

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Artforum

Singapore Fling: Nicolas Trembley around Singapore Art Week 2020

28 January 2020

ARTFORUM

Singapore Fling



Image: Nicolas Trembley receiving a birthday cake from Hans Ulrich Obrist. Photo: Rita Targui.

like “global platform” and “art hub” were as plentiful as the *bonnes bouches* on offer. And such talk is warranted. For readers unfamiliar with Singapore (like I was a couple weeks ago), I hereby report that the city-state is booming, enjoying new streams of money diverted from Hong Kong. On January 12, the educational nonprofit Art Outreach kicked off Singapore Art Week (SAW) with the return of their third annual Impart collector’s show at the School of the Arts (SOTA). Curated by Boon Hui Tan, Director of the Asia Society Museum in New York, the exhibition showcases local and international collections, featuring works by Jakkai Siributr, El Anatsui, Bharti Kher, and Kehinde Wiley, among others.

The art fair is called S.E.A Focus (for South East Asia), and is a kind of Plan B. Plan A, an expo called Arts Stage founded by Lorenzo Rudolf, was canceled abruptly last year. More “curated event” than fair—galleries are invited to participate, rather than apply—the whole thing is orchestrated by the Singapore Tyler Print Institute (STPI). They love acronyms over there.

The next day, at a chic rooftop lunch for the national arts council at the NGS (National Gallery Singapore)—not to be confused with SAM (Singapore Art Museum), currently under renovation, or the NMS (National Museum of Singapore)—we ate beautiful, minimal, Cantonese dishes with Minister of Culture Grace Fu. Around the table at Yan (one of the NGS’s eleven restaurants) were exhibition-organizers such as Clara Kim from Tate and Centre Pompidou’s Catherine David, co-curator of a show of paintings by Latiff Mohidin, one of Southeast Asia’s leading modernists, at the Pompidou and the NGS. I also spotted Ute Meta Bauer from NTU CCA (Nanyang Technological University’s Center for Contemporary art). As a postprandial indulgence, we toured the Sixth Singapore Biennale, this year fielded by Patrick Flores and six others.



Image: Curators Catherine David and Ute Meta Bauer. Photo: Nicolas Trembley.

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Afterwards, I trailed collector Andreas Teoh to the Arts House, located in the old parliament building, where he had commissioned a transfixing installation by Yinka Shonibare curated by Singaporean Artforumer Zehra Jumabhoy. After taking in the work—a vibrant, melting-pot-take on the gilt bronze Lady Justice atop London's Old Bailey courthouse, featuring Shonibare's hallmark Dutch wax Batik patterns—we had a low-key chicken rice dinner at a street food joint where, alongside Pace's Tamara Corm and Stephen Friedman's Karon Hepburn, the jetlag started to catch up with me.

No rest for the wicked, alas. On Tuesday, London-based architect Simon Heah, whose father built Singapore's first-ever Shangri-La Hotel in 1971, kindly invited me, art advisor Cordula von Keller, and MONAD curator Olivier Varenne for lunch at the lavishly tropical suburban residence of collector and curator Peter Lee. En route back to the center, we stopped at the Goodman Arts center, an "arts hive" managed by the nonprofit AHL (Arts House Limited), which is in turn an affiliate of the NAC (National Arts Council), to visit the studios of young painter Luke Heng and old sculptor Han Sai Por. We didn't have much time: the incognito owner of the DRAT collection, whose holdings span from Picasso to Kusama to Team Lab, had organized a limited-hours viewing in the hypersleek Singapore Freeport, a highly secured depot that's been on the market for four years and boasts a forty-one-yard-long Ron Arad sculpture at its center.



Post-tour, we ate Peranakan cuisine at the famous Violet Oon restaurant at the nearby Changi airport (SIN) in a new, insane terminal by Moshe Safdie—complete with gardens, infinite shops, and rain vortex. Present were artist Minjung Kim; Art India president Sangita Jindal, Alessio Antoniolli from Gasworks, and archeologist Agnes Hsu Tang (also the executive chair of 2020's Art Triennial of Asia in New York). Some of my companions were checking into their flights at the table, already off to Taipei for the city's annual fair.

Image: Artist Yinka Shonibare. Photo: Nicolas Trembley.

While S.E.A Focus, that Wednesday's showcase of contemporary art from Southeast Asia, counted only twenty galleries, its solo shows—Danh Vo at Vitamin creative space, Rirkrit Tiravanija at neugerriemschneider, and Pinaree Sanpitak and Melati Suryodarmo at STPI, the institution helming the fair—didn't fail to impress. The fair unfolds under a tent pitched at Gilman Barracks, a onetime British military camp now home to galleries, restaurants, artist's studios, the Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA), and one of the biennial's many exhibition spaces.

Thursday was a blur: I caught off-site exhibitions like "Emerging," a display of up-and-comers from the mysterious Duo Collection (its owners, much like the entity behind DART, prefer to remain anonymous) at The Private Museum and "Strange Things"—a show of "unfamiliar entities and alien objects" at 2 Cavan Road, a temporary venue in an abandoned shipyard overseen by the Singapore Arts Club. Plus "State of Motion," a program produced by Asian Film Archive and curated by Cheong Kah Kit, Selene Yap, and Tan Guo-Liang at an old depot now reborn as "The Warehouse." It goes without saying that there was no time to shop for the upcoming Chinese New Year (that of the Rat).