aspects of the exhibition. Tzu Nyen responds to artworks with the figure of the tiger in them; Erika to corridors and spaces in the

exhibitions and Heman to exhibition titles. Kevin Lim, Deputy Director of Co:Lab X, the Gallery's dedicated innovation team, observes: "Tzu Nyen and Erika's works are activated via proximity-based iBeacons. The iBeacons will both notify users when they are in the vicinity of the work and bring the work to a halt if the user moves out of range. This utilises iBeacons not to push information to a user, which is how they are most commonly used, but to deliver a digital artwork that is a response to the physical exhibition they are standing in. With this, *unrealised* takes a step towards bridging the analogue and digital world with artists."



Ho Tzu Nyen, *Timelines*, 2017

The three inaugural projects for *unrealised* were commissioned in 2014 as the Gallery set about developing its long-term displays. With these commissions, Chong, Ho and Tan responded to the burgeoning questions of where the modern museum ought to figure in an increasingly digitised world.

Shabbir Hussain Mustafa, co-curator of *unrealised* adds, "With these artists' responses, *unrealised* is a project platform for conversations about the modern art histories of Singapore and Southeast Asia, rather than an online exhibition per se. In the works of all three artists there is a reliance on both text and image, as the modern comes to be linked with the colonial, the urban and the non-conscious. In the distinct approach of all three artists, the modern is not something predestined or overlooked, avoided or embraced. When you experience the works on the surface of your mobile device issues concerning gender, labour, historical memory come to be unformed, unhinged, unrealised! Learning from artists, perhaps the institutional practice of curating too is put under pressure."

Lim adds, "This project platform holds vast potential for exploring the digital image in relation to museology in Singapore. *unrealised* is going to open up newer possibilities for innovation as we continue to look for ways to tell stories about art."

unrealised is developed as part of the Gallery's dynamic efforts to engage with an increasingly tech-savvy public. It will complement the Gallery's other digital innovations, such as the Social Table and *Who's in the Woods*, which has proven popular with visitors of all ages since the Gallery's opening. The digital innovations serve to engage with visitors in new and refreshing ways, while educating on Singapore and Southeast Asia art through technology.



Heman Chong, *Past, Lives* (Singapore, 1819-2015), 2017-ongoing

unrealised is conceived by curators Shabbir Hussain Mustafa and Charmaine Toh. Its digital surface was developed by Gallery's Co:Lab X team, which is headed by Kevin Lim, in collaboration with Accenture, Innovation Partner to National Gallery Singapore. The Gallery Explorer mobile application is free to download on the App Store and Google Play.

For more details about the exhibition, please visit www.nationalgallery.sg/unrealised.

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ABOUT NATIONAL GALLERY SINGAPORE

UNVEILING MODERN SINGAPORE AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART

National Gallery Singapore is a visual arts institution which oversees the largest public collection of modern art in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Situated 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 venue.

Reflecting Singapore's unique heritage and geographical location, the Gallery features Singapore and Southeast Asian art from Singapore's National Collection in its long-term and special exhibitions. The Gallery also works with international museums to jointly present Southeast Asian art in the global context, positioning Singapore as a regional and international hub for the visual arts.

In 2016, the Gallery won the awards for "Best Attraction Experience", "Breakthrough Contribution to Tourism" and "Best Customer Service (Attractions)" at the prestigious Singapore Tourism Awards for its role in adding to the vibrancy of Singapore's tourism landscape.

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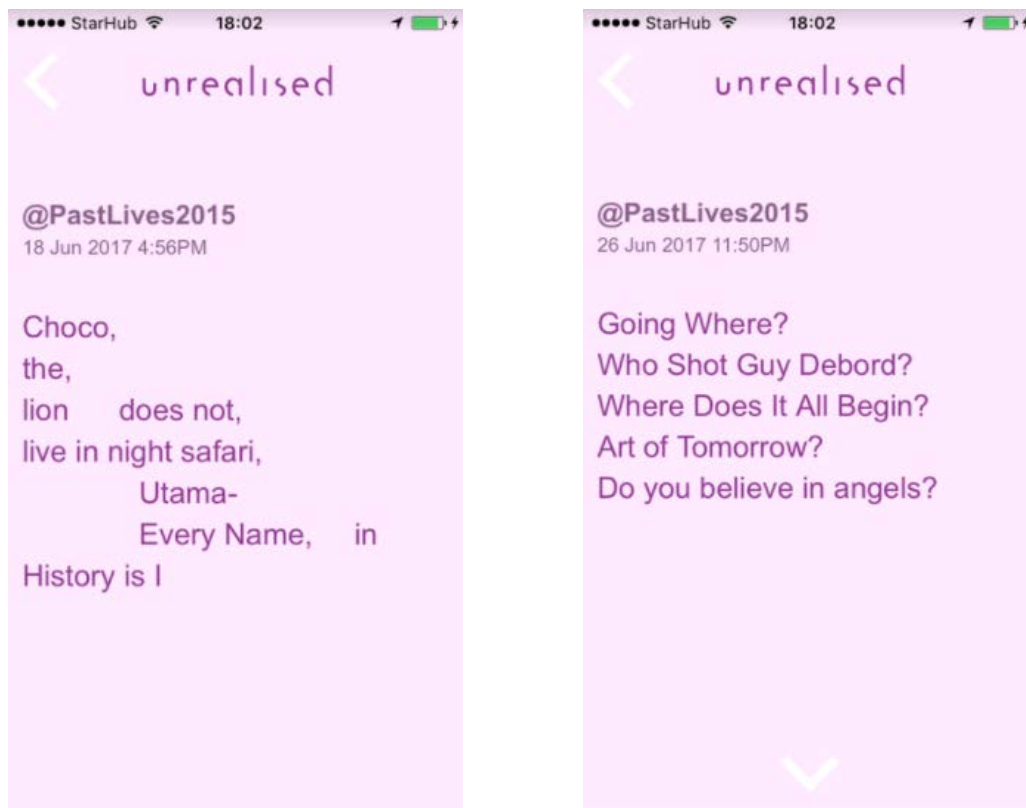
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Annex: About the artists and artworks

