

For immediate release

Media Release

**Untold Stories of the National Collection Unveiled at
(Re)collect: The Making of our Art Collection exhibition
by National Gallery Singapore**

*National Gallery Singapore's latest exhibition from 11 May to 19 August 2018
chronicles the stories and legacy of the world's largest collection of Singapore and Southeast Asian art*

Singapore, 3 May 2018 – Featuring over 120 works from the world's largest institutional collection of modern art from Singapore and Southeast Asia, ***(Re)collect: The making of our art collection*** unveils National Gallery Singapore's journey of collecting and acquisition practice. It uncovers the untold stories of the Gallery's collection and brings to light how it is continuing to evolve dynamically two years after the opening of the Gallery.

Dr. Eugene Tan, Director of National Gallery Singapore said, "For a collection of over 8,600 visual artworks, it is an ongoing process for National Gallery Singapore to delve deep and uncover stories behind these works that are representative of the zeitgeist of the century. The diversity and inclusiveness characterise and differentiate our collection of Singapore and Southeast Asian works as they open up possibilities to connect artistic practices beyond national boundaries. This has allowed us to continue the endeavour in questioning and re-imagining what constitutes Southeast Asia through art, and through this come to understand our region's heritage better. This would not be possible without the goodwill of the artists and private collectors who donated their precious works to us."

An art journey that began during post-war Singapore

With seven different sections to the exhibition, visitors will be led on a journey that begins during post-war Singapore when art took a backseat to nation-building. They will be able to witness the important milestones that led to the crystallisation of Singapore's visual arts collection and how it developed as its custodianship shifted from the National Museum Art Gallery (NMAG) in 1976 to

Singapore Art Museum in 1996 and to the present day National Gallery Singapore which opened in 2015.

It all began when Dato Loke Wan Tho, a leading philanthropist, and co-founder of Cathay Organisation, donated more than 110 works from his personal collection to Singapore in 1960, with the wish that they would eventually be housed in a new art gallery. This donation formed Singapore's seedling collection of visual art, with the first registered artwork titled *Self-Portrait* by Chuah Thean Teng.



(from left to right) Chuah Thean Teng, *Self-Portrait*. c. 1950s; and Cheo Chai Hiang, *And Miles to Go before I Sleep*. 1975.

Dato Loke's wish came true with the opening of the National Museum Art Gallery, which marked a concerted effort by a state-level institution to collect and display works of art for the first time. Several works from NMAG's inaugural exhibition donated by artists will be on display at the exhibition. This includes *And Miles to Go before I Sleep* by Singapore artist Cheo Chai Hiang, a conceptual work comprising found objects – a log and a wooden laundry board bearing an excerpt from a renowned poem by Robert Frost.

Understand the key characteristics of Singapore's National Collection

The following sections will highlight key characteristics of the Gallery's Collection such as works by Singapore's artistic forerunners like Lim Hak Tai, Georgette Chen, Cheong Soo Pieng, as well

as works engaging with aesthetics of ink painting by Lim Tze Peng, Chen Wen Hsi, Tan Oe Pang and Zao Wou-Ki. Also featured is the Gallery's new collecting focus on photography, a medium historically under-represented in the collection.



Georgette Chen, Family Portrait. c. 1954.

The support from private donors, organisations, artists, artists' estates and families through artwork donations, as well as the Gallery's Art Adoption and Acquisition (AAA) Programme, is critical to the building of the collection. This is highlighted particularly through the Gallery's collection of Georgette Chen's artworks and personal documents which are formed over the years through donations by the artist, the artist's estate and the Lee Foundation. A part of this collection will be displayed at the exhibition. This includes Chen's *Family Portrait*, an intimate portrayal of the family of Chen's close friend was part of the donations by the artist's estate in 1994. The names of more than 400 past artwork donors and participants of the AAA programme are acknowledged in this exhibition, which demonstrates the tremendous level of support received in building the collection.

Visitors can also look forward to getting up-close with recent important acquisitions by the Gallery. This includes Singaporean artist Kim Lim's *Abacus* (1959), *Pegasus* (1962) and *Naga* (1984) which will be shown together for the first time; as well as early works by Malaysian artist Latiff Mohidin, who recently became the first Southeast Asian artist to have a solo exhibition at Centre Pompidou's *In-Focus Gallery* as part of National Gallery Singapore's inaugural travelling show.



Latiff Mohidin, Mindscape 17. 1983.

