



Signature

ART PRIZE 2011

ASIA PACIFIC BREWERIES FOUNDATION

DIRECTOR'S GUIDE TO CONTEMPORARY ART

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ASIA PACIFIC BREWERIES FOUNDATION SIGNATURE ART PRIZE 2011

Director's Guide to Contemporary Art



Welcome to the Asia Pacific Breweries Foundation Signature Art Prize exhibition.

The Signature Art Prize recognises artists whose works represent a significant development in contemporary visual art in the Asia Pacific region. The competition is open, by nomination, to all visual artworks, regardless of medium, subject matter and size.

This exhibition presents the 15 finalist artworks which have been shortlisted by an international jury from a total of 130 works nominated by art curators and professionals from the region. It is thus an excellent opportunity to see and discover some of the most exciting contemporary art produced in this dynamic region in the last three years.

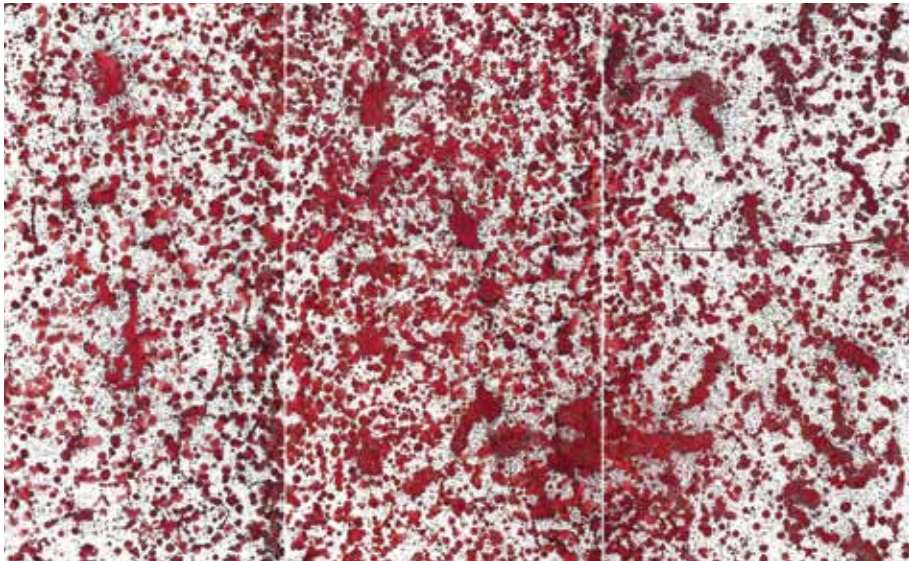
The Director's Guide to Contemporary Art is meant to serve as a helpful reference for visitors to this exhibition who wish to know more about how to approach contemporary art. The points in the guide are applicable to viewing all kinds of contemporary art, and will hopefully debunk certain preconceptions about contemporary art being inaccessible, or difficult to understand.

Enjoy the exhibition!

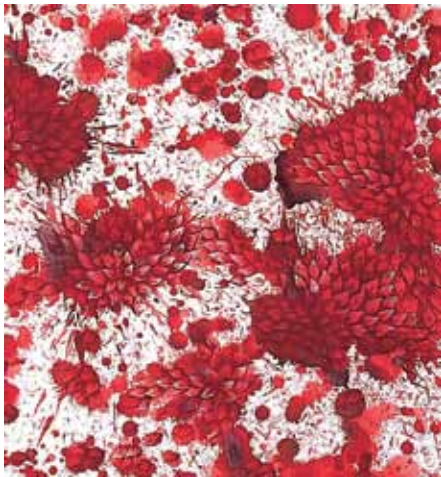
Tan Boon Hui
Director, Singapore Art Museum

- 1 Contemporary art often deals with **current political, social and cultural issues** (in interesting ways)
- 2 Contemporary art is often about the **process** of creating the work and not just the finished product
- 3 Contemporary art is often about the idea, or the **concept** of the work
- 4 Contemporary art **may not be made by the artist** him/herself
- 5 Contemporary art can involve **traditional art forms and mediums** or methods, as well as traditional folklore in new and interesting ways
- 6 The meaning of a contemporary piece of art is transformed according to the visitor's **context**
- 7 Contemporary art is often **site-specific** – that is, made for and in response to a particular space

1 Contemporary art often deals with current political, social and cultural issues (in interesting ways)



Imran Qureshi, *You who are my love and my life's enemy too*, 2010, gouache on wasli paper, 216 x 365 cm, Amna and Ali Naqvi collection.



