

Media Release

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Watch the history of City Hall come alive at National Gallery Singapore

Multimedia exhibition, “*City Hall: If Walls Could Talk*”, will open to the public from 1 September 2019



Singapore, 26 August 2019 – The City Hall has had a long and colourful history since its completion in 1929. From serving as a bomb shelter during the Japanese Occupation to housing Singapore’s first Public Complaints Bureau, the building has borne witness to key moments in Singapore’s history. In conjunction with the Singapore Bicentennial commemoration, National Gallery Singapore will present ***City Hall: If Walls Could Talk*** from 1 September 2019 to cast the spotlight on pivotal moments that have occurred within and around the walls of this grand dame.

Slated to run for two years, the immersive multimedia experience in the City Hall Chamber introduces audiences to the rich stories and evolving functions of the building in decades past as Singapore grew from colony to city-state – and in more recent times – when it transformed into National Gallery Singapore. The first long-term exhibition staged within the Chamber, *City*

Hall: If Walls Could Talk will augment the Gallery's role in bridging history, art and ideas as the defining historical events showcased provide the context and backdrop to the masterpieces on display at the museum.

Ms Suenne Megan Tan, Director (Audience Development & Engagement) of National Gallery Singapore shared the significance of this exhibition: "In the course of Singapore's history, many have congregated in front of City Hall to rally around worthy causes that reflected our ideals, values, hopes and aspirations. It is for this reason that we continue to celebrate our independence in front of this building. Events that have marked key moments in our history have taken place in and around City Hall and the Former Supreme Court, which now form National Gallery Singapore, and since our opening visitors have shown a keen interest to learn about the history of these national monuments. As a museum for the people, we wanted to create this exhibition so that City Hall can continue to be a place where important memories can be shared, and to which future generations of Singaporeans can return to learn and experience the connection between history and art."

Unfolding key moments of Singapore's past over the last 90 years

Upon entering the City Hall Chamber, visitors will first be invited to capture images of themselves at customised photo stations; a pleasant surprise awaits. Next, guided by "Encik Awang" – a character inspired by a real-life caretaker – they embark on a multisensorial historical journey through the key national events that took place at the building. They see what was then the Municipal Building when it was first completed and witness its evolving roles over the years, each of which marked pivotal moments in Singapore's history and development as a nation. Aside from encountering lesser-known trades from yesteryear during the experience, such as the lamplighters (overseen by the Municipal Council) who climbed up lamp posts daily to illuminate the streets with gas lamps, visitors will learn when the building was named "City Hall". They will also get a better understanding of its transformation from being the space for government bodies in the early years of Singapore's independence to becoming the home to the world's largest public collection of Southeast Asian art today.

Connecting art and history with interactive digital Social Wall

Echoing City Hall's changing roles and transformation into an art institution today, the exhibition, with its immersive storytelling through digital technology, also adds to the varied and evolving suite of experiences offered by the Gallery to engage and capture the imagination of visitors with diverse interests. The experience of *City Hall: If Walls Could Talk* will culminate with the Social Wall, a multi-touch interactive screen made up of twelve 55-inch panels that allows visitors to unravel historical events of Singapore with selected artworks that are displayed at the DBS Singapore Gallery.

Visitors can choose from seven curated themes (e.g. "Places and Landscape") to be presented with a selection of artworks of a particular topic; they can also choose to answer a few short questions and be presented with a customised selection of artworks. The Social Wall invites visitors to look closely at the artworks and imagine the historical and cultural contexts in which they were created, thereby deepening their appreciation of these artworks and forming personal connections to them. The Social Wall also provides a digital map for curious visitors to hunt for the original artworks at the Gallery.

Related Exhibition and Tours

City Hall: If Walls Could Talk complements the Gallery's ongoing efforts in delving into the history of the two national monuments which it is housed in. This is further supported by a visual display at the nearby Singapore Courtyard. Titled *Memories of City Hall*, the display features a selection of oral history interviews and archival materials that capture the unique stories and memories of people who were based in City Hall from the 1960s to 1980s.

Other related exhibitions at the Gallery include *Listening to Architecture: The Gallery's Histories and Transformations* and *mark*; related programmes include daily "Building Highlights" tours, as well as special back-of-house tours of the Former Supreme Court.