1. Heman Chong

Past, Lives (Singapore, 1819-2015), 2017-ongoing



Heman Chong, Past, Lives (Singapore, 1819-2015), 2017-ongoing, Images courtesy of the artist, commissioned by National Gallery Singapore

Past, Lives (Singapore, 1819-2015) appropriates titles of exhibitions staged in Singapore between the years 1819 to 2015 and manually reconfigures these titles into hundreds of thousands of fragments of new writing(s). The artwork looks at an aspect of exhibition history concerned with language, examining through titles the residue exhibitions leave behind. *Past, Lives (Singapore, 1819-2015)* is not activated within a single space of the Gallery, rather it permeates the digital realms, available as an artwork on the Gallery Explorer app, and as the Twitter handle @PastLives2015. The artist will continue to post one tweet per day for as long as he lives. The immediacy of the artwork on social media, and the chronological compressions it generates reimagines the ways in which history is written and expressed through narrative. Chong addresses a paradoxical tension between the vastness of history, the order of the modern, and the structural systems that seemingly govern the digital. From this emerges the uneven binaries of past/present, material/ephemeral, presumed/unexpected.

In his proposal to the Gallery's invitation to the artwork commission, Chong observed, "titles are possibly the first thing you might encounter when an exhibition is produced. It is an allusion to things that will come, to the objects and images one will see, to the emotions you will feel. Sometimes, it obscures, sometimes it reveals. What is in a name?"

About Heman Chong

Heman Chong is an artist whose work is located at the intersection between image, performance, situations and writing. He has recently produced a series of interconnected exhibitions located in Art Sonje Center (Never, A Dull Moment, 2015), South London Gallery (An Arm, A Leg and Other Stories, 2015) and Rockbund Art Museum (Ifs, Ands, Or Buts, 2016). He is the co-director and founder (with Renée Staal) of 'The Library of Unread Books' which has been installed in NTU Center for Contemporary Art in Singapore, The Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (MCAD) in Manila and will be traveling to Casco Projects in Utrecht and Ilham Gallery in Kuala Lumpur. He is currently working on a novel 'The Book of Drafts' which will be published by Polyparenthesis in 2019.

2. Ho Tzu Nyen

Timelines, 2017



Ho Tzu Nyen, Timelines, 2017, Images courtesy of the artist, commissioned by National Gallery Singapore

The arrival of tigers more than a million years ago on the island of Singapore from elsewhere has led to their eternal recurrence. We listen to their thoughts and reveries, leading us through a web of natural and cultural histories – a story of Singapore and Southeast Asia from pre-history to the near present. *Timelines* is composed of three single-channel digital videos which become active when visitors are in the proximity of three specific artworks that feature the figure of the tiger: Heinrich Leutemann's *Unterbrochene Straßenmessung auf Singapore (Interrupted Road Surveying in Singapore)*, c. 1865, (DBS Singapore Gallery 1); Raden Saleh's *Boschbrand (Forest Fire)*, 1849, (UOB Southeast Asia Gallery 2); and Tang Da Wu's *Tiger's Whip*, 1991, (DBS Singapore Gallery 3). The three films are doubles, or inverses of each other, and sometimes incommensurate stories, linked only by the recurring figure of a tiger, leaping through the air, through different times, places and systems of meanings. They document and tell stories of tigers from the Malay world. They allow for continuous slips between human/animal, tiger/weretiger, colonial/convict, native/migrant, as computer-generated hybrids morph into live figures and action, disrupting the digital/living. *Timelines* develops from Ho Tzu Nyen's extensive research on the Malayan tiger, and its place in natural and cultural histories of the region. It examines the gradual evolution of such histories over

shifts in time, topography and political constructs: charting the fading symbiosis of the animal to the jungle, as deforestation and urbanisation prepare the landscape of Singapore and Southeast Asia's rise to modernism.