Imran Qureshi's painting *You who are my love and my life's enemy too* was created in response to a terrorist attack that took place near his home in Pakistan. Though its vivid splashes of red make the painting look like the aftermath of a violent incident, upon looking closer one can see that some of the 'blood' has actually transformed into exquisite flowers. This seeming contrast and tension between life and death is perhaps a signal from the artist that even from violence and death, life and hope can still blossom.



Vandy Rattana, *Bomb Ponds*, 2009, 9 photographs (90 x 105 cm each) and single channel video (duration: 21 mins), colour, sound, edition of 5, artist collection.

Related to the previous point, contemporary art often represents the voices of the marginalised and dispossessed, and previously silenced viewpoints or interpretations in history.

Many of us may not be aware that during the Vietnam War, bombs were also dropped on the neighbouring country of Cambodia. Vandy Rattana's work *Bomb Ponds* documents and investigates the after-effects of these bombs on politically-neutral Cambodia. These bombs, dropped by the U.S. military during the Vietnam War, left numerous craters around the Cambodian countryside that have gradually filled up to become 'bomb ponds'. Rattana also records accounts from Cambodians whose lives were permanently affected by this traumatic history.

His work reflects a wider phenomenon of Southeast Asian artists turning back to events in recent history and coming to terms with them by shedding light on a particular point of view that has been kept silent before. By revisiting this previously silenced part of Cambodia's history, this work also argues that the act of remembering is something active, not passive – it is a form of bearing witness; an act against historical amnesia.



Chen Chieh-jen, *Empire's Borders I*, 2008-2009, single-channel video, colour and black and white, sound, dimensions variable (duration: 26:50 mins), artist collection.

Also related to the previous points, artists who deal with current issues or crises and who represent the marginalised often become activists for certain causes.

Chen Chieh-jen sees his video installation *Empire's Borders I* as a form of activism against modern imperialism. The work is based on his own experience of applying for an American visa at the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), where he was accused of trying to enter the US in order to remain there illegally. To Chen, modern imperialism takes the form of ways in which dominant countries maintain border control by deploying tactics to humiliate and subjugate citizens from weaker nations when they seek to enter these more powerful countries.