In the final section of the exhibition, visitors will be able to explore the Gallery's selective approach in collecting contemporary art which is aimed at historicising the contemporary. The Gallery's focus on drawing historical paths between works in the collection is manifested by a display of three major works by Thai artists of varying cultural backgrounds and generations — Montien Boonma, Navin Rawanchaikul and Rirkrit Tiravanija. Navin's stirring installation of 11 towers consists of 11,000 medical bottles, half of them containing black and white photographs of the elderly which the artist painstakingly documented.

Curator of the exhibition, Horikawa Lisa shared, "This is our first attempt at coming face-to-face with the history of our collection. Our aim is to make the collecting history and acquisition practice by the Gallery more visible to the public. As a custodian of the world's largest collection of 19th and 20th century art of Southeast Asia, we have an important responsibility to conduct research into our collection, understand where we come from, and identify the ways in which we can build the collection further for generations to come. We hope that this exhibition will enable a deeper appreciation of our National Collection and inspire interests in the layers of histories, memories and current practices that inform the building of a collection. The display complements our long-term exhibitions at the DBS Singapore Gallery and UOB Southeast Asia Gallery."

The exhibition will be held at the Singtel Special Exhibition Gallery B and C from 11 May to 19 August 2018.

Sharing her hopes for the exhibition, Ms. Chua Sock Koong, Group CEO of Singtel said, "National Gallery Singapore is the custodian of the world's largest institutional collection of modern art from

Singapore and Southeast Asia and the pride and joy of Singaporeans. As Singapore's leading communications group and a longstanding supporter of the arts, we look forward to supporting the Gallery's efforts to showcase the depth and breadth of this unique and important collection, and cultivating a greater appreciation of art from the region."

(Re)collect is proudly supported by Lead Sponsor Singtel and Supporters Applied Materials and Hitachi Home Electronics Asia (S) Pte. Ltd.

For more information about the exhibition, please visit

<https://www.nationalgallery.sg/see-do/programme-detail/780/recollect-the-making-of-our-art-collection>

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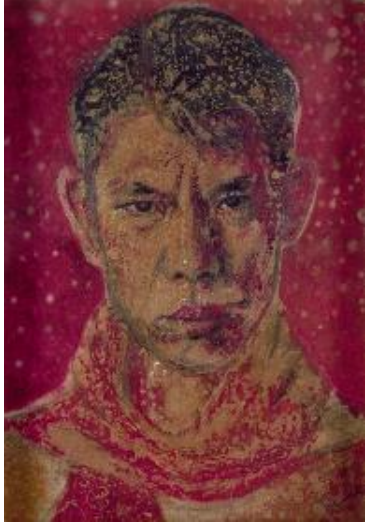

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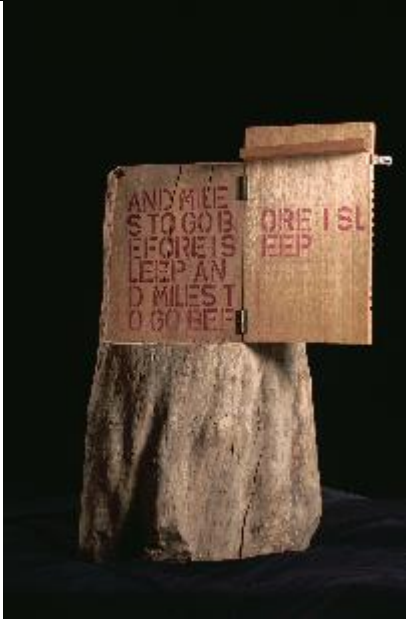
About National Gallery Singapore

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.

Annex A: Exhibition Highlights

	<p>Chuah Thean Teng <i>Self-Portrait</i> c. 1950s Batik 31 x 21 cm Gift of the Loke Wan Tho Collection Collection of National Gallery Singapore</p> <p>Set against an intense red background, Chuah Thean Teng gazes resolutely at the viewer, exuding steely confidence. In contrast to his later, more stylised works, Chuah experiments here with the effects of light and shadow, striving to create a balance between figuration and abstraction through the medium of batik.</p> <p><i>Self-Portrait</i> is the first artwork to have been accessioned into our art collection. The provenance of this work highlights the key role that private patrons have played in the formation of our collection. It was purchased by Dato Loke Wan Tho from art promoter, Frank Sullivan, and subsequently donated to Singapore.</p> <p>Chuah is known for vibrant, richly coloured works depicting everyday life in Malaya. He pioneered the transformation of batik from a traditional textile medium into a form of fine art, and has influenced many artists.</p>
	<p>Affandi <i>Self-Portrait</i> 1975 Oil on canvas 130 x 100.5 cm Gift of the artist Collection of National Gallery Singapore © Affandi Foundation</p> <p>A senior artist kneels down and squeezes paint directly from a tube onto a large canvas in front of him. As his hand moves dynamically, almost violently, across the surface of the canvas, an image of his face emerges and fills the space with sprawling energy. This was the remarkable sight people encountered at Affandi's solo exhibition at the National Museum in April 1975.</p> <p>Largely self-taught, Affandi was one of the first artists from Indonesia to earn international acclaim. He once</p>