About Ho Tzu Nyen

Ho Tzu Nyen makes videos, installations and performances. Interested in historical and philosophical texts, Tzu Nyen frequently explores subjects such as the structure and power of myths in his art, often revealing stories as discursive tools used to shape the present. His artworks have been presented at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Berlin, 2017) The Guggenheim Bilbao (2015), DAAD Galerie (2015), Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2012), the Singapore Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale (2011); the 10th Shanghai Biennale (2014); Witte de With (2013, 2012); Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2011, 2017). His theatrical works have been presented at the Asian Arts Theatre, Gwangju (2015); Wiener Festwochen (2014); Theater der Welt (2010); the KunstenFestivaldesArts (2006, 2008). His films have been presented at the Berlin Film Festival (2015); Sundance Film Festival (2012); Cannes Film Festival (2009); Venice Film Festival (2009); Locarno Film Festival (2011) and Rotterdam (2008, 2010, 2013). Ho Tzu Nyen was awarded a DAAD Scholarship in Berlin (2014 – 2015) and the Grand Prize of the Asia Pacific Breweries Foundation Signature Art Prize (2015).

3. Erika Tan

Apa Jika, The Mis-Placed Comma (I, II, III), 2017



Erika Tan, Apa Jika, The Mis-Placed Comma (I, II, III), 2017, Images courtesy of the artist, commissioned by National Gallery Singapore

Consisting of three double-channel videos streamed on the Gallery Explorer app when the visitor enters the DBS Singapore Gallery 1 and historical corridors of the UOB Southeast Asia Gallery, *Apa Jika, The Mis-Placed Comma (I, II, III)* resurfaces the lesser-known story of Halima Binti Abdullah, the weaver who was presented as a 'living display' as part of a typical Malay village at the British Empire Exhibition of 1924 in Wembley, England where she subsequently contracted pneumonia and died. Tan has been studying the spectre of Halima for a number of years now, seeking to establish her traces within modernism's *modus operandi*, the exhibition. The work takes the form of a filmic journey weaving in and out of specific locations in the Singapore and Southeast Asia Galleries, in and out of time zones/periods, in and out of fiction/fact. The sites within the galleries have been specifically chosen by the artist as a strategy towards reviewing the work of a modern art museum, which constructs narratives of the past: how does one consider gender representation(s), the looming spectre of 'traditional crafts', and even the 'native body'. Halima wanders the historical corridors and rooms of the long terms displays of Singapore and Southeast Asian art, evoked through the contemporary dancer and cultural medallion winner Som Said and a collective chorus of debaters who have now come to occupy the

Former Supreme Court. They focus on Halima's existence, performance and death as a mere a footnote in colonial history, calling into question the authority behind the construction of these narratives. In these spaces, the colonial histories of the museum building, and the postcolonial aspirations towards the 'modern' are unsettled and ruptured.

Erika Tan has this to say about her work, "Based on a handful of footnotes, *Apa Jika, The MisPlaced Comma (I, II, III)* reconsiders the way in which 'modernism's others' is necessarily an ongoing project. Like markings on a wall that seep through a newly applied layer of paint, it fosters the spectral return of a forgotten artist and exhibition project that precedes the current National Gallery Singapore displays. Halima's story becomes symbolic collateral in the push towards modernity. It approaches the idea of 'homing' and 'returns', minor/major histories, boundaries of nation, craft/art distinctions, gendered bias and transnational connections/influences in the thinking about how one approaches history making – in general and specifically within the context of the Singapore and Southeast Asia galleries."

About Erika Tan

Erika Tan's practice is primarily research-led and manifests in multiple formats (moving image, publications, curatorial and participatory projects). Recent research has focused on the postcolonial and transnational, working with archival artefacts, exhibition histories, received narratives, contested heritage, subjugated voices and the transnational movement of ideas, people and objects. Future projects point towards the digitisation of collective cultural memory and cloud architecture through the prism of ruins, hauntings, and mnemonic collapse. Her work has been exhibited, collected and commissioned internationally including: The Diaspora Pavilion (Venice Biennale 2017); Artist and Empire (Tate Touring, National Gallery Singapore 2016/7); Come Cannibalise Us, Why Don't You (NUS Museum, Singapore 2014); There Is No Road (LABoral, Spain 2010); Thermocone of Art (ZKM, Germany 2007); Around The World in Eighty Days (South London Gallery / ICA 2007); The Singapore Biennale (2006); Cities on the Move (Hayward Gallery, London). Erika is a lecturer in Fine Art at Central Saint Martins College of Art (London).