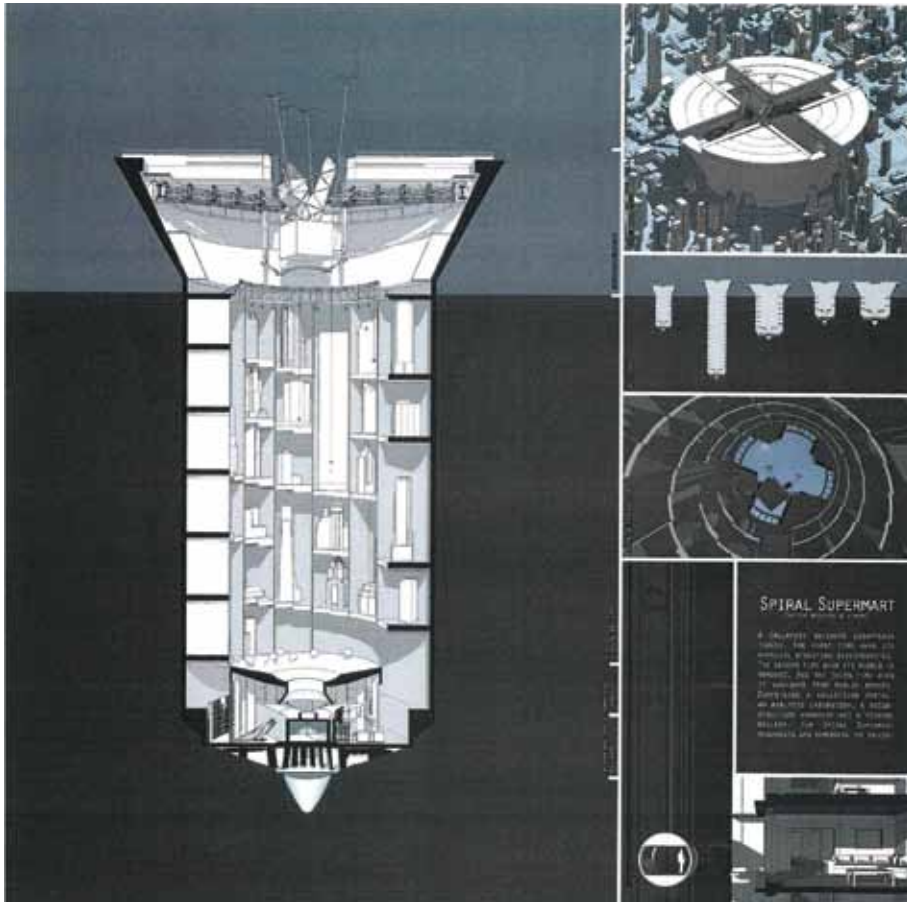


Greg Semu, *The Last Cannibal Supper*, 2010, digital photography and 9 light boxes, various dimensions, artist collection.

Contemporary art is often informed by the artist's context i.e. the artist's background, be it personal, cultural or socio-political.

Many contemporary artists are influenced by their personal, socio-political or cultural background when creating their artworks. Greg Semu's work *The Last Cannibal Supper* stems from his background as an ethnic Samoan and third-generation Mormon born in New Zealand – his family was originally converted by American missionaries, and his parents migrated to New Zealand from Samoa. His works are also informed by a sense of cultural displacement, as he does not feel at home with either New Zealand or Samoan culture. This sense of displacement reflects the wider phenomenon of religious and political colonisation of the indigenous peoples in the Pacific.

In a series of photographs, Semu – whose ancestors were politically and religiously colonised – displaces the original context of Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* in a tongue-in-cheek manner by posing 'savages' around a cannibalistic meal, in a tableau reminiscent of the one in Leonardo Da Vinci's painting, thereby subverting romanticised colonial stereotypes of indigenous people as exotic savages.



Spiral Supermart (after Brodsky & Utkin).
 Michael Lee, *Second-Hand City*, 2010, digital print on archival paper, 123 x 123 cm each, edition of 10 + 1AP, set of 8 episodes, artist collection.

Michael Lee's *Second-Hand City*, like much of his other work, deals with 'lost buildings' or architecture and on-going debates on urban conservation: whether to conserve old buildings, or to develop new ones at the expense of the former. His background as a Singaporean – where rapid urbanisation and high value of properties mean that old buildings are torn down and new ones built up swiftly in the name of development – has influenced this prevailing theme in his work. *Second-Hand City* brings forth a third stance to urban conservation and development: remembering and imagining buildings and architecture through humour.



Ay Tjoe Christine (in collaboration with Deden Sambas), *Lama Sabakhtani #01*, 2010, wood, metal, wire, brass balls, 400 x 250 x 430 cm, artist collection.

Ay Tjoe Christine's personal upbringing as a Catholic has influenced her body of work, including *Lama Sabakhtani #01* – the Aramaic phrase translates to 'Why have you forsaken me', the same words that Jesus spoke on the cross, entreating God not to abandon him at the last. This work, a version of the guillotine, echoes the internal struggle between individual, personal expression and a strict code of conduct put in place by an organised religion. As the artist explains, her work 'affirms the intimate relationship between the human being and the Maker'. It is not only about death and grieving, as evinced by the knives in the guillotine, but the joy of life after death, as seen in the dancing balls above the knives.