	<p>described an artist's urge to paint as "the beast within the man." Impelled by his desire to express the vital forces of life, Affandi developed a distinctive method of painting that involved applying the paint directly onto the canvas without a brush. His signature embodies the sun, which the artist saw as the source of all energy.</p>
	<p>Cheo Chai Hiang <i>And Miles to Go before I Sleep</i> 1975 Wood, metal and ink 90 x 54 x 40 cm Gift of the artist Collection of National Gallery Singapore</p> <p><i>And Miles to Go before I Sleep</i> challenges established ideas of sculpture, as well as the form of the book and poem, and modes of viewing an artwork. Assembled from found objects, this work is simultaneously a sculpture and a book. The book is composed of a wooden laundry board that requires viewers to open it to read it. Its closing refrain, stencilled in red as a fragmented text, is drawn from Robert Frost's poem, <i>Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening</i>. The traditional plinth for sculpture is replaced with a log of wood retrieved from a pile at the home of the artist's grandfather.</p> <p>This work was displayed in an exhibition at National Museum Art Gallery in 1976. After the exhibition, the work was left in the museum's storage. It was re-discovered in the 1980s and Cheo Chai Hiang subsequently donated it to the National Collection.</p>



Georgette Chen

Family Portrait

c.1954

Oil on canvas

161.5 x 130.2 cm

Gift of the artist's estate

Collection of National Gallery Singapore

This work portrays the family of Chen Fah Shin, a long-time friend of Georgette Chen. The family's intimacy with the artist is conveyed through their relaxed postures. Each family member took turns to pose for Chen as she sketched them in charcoal. She then painted them in oil, layering opaque brushstrokes in a range of pastel tones.

Chen is the only woman artist to have had a retrospective exhibition in the Ministry of Culture's Pioneer Artists of Singapore series. Her artworks tended towards still lifes, landscapes and the human figure, always conveying her physical environment through a cosmopolitan modernist lens. A teacher at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts for many years, Chen inspired and nurtured many younger artists, including Thomas Yeo and Ng Eng Teng.

Our collection of Chen's work was formed through donations by the artist, the artist's estate and the Lee Foundation.



Chen Wen Hsi

Black Mountain

c. 1970s – 1980s

Ink and colour on paper

118.5 x 97.4 cm

Collection of National Gallery Singapore

This work of art has been adopted by Lam Soon Cannery Pte Ltd.

Chen Wen Hsi believed that "In Chinese and Western painting, a good work does not entail prettiness, but there has to be a kind of archaic simplicity, whether in respect of colours, brushwork or lines." This formidable landscape reflects Chen's words. Broad strokes of black ink fill most of the composition, with just a swipe of bright yellow at the top and strokes of crimson and grey within it. Chen favoured black. Yet, a painting with too much black throughout would appear "spiritless",

	<p>hence colours were added to create the ideal balance of harmony and liveliness.</p> <p>This work, like most of Chen's paintings, is not dated. He thought dating his works was unnecessary as their sequence was irrelevant to him: what mattered most in a painting was its visual components and aesthetics. We can compare this work to two of Chen's landscape paintings in the DBS Singapore Gallery, <i>Rocky Hill</i> and <i>Blue Mountain</i>, and speculate that <i>Black Mountain</i> was created around the same time, between the late 1970s and 1980s, and may reference one of these mountains.</p>
	<p>Lim Yew Kuan <i>London Tate Gallery</i> 1961 70 x 90 cm Collection of National Gallery Singapore</p> <p>This painting captures the quiet rhythm of activity within the Tate Gallery, now known as Tate Britain. A bespectacled man sits on a sofa in the foreground. He watches a woman leaning in close to scrutinise a painting, while two other visitors stand captivated by a man sketching a painting on the right. This work was made by Lim Yew Kuan when he was a student at the Chelsea School of Art in London. He also made <i>Blocks and Roses</i>, displayed here, during this period. Lim's time overseas transformed his practice, exposing him to many experimental artistic approaches. Visiting London's art galleries also gave him the opportunity to view and learn from European masters such as Paul Gauguin and Rembrandt.</p> <p>A prominent artist and educator in Singapore, Lim received the Cultural Medallion in 2011. His diverse body of work includes drawing, oil painting, woodblock prints and sculpture. He was the founding president of the Equator Art Society in 1956 and was the second principal of the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Singapore's first art school.</p>



