

NATIONAL GALLERY SINGAPORE

5 APR 2024 -
23 MAR 2025

「DALAM
SOUTHEAST ASIA」

FIGURING A SCENE



After Fire

UOB SOUTHEAST ASIA GALLERY

nationalgallery.sg/FiguringAScene

LET *Art* SURPRISE YOU

DALAM SOUTHEAST ASIA

Dalam Southeast Asia is a dedicated project space located within the UOB Southeast Asia Gallery. Projects presented here pose critical questions about and explore lesser-known narratives in Southeast Asian art, while rethinking what a collections-based display is, and what it may seek to achieve.

The Malay word *dalam* means “inside,” and is used when inviting someone to enter a place or room. The word also carries esoteric undertones that suggest the “deep within” or “interior”: the part of the Self that can be perceived but that is not fully known.

Dalam Southeast Asia presents one to two projects annually, each offering unique insights into our curators’ ongoing research on the modern art of our region, and on artworks in Singapore’s National Collection.

FIGURING A SCENE

Figuring a Scene moves away from how art history has determined the logic of exhibitions, arguing that exhibitions have intrinsic significance independent of supposedly external factors like history or society. It asserts that emotions, the imagination and sensory experiences play crucial roles in understanding art, and inevitably defining how we make sense of history or society. The exhibition probes the process of creating forms and how sensitive materials like art gain significance within specific settings, resembling the unfolding of narrative or drama.

As we move through any exhibition, we often link our own experiences to artworks. This exhibition urges us to pursue this link by further appreciating the intricate process around art creation. It prompts questions about the production and reception of forms, the collective staging of the exhibition scene, as well as the connections between the forms and the broader realms of history and everyday life.

Figuring a Scene presents different instances where elements from nature become signs that help us perceive and grasp social forms. These instances come via the shadow, the fruit, the fire, the air, the wax and the city.

nationalgallery.sg/FiguringAScene

This exhibition is in English, with room sheets in 中文, Bahasa Melayu and தமிழ்.

ON COVER
Lim Yew Kuan. Detail of *After Fire*. 1966. Woodblock print on paper, 48.4 × 62.5 cm.
Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

EPISODE 1

SHADOW

Sharon Chin juxtaposes nature and technology in her art. Living near an oil refinery, she addresses ecological tensions, climate justice and displacement. Her linocut prints, which were initially used for book illustrations, became protest placards and workshop materials. The prints have now been transformed into shadow puppets in an installation exploring the struggle between natural and social forces, posing the question: "Without darkness, how can we dream of the day?"



Sharon Chin. *Creatures on the Move (In the Death of Night)*. 2023–2024. Plywood and printed posters, dimensions variable. Commissioned by National Gallery Singapore for the exhibition *Figuring a Scene*.

EPISODE 2

FRUIT

Three works flesh out the durian, a fruit whose story and image have partly shaped the imagination of Singapore and Southeast Asia. A painting, a photograph and a sculpture by Liu Kang, Robert Zhao Renhui and Anusapati articulate the durian in different ways. Reflect on the tropical fruit's cultural significance for those seeking a sense of home, a connection to the past and an understanding of the role of colonisation in shaping the land and its people.



Liu Kang. *Durian Vendor*. 1957. Oil on board, 47.5 × 118.5 cm. Gift of the artist's family. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

EPISODE 3

FIRE

In 1961 a tragic fire engulfed villages and communities in Bukit Ho Swee, a slum that was made up of attap huts. It was a critical moment in the social history of Malaya. To a significant extent, this event paved the way for the development of the local urban form in Singapore. An important aspect of this modernisation was the intense pace by which the construction of public housing took place. See works by Liu Kang, Lim Hak Tai, Tan Choo Kuan and Lim Yew Kuan in this episode.



Lim Yew Kuan. *After Fire*. 1966. Woodblock print on paper, 48.4 × 62.5 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

EPISODE 4

AIR

It is visually difficult to represent air in art. Its invisibility poses a problem for artists, but its role and effect are visceral and vital. This section features a painting titled *Storm* by Sun Yee and a photograph titled *The Opposite is True #2* by Lim Tzay Chuen.



Sun Yee. *Storm*. 1959. Oil on canvas, 50 × 60 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

EPISODE 6

CITY

Two prominent signs of Singapore's aspiration to a national and modern form are public housing and the art museum, traced to discourses emerging from post-colonial Malaya. Architectural texts from the 1960s to independence underscore the role of art and culture in shaping national identity. Meanwhile, public housing, catalysed by the 1961 fire crisis, transformed "squatters into citizens."



Renato Habulan. *Tira (Remains)*. 2014–2023. Paraffin wax, sculpted wood, aluminium and found objects, 140.5 × 145 × 224.5 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

EPISODE 5

WAX

How does wax embed faith and terror? Renato Habulan's artwork, *Tira*, encompasses various meanings. Comprising driftwood, found statuary and paraffin wax, it features a transfigured Christ sculpture resting on wax, referencing colonial Catholicism in the Philippines. The work evokes the religious embeddedness, fragmentation and the horrors of war in southern Philippines.



Amid this desire for belonging, a teak sculpture by Shui Tit Sing alludes to the excitement of change, but also to the trauma of death, complicating the narrative of development in a country where nearly 80% live in public housing.

Shui Tit Sing. *Why? (为什么?)*. 1979. Wood, 67.5 × 23 × 15.5 cm. Collection of the Shui family.

PROGRAMMES

In conjunction with the exhibition, we are bringing together a variety of discussions, tours and artist talks for you to unpack and connect with its key ideas, artworks and artists. For more information about the programmes, please visit nationalgallery.sg/FiguringAScene

TICKETS

Purchase your tickets at tickets.nationalgallery.sg

FREE ADMISSION[^] for Locals (Singaporeans/PRs) | Gallery Insiders | Children aged 6 and below | Local/locally based students and teachers | Persons with disabilities (PWD) and their caregiver

[^]VALID VERIFICATION IS REQUIRED.

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AN ACCESSIBLE EXPERIENCE FOR ALL

The Gallery is committed to creating an inclusive experience that can be enjoyed by visitors with access needs.



SCAN FOR
ACCESS GUIDE

OPENING HOURS

Daily 10am–7pm

General ticket sales end
30 minutes before closing time.

ENQUIRIES

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