2 Contemporary art is often about the process of creating the work and not just the finished product. Often, the material used to make the work is as important as the way it is made



Chang Yoong Chia, *The World is Flat*, 2010, postage stamps and adhesive, 84 x 134 cm, artist collection.

Chang Yoong Chia chose to use postage stamps to create a collaged map of the world in *The World is Flat*, whereby the viewer can come to understand how countries are formed as well as their relationships with one another. Chang created the work through a laborious process of collecting, cutting, sorting and pasting of thousands of stamps over a nine-month period. The artist has described this process as a contrast to the fast-paced, production-line society that we live in today, and that it reflects his desire for 'a better, slower, and less destructive way of living'. The use of stamps also harks back to a slower pace of life, when postal letters were sent instead of the more impersonal e-mails that are prevalent today.

Chang was also interested in the fact that stamps originated from the British colonial era, and featured state-sanctioned images that portrayed their respective countries in a positive light; images that would have been difficult to contradict before the rise of the Internet. In this artwork, the artist has presented darker events in history, including the Opium War in China, alongside more light-hearted fictional events, such as the Queen of England having tea with various representations of herself.

Image courtesy of the artist.

3 Contemporary art is often about the idea, or the concept of the work



Daniel Crooks, *Static No.12 (seek stillness in movement)*, 2010, single-channel HD video, colour, sound (5:23 mins), dimensions variable, artist collection.

Top: Video still
Below: Detail



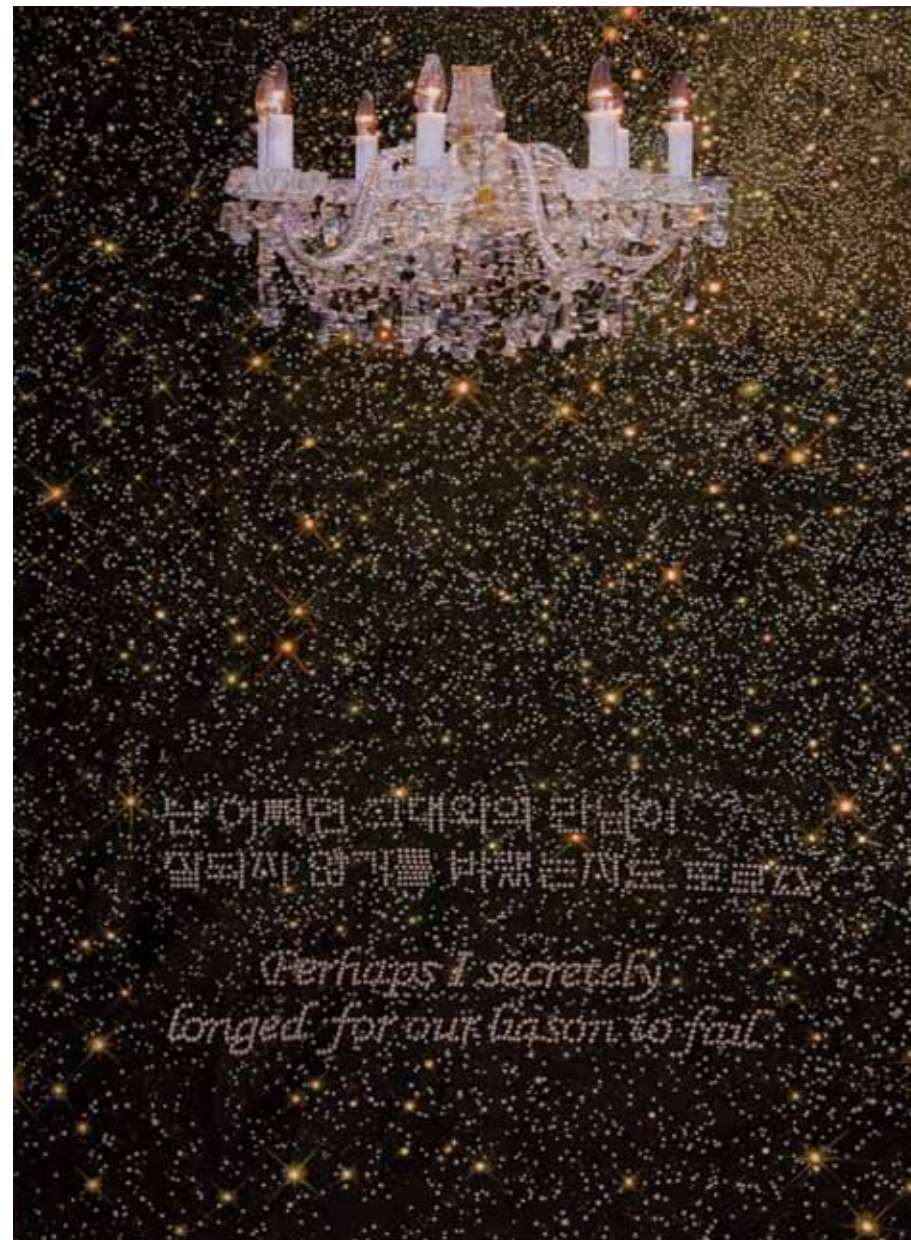
In his video installation *Static No.12 (seek stillness in movement)*, Daniel Crooks seeks to capture time through spatial means, by using the moving image to 'think of time in material terms and seeking to treat it in a very tangible, malleable, almost sculptural way'. He aims to capture 'stillness in movement', and to get closer to answering the question of how one understands time in terms of spatial means. Crooks has described this installation as part of an ongoing project to explore the idea of 'temporal geometry'.