S. Sudjojono

Draw & Paint sketchbook

1969

Ink and watercolour on paper

Gift of John Koh

Collection of National Gallery Singapore

© S Sudjojono Center

Draw & Paint comprises 18 drawings of everyday scenes that S. Sudjojono encountered in Jakarta and its surrounds. The artist's fluid line work, nuanced tonal gradations of ink, and occasional use of soft colours imbue them with vivid life.

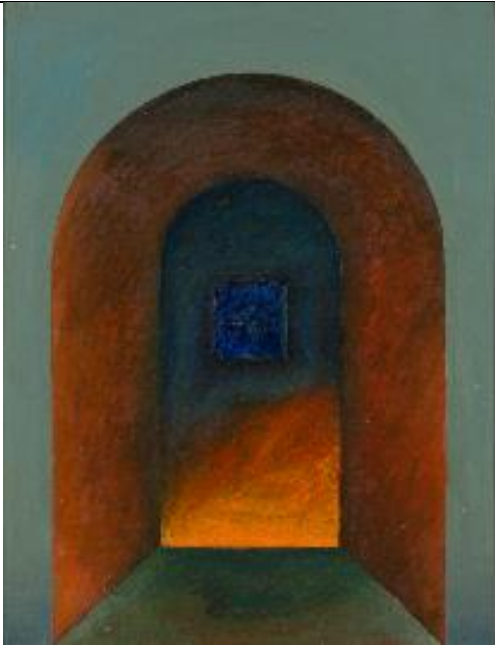
Echoing Sudjojono's credo that the artist's duty is to engage with reality, these drawings sensitively capture the essence of every subject and scene here. His subjects bear a sense of pathos and dignity, but are never devoid of humour.

Accompanying a drawing of his second wife, mezzo-soprano Rose Pandanwangi practicing, he writes:

*Where does it lead to?
To perfection in beauty
And what is beauty?
That is something personal*

This sketchbook reveals the artist's thought process and observations following a defining period in his life. 1969 marked his 10th wedding anniversary with Rose and his subsequent withdrawal from political activity. Sudjojono quietly coped with these immense changes in his private and social circumstances amidst the turbulent political upheavals in Indonesia in the mid-1960s.

Draw & Paint was gifted by the artist to a Jakarta-based Japanese friend. The work later appeared at auction, where it was acquired by a previous owner, before joining the Gallery's collection through donation.



Latiff Mohidin

Mindscape 17

1983

Oil on canvas

82 x 64cm

Gift of BinjaiTree in memory of Chia Yew Kay and Tan Kim Siew

Collection of National Gallery Singapore

Latiff Mohidin is hailed as Malaysia's leading painter and poet. After studying art in Germany, Latiff travelled extensively throughout Southeast Asia. He began to engage with Southeast Asia as an interconnected region, drawing a vocabulary of forms from its natural, cultural and historical motifs.

Latiff's sensitivity to colour and ability to distil symbolic forms from local cultural references is already apparent in *Joget* (Malay Dance), an early work painted in Singapore. *Bunga Api* (Fireworks), also from this period, suggests the young artist's experimentation with a variety of expressive brushstrokes. The Mindscape series, begun in 1973, takes Latiff's search for forms further. It references the colonial architecture of Penang shophouses.

From 1976, Latiff began to explore a synthesis of painting and sculpture through the use of three-dimensional plywood panels which he called "wall sculptures." The Langkawi series combines his drive to find forms that reflected Langkawi's ancient traditions, with an interest in the global modernist concern of pushing the material boundaries of painting.



Kim Lim

Naga

1984

Portland Stone

Collection of National Gallery Singapore

Image taken by the artist, courtesy of the artist's family.

Kim Lim was a Singaporean artist who went to London to study art in 1954, and then settled there. Space, light and rhythm were constant preoccupations for her. This group of works was recently acquired and is being shown together here for the first time, taking us through the different chapters of Lim's artistic journey.

Naga was made after Lim's 1979 solo exhibition at The Round House Gallery in London. This marked a turning point for the artist. She became fixated with combining the "static experience" and "dynamic rhythm of organic forms" into a work. This was articulated in her stone sculptures, which appear to defy weight and engage our eyes with their active surfaces.