Visitors can also download the Gallery Explorer App to read about some of the compelling but lesser-known stories relating to key moments in Singapore's history. These include the activities

of the Indian National Army during the Japanese Occupation, post-war medal ceremonies, Lim Bo Seng's memorial funeral service, the unveiling of Singapore's State Crest and National Flag, first public performance of the national anthem, the tumultuous years as part of the Federation of Malaysia and the National Day parades that have been celebrated in and around City Hall.

General admission applies to the exhibition. For more information, please visit www.nationalgallery.sg

Annex A: Social Wall - Artwork highlights informed by historical events that took place in Singapore

Annex B: *Memories of City Hall* Visual Display

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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 2019, 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 32nd 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 <https://www.nationalgallery.sg>

Annex A: Social Wall - Artwork highlights informed by historical events that took place in Singapore

The Social Wall is a multi-touch animated interactive wall that invites visitors to unravel historical events of Singapore with selected artworks that are on display at the DBS Singapore Gallery.

It is presented in conjunction with *City Hall: If Walls Could Talk*, an immersive experience of the multi-faceted stories that emerged from City Hall, which span the time Singapore transformed from colony to city-state. Continuing the immersive journey from the City Hall Chamber to the Social Wall, visitors are presented with thematic journeys, including *Portraits of Lives*, *Architecture and Stories*, *Conflicts and Concerns*, *War and Adversity*, *Places and Inspirations*, and *Changing Landscapes*. They can also choose a personalised experience by selecting the option, *Surprise Me!* to activate a journey that matches their profiles.

The Social Wall will show a selection of high-quality images of artworks in the National Collection and pose questions to the visitors so as to invite them to take a closer look at the artworks and imagine the historical and cultural contexts in which they were created. This way, visitors can deepen their appreciation of these artworks while forging personal connections with them.

This serves as a starting point for rich dialogues amongst visitors as they are spurred to embark on a hunt for the original artworks at the Gallery. Visitors can download a map to their mobile devices with a QR code from the Social Wall and find their way to artworks that are displayed in the exhibition *Siapa Nama Kamu? Art in Singapore since the 19th Century*, located in the DBS Singapore Gallery nearby on level 2.

The Social Wall can be experienced at the Singapore Courtyard at level 3 of the City Hall building for two years.

Key artworks featured in the Social Wall include:



<p>Koeh Sia Yong <i>Here They Come!</i> 1965 Oil on canvas 85.6 x 119.5 cm Collection of National Gallery Singapore</p>	<p>Chua Mia Tee <i>National Language Class</i> 1959 Oil on canvas 112 x 153 cm Collection of National Gallery Singapore</p>	<p>Tay Kok Wee <i>Picking</i> 1955 Oil on canvas 103.5 x 98 cm Collection of National Gallery Singapore</p>
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Annex B: *Memories of City Hall* Visual Display

Memories of City Hall is a special visual display of personal stories and shared histories of those who walked the hallways of this grand monument for many years.

This display is presented in conjunction with *City Hall: If Walls Could Talk*, an immersive experience of the multi-faceted stories that emerged from City Hall, which span the time as Singapore transforms from colony to city-state. While the experience in the City Hall Chamber takes visitors through defining moments in Singapore’s history related to the building and its surroundings, *Memories of City Hall* shares the stories of individuals who have developed fond and lasting connections to the space.

Through archival and personal photos, the visual display will present stories from former employees of the civil service in the early days of Singapore’s independence. Visitors will learn the stories of former Permanent Secretary Herman Hochstadt, who served under Lee Kuan Yew in the Prime Minister’s Office when Singapore was still part of the Federation of Malaysia; as well as Ministry of Culture employees like Juliana Lim and Ng Suan Eng, who formed life-long friendships with colleagues as they set the foundation for the arts and culture sector today, such as organising early editions of the Singapore Festival of the Arts. *Memories of City Hall* gives visitors the opportunity to understand how life was like working in the building and making critical contributions to a newly independent Singapore.

Memories of City Hall will be displayed at the Singapore Courtyard at level 2 of the City Hall building until 29 December 2019.

Some archival images in the display include:



Ng Suan Eng and her Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1972. From left: Chew Beng Yong, Ng Suan Eng, Tan Siok Sun, Joan Goh and Choy Leng. Courtesy of Ng Suan Eng.



Pang Li Kin at her desk. Courtesy of Pang Li Kin.