Images courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery.

4 Contemporary art may not be made by the artist him/herself

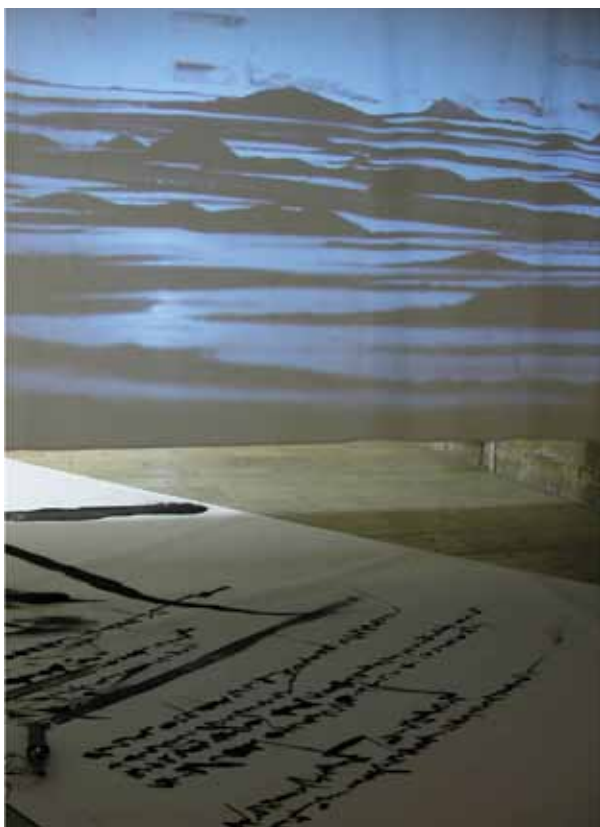
Unlike artworks from other art periods, contemporary art may not be produced by the artist in question. *Needling Whisper, Needle Country / Embroidery Project* was not made by artist Kyungah Ham herself, but by embroidery workers acting on instructions relayed through intermediaries. For Ham, the starting point for this project was the North Korean propaganda flyers that would sometimes get blown by the wind into South Korea from the North. Wanting to create messages to communicate with North Koreans as well, Ham created the designs for *Needling Whisper, Needle Country / Embroidery Project* and came up with the idea of how they were to be made. She smuggled her designs to embroidery workers in North Korea through the use of intermediaries who could go back and forth between the two countries.