Rirkrit Tiravanija

Untitled 2014-2016 (curry for the soul of the forgotten)

2014-2016

Bronze and video, 3-channel, high definition, 4:3 format, colour and sound (stereo), 47 min

Installation view at neugerriemschneider, Berlin

Collection of National Gallery Singapore

Image courtesy of the artist and neugerriemschneider

This bronze cookpot, evocative of ancient sculpture, has been used to cook Thai curry near Rirkrit Tiravanija's home in Chiang Mai. It is surrounded by three video projections presenting "documentation" of different instances of curry being cooked in the pot. In the video, the pot mysteriously moves across the platform while the curry is cooking. This creates a sense of anticipation that is left unresolved: we don't see the meal being eaten; only the evidence of its production through the videos and the cookpot.

Untitled 2014-2016 (curry for the soul of the forgotten) is a development of Tiravanija's renowned cooking performances, which he began in 1990. These works transformed the supposedly neutral "white cube" gallery into a kitchen serving rice and curry to guests. Many of Tiravanija's installations create a stage for events to take place and viewers to participate.

	<p>Here, however, the artist creates a distance between the meal and the audience. This distance evokes the violence inherent in institutions of art, where objects are displaced from their original contexts into a non-neutral space.</p>
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Annex B: Programme Highlights

TOURS

Self-guided Tours

Download our free Gallery Explorer app to enjoy a short audio tour. Available in English.

Guided Tours

HIGHLIGHTS OF RE(COLLECT) (FROM 25 MAY)

English Fri–Sun 2.30pm | Mandarin Fri–Sun 4.30pm

Curator-led Tour

CURATOR'S TOUR: (RE)COLLECT

Sat 12 May, 19 May | 2.30–3.45pm | City Hall Wing, Level 3, Singtel Special Exhibition Galleries | Free (registration required)

Led by *(Re)collect* curators, this tour takes you through key artworks and themes of the exhibition.

To register, please visit www.nationalgallery.sg/whats-on.

KIDS AND FAMILIES



Gallery Cart

Stop by the roving Gallery Cart on Level 1 from 11 May to 31 July 2018 to learn about art conservation! This programme is supported by Applied Materials.

Drop-in Activity: *(Re)collect*

Sat–Sun 15–17, 23–24, 30 Jun | 10am–6pm (last admission at 5pm) | City Hall Wing, Level 1, Keppel Centre for Art Education | Free | Ages 4 and above

Explore key works of art from the Gallery's collection and learn about the different types of art that Singapore and Southeast Asian artists create.

Stories in Art: The Clever Sisters

Sat–Sun 9–10 Jun | 2.30–3.15pm, 3.30–4.15pm | City Hall Wing, Level 1, Keppel Centre for Art Education | Free | Ages 4 and above

In line with the exhibition *(Re)collect*, master storyteller Kamini Ramachandran shares one of her favourite childhood stories, *Lon Po Po*. Resonant of *Little Red Riding Hood*, this Chinese folktale is inspired by Georgette Chen's painting *Family Portrait* and tells the tale of siblings and family love.

Register at the Keppel Centre for Art Education Family Reception from 10am on the day of the programme.

Family Art Workshop

Sat 14 Jul | 1.30–3pm | City Hall Wing, Level 1, Keppel Centre for Art Education | \$20 per adult-child pair & \$30 per adult-child trio | Ages 7 and above | Tickets:

<https://www.sistic.com.sg/events/cngsfaw2017>

Get creative as a family in this fun, hands-on workshop! Pick up new skills for artmaking under the guidance of an experienced Gallery facilitator, then create your own masterpieces inspired by works in *(Re)collect*.

Annex C: National Gallery Singapore’s Art Adoption and Acquisition Programme

The Art Adoption and Acquisition (AAA) Programme provides a rare opportunity for art supporters to “adopt” key artworks of historical and artistic significance from the Gallery’s Singapore and Southeast Asia collection. Funds from the Programme go towards strengthening the National Collection through the acquisitions of new artworks, deepening research and scholarship, and enhancing our mission to showcase Singapore and Southeast Asian art to the world.

An art adopter can adopt an artwork individually or as a group. In gratitude for the support, art adopters will be acknowledged alongside their artwork in perpetuity. Art supporters can also make a donation directly to the AAA Programme.

You may view key artworks available for adoption and the adopted artworks on the Gallery website: <https://www.nationalgallery.sg/join-give/make-a-gift/art-adoption-acquisition>