Describing this furtive back-and-forth process as ‘a form of espionage’, Ham has made ‘an attempt at forbidden communication to an unreachable place’, where North and South Korea are not just separated by physical distance, but an ideological distance as well. During this process, some of the digital prints she sent the workers were confiscated, and the resulting embroidery has misspellings and a blurry quality. This becomes part of the dialogue on the tension in communication, as well as miscommunication, between the two countries. It was thus imperative that Ham did not sew the embroidery designs herself, but that others were involved in the process of creating the work: the workers from North Korea who could view and think over her messages as they sewed them, and the intermediaries whose role highlighted the political tensions between North and South Korea.



Perhaps I Secretly Longed for Our Liaison To Fail, Uli Sigg Collection
Needling Whisper, Needle Country / Embroidery Project, 2009-2010, North Korean hand embroidery on silk; total 9 pieces, various dimensions, Uli Sigg and artist collection.

5 Contemporary art can employ traditional art forms and mediums or methods, as well as traditional folklore in new and interesting ways



Kim Jongku, *Mobile Landscape*, 2009, steel powder, CC camera, LED projector, screen, paper roll, dimensions variable, artist collection.

Kim Jongku has created a 'painting' which resembles traditional Chinese calligraphy in *Mobile Landscape*, using steel powder that has been ground from a steel pole, in much the same way that artists grind the Muk (a solid bar of Chinese ink) in traditional Chinese painting. He creates this calligraphy by scattering the steel powder over a canvas in various shapes, so that it resembles a stylised calligraphic script. By doing so, Kim has reinterpreted a traditional form of art with a contemporary approach.



Rodel Tapaya, *Baston ni Kabunian, Bilang Pero di Mabilang (Cane of Kabunian, numbered but cannot be counted)*, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 305 x 610 cm, Tiroche DeLeon Collection and Art Vantage.

Rodel Tapaya appropriates various pre-colonial myths from the Philippines' oral history in his painting *Baston ni Kabunian, Bilang Pero di Mabilang (Cane of kabunian, numbered but cannot be counted)*. He does this not only to discuss the rich oral cultural heritage of the Philippines, but also as a form of 'political commentary about prevailing issues', such as the problem of greed in modern life. For example, the work references a Tagalog tale of a greedy man who was turned into a frog, and in the foreground, one can see a masked man chopping down a tree that has a face of a man instead of a crown of leaves, foretelling environmental disaster.



Yang Xinguang, *Thin*, 2009, wood, various dimensions, artist collection.



There is a visceral quality to Yang Xinguang's work *Thin* – pieces of wood have been carved to look like painfully thin bones with blood still drying on them. There is a sense of cruelty inflicted on the wood, as though they have undergone a 'brutal attack' from the artist's axe. Yang has redefined sculpture by reworking natural materials such as wood and stone in an unusual way, creating a new, minimal form of sculpture.



Aida Makoto, *Ash Color Mountains*, 2009-2010, acrylic on canvas, 300 x 700 cm, Taguchi Art Collection.



Top: Full image of artwork
Left: Detail

From afar, Aida Makoto's painting *Ash Color Mountains* looks exactly like that – ash-coloured mountains in a traditional oriental landscape painting (*sansuiga*). However, these mountains are actually made up of heaps of white collar workers in business suits entangled with the debris of daily office life – desks, wires, computer units. A seemingly tranquil landscape is in reality something much more disturbing, and becomes a commentary on our contemporary rat-race and the dissatisfactions with existence.

6 The meaning of a contemporary piece of art is transformed according to the visitor's context



Bùi Công Khánh, *The Past Moved*, 2010, charcoal on paper backdrop and 8 photographs, drawing installation: 300 x 200 x 241 cm; photographs; 50 x 75 cm each, artist collection.

Bùi Công Khánh's *The Past Moved* grapples with the issues of rapid urbanisation and development in Southeast Asia, specifically Vietnam. He does so by re-creating his neighbourhood – soon slated to be razed in order to make way for a steel and glass tower block – as a mock studio backdrop, and inviting friends and neighbours to take photos in front of this backdrop as a form of active remembrance.

When Bùi's neighbours take photographs in front of this backdrop, theirs is an experience of remembering and commemorating a space that will soon be gone. However, when non-residents view this work in a museum setting and take photographs in front of the backdrop they are doing so as visitors or tourists to the space – they have no previous emotional engagement with the place that is depicted in the background, thereby transforming the meaning of the artwork according to their own social context.



Images courtesy of the artist and Phan Quang.

7 Contemporary art is often site-specific – that is, made for a particular space



Sheba Chhachhi, *The Water Diviner*, 2008, installation with single-channel video, books, light boxes, light and sound, dimensions variable, artist collection.

Above: Installation view

A site-specific installation makes use of the unique characteristics of a particular space to respond to, or even challenge the original use or purpose of that space. Sheba Chhachhi's *The Water Diviner* is one such work. It is about the complex relationships people have with water – as an ancient symbol of divinity, a life source, with issues of control, access and distribution – and how these relationships have changed with rapid urbanisation and the attendant pollution of water sources and increasing scarcity of water.

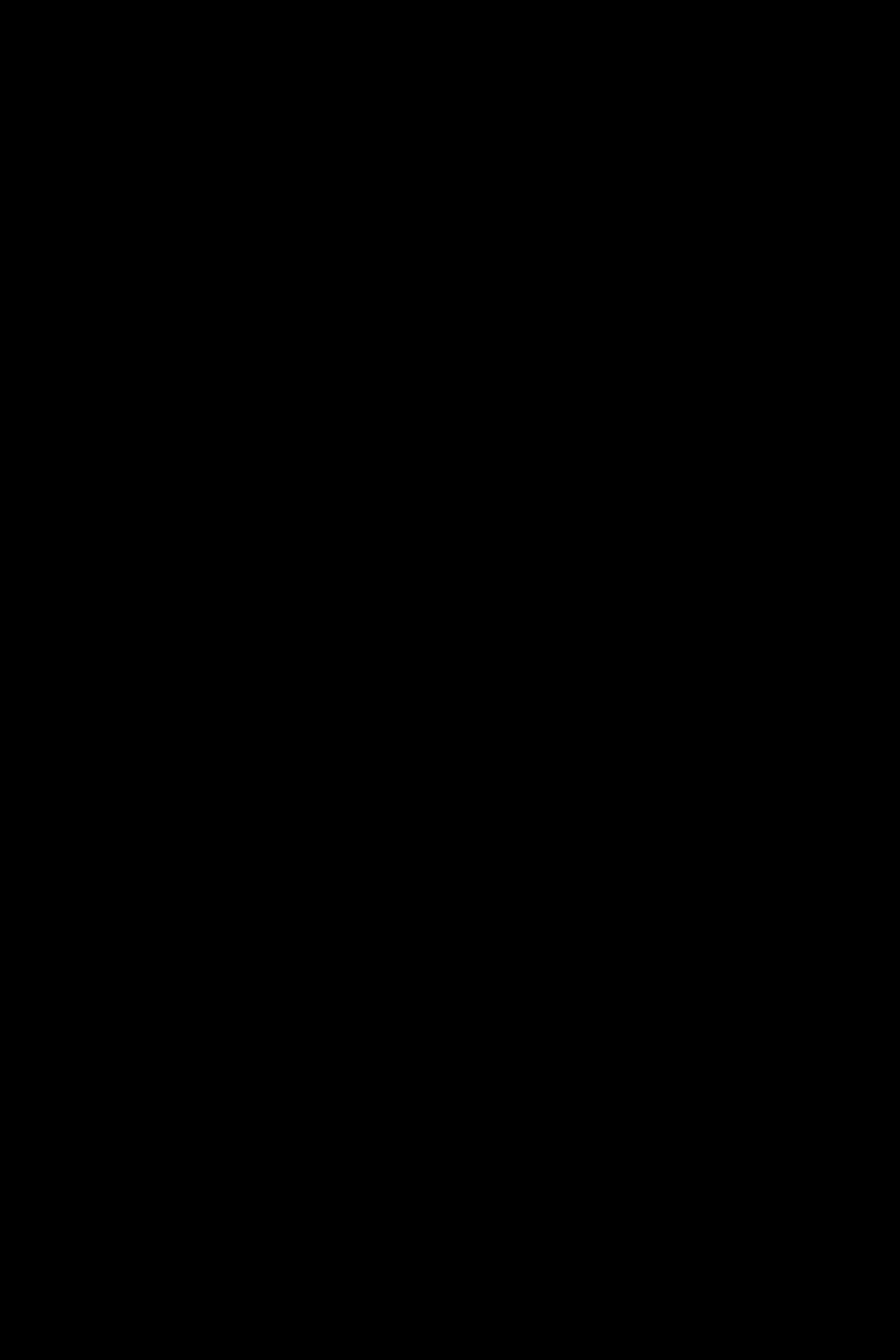
Accordingly, Chhachhi wanted to create a 'sub-aquatic environment' for the original installation, where visitors could immerse themselves in the installation to become water diviners – to 'sense the presence of water deep below the surface of the earth' and uncover experiences with water that go beyond mere consumption. She did this by installing her work in a long-disused underground meeting room in the Delhi Public Library, which was once a colonial-era swimming pool. Chhachhi piled stacks of deacquisitioned books to form walls that brought to mind tossing waves in a roiling sea of dusty paper, and used lights and projections to transform the space into a subterranean vault. By using this particular space, Chhachhi opened this previously private, unused space into one accessible to the public, as well as the library's users to discover.



Above left: Installation view

Above right: *Illuminated Books: The Bathing Beauties, the Farmer, the Ascetic.*

NOTES



General Information

OPENING HOURS

Mondays to Sundays | 10am to 7pm

(Last admission at 6:15pm)

Fridays | 10am to 9pm

ADMISSION

Adult \$10

Student, Senior Citizen 60 years and above and Regular (with valid 11B pass) * \$5

20% off admission tickets for 20 or more persons.

* Unless otherwise stated, admission is free for visitors 6 years and below, Singaporean and PR students and senior citizens, NSFs and teachers from local schools.

Free admission to SAM every Friday from 6pm to 9pm and on Open House days.

Admission ticket includes \$1 SISTIC fee and is available from SAM Information & Ticketing Counters and SISTIC.

Please present proof of eligibility to enjoy concessions or free admission.

MUSEUM TOURS AT SAM

Tours in English

Mondays | 2pm

Tuesdays to Thursdays | 11am & 2pm

Fridays | 11am, 2pm & 7pm

Saturdays and Sundays | 11am, 2pm & 3:30pm

Tours in Japanese

Tuesdays to Fridays | 10:30am

Tours in Mandarin

Fridays | 7:45pm

ADDRESSES

Singapore Art Museum is located at 71 Bras Basah Road, Singapore 189555.

SAM at 8Q is located at 8 Queen Street, Singapore 188535.

SAM ONLINE

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ENQUIRIES

6332 3222 or 6332 3200

nhb_sam_programs@nhb.gov.sg

HOW TO GET TO SAM

By bus

SBS 7, 14, 16, 36, 111, 131, 162, 175, 502, 518
SMRT 77, 167, 171, 700

By MRT

2-minute walk from Bras Basah MRT station.
10-minute walk from Dhoby Ghaut, Bugis or City Hall MRT stations.

By car

Carparks available at Waterloo Street, Queen Street, NTUC Income Centre, Plaza by the Park, Hotel Grand Pacific and Singapore Management University.

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS/LOCKERS

Lifts provide easy access to galleries.

Lockers are available for visitors' use.

