



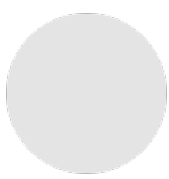
Lifestyle / Arts & Culture

Singapore Art Week a triumph of community spirit after major fair's last-minute cancellation

Pop-up shows arranged at short notice in galleries, studios, offices and private homes filled the gap left by Art Stage Singapore's abrupt axing

Breadth of exhibitions and range of accessible works on show demonstrated that the city's art scene is vibrant and diversified

Topic | Art



**Usha
Chandradas**

Published:
6:26pm, 29
Jan, 2019 ▾



The 2019 edition of Singapore Art Week opened on January 19 with a lot at stake. Art Stage Singapore, the country's biggest contemporary art fair and an anchor event for Art Week, had been [abruptly cancelled](#) [1] just a few days before opening day, upsetting the plans and budgets of the nearly 50 participating galleries and putting the reputation of the government agencies behind it on the line.

While efficient and well-funded, the Singapore visual arts scene is sometimes criticised for its lack of ground-up initiatives. Nonetheless, in the days following Art Stage's cancellation came proof that the community was perfectly capable of galvanising support for alternative exhibitions on the hoof for the galleries and artists affected by riding on an outpouring of support from the general public.

If you're an artist, is it better to work in Hong Kong or Singapore? [2]

There were already a number of events organised in Art Week, such as the first edition of S.E.A. Focus, a boutique art fair featuring 26 galleries that was organised by STPI, a local art institute.

Emi Eu, executive director of STPI, said the new fair at Gillman Barracks, a contemporary arts cluster in Singapore, charged relatively affordable rates for booths, which probably encouraged galleries to show the work of younger and more affordable artists. There was a mix of art by established masters such as Cheong Soo Pieng and bold offerings by newer names such as Indonesia's Octora, Yeo Kaa from the Philippines and Singapore's own Priyageetha Dia. Richard Koh Fine Art sold out its entire booth of works by artist Faris Nakamura.

Yeo Kaa from the Philippines with her work at Yavuz Gallery's booth at S.E.A. Focus. Photo: Usha Chandradas

Samsara II, a print collage with acrylic beads by Indonesian artists Octora, on show during Singapore Art Week. Photo: Gajah Gallery

Bibi Chia, a 37-year-old dietitian and regular art fair-goer, said she found S.E.A. Focus easy to navigate. “Their social media was very informative and I knew exactly which artworks I wanted to see.” She said it was fun to see art collectors “grabbing a hotdog and a cocktail, unlike old-school art fairs where “it’s all champagne, red wine and high heels only”.

It was the large number of pop-up events filling the gap of Art Stage that really showed the sense of community in Singapore’s art world. People with spare space in their galleries, art studios, offices or even private homes answered a social media appeal [3] to help stranded artists and galleries.

Within days, three government agencies which had backed Art Stage came up with a partial rescue plan. The ARTery, initiated by the National Arts Council, the Singapore Tourism Board, the Economic Development Board and educational non-profit Art Outreach, managed to house 14 (largely foreign) galleries at Marina Bay Sands, where Art Stage would have taken place.

The team from Hong Kong’s Blink Gallery, one of the exhibitors housed at pop-up show The ARTery, photographed with visitors from Hong Kong’s Art Development Council. Photo: Blink Gallery

Singapore artist Priyageetha Dia with her artwork Object of Desire, a gold leaf-covered dustbin

Photo: Usha Chandradas

It also mounted a small collector's showcase. Linda Neo and Albert Lim, who loaned works by local artists Robert Zhao Renhui and Boo Sze Yang, said they felt compelled to respond to what they saw as an “urgent call” for support for the local art market.

There was concern that the smaller events and last-minute exhibitions organised by other Art Stage victims would be too spread out and fail to attract attention. Some organisers, at least, said they were happy with the turnout.

The Culture Story, which hosted Austrian artist Hermann Nitsch's debut solo exhibition in Asia, saw strong attendance at a talk organised in conjunction with the show. Similarly, Instinc Space's group exhibition – the appropriately named “Things Fall Together” – enjoyed a solid turnout for its artist talk and opening performance.

Artist Chloe Manasseh's exhibition at Eden Hall, the residence of the British high commissioner, welcomed 250 guests on its opening night and saw significant buying interest. Manasseh's grandfather had been born in the house, and her solo presentation was intimate and personal.

The opening of Instinc Space's group exhibition “Things Fall Together” at Singapore Art Week. Photo: Yeo Shih Yun

Works by Chloe Manasseh on display at Eden Hall as part of Singapore Art Week. Photo: Art Porters Gallery

Urban-art-focused Kult Studio & Gallery saw brisk sales of its street-sign-inspired artwork, displayed in a gritty car park at the Aliwal Urban Art Festival. Over in the industrial wilds of Lavender Street, above a tyre shop, the Sikap group mounted an edgy, self-funded exhibition led by Singapore artist and educator Jeremy Sharma and featuring a number of emerging local artists. Sikap co-founder Zulkhairi Zulkiflee said opening night was packed.

In the end, Singapore Art Week 2019 was a timely reminder that the city's art scene is vibrant and diversified. Art Outreach chairman Mae Anderson summed up the overall sentiment of the week best when she said of The ARTery: "Everyone rolled up their sleeves, and it helped that there was a strong sense of camaraderie, along with a good dose of humour."

The Sikap group mounted an edgy, self-funded exhibition led by Singapore artist and educator Jeremy Sharma and featuring a number of emerging local artists.
Photo: Usha Chandradas

Usha Chandradas is a former tax lawyer in Singapore who co-founded Plural art magazine in 2017, an online platform focused on southeast Asian art. <https://pluralartmag.com> [4]

Source URL: <https://scmp.com/lifestyle/arts-culture/article/2184118/singapore-art-week-triumph-community-spirit-after-major-fairs>

Links

[1] <https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/arts-culture/article/2182303/major-singapore-art-fair-cancels-week-opening-leaving>

[2] <https://www.scmp.com/culture/arts-entertainment/article/2133949/singapore-vs-hong-kong->

artists-rate-them-freedom-cost

[3] [https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/arts-](https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/arts-culture/article/2182641/singapore-sos-exhibitors-cancelled-art-stage-fair-brings)

[culture/article/2182641/singapore-sos-exhibitors-cancelled-](https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/arts-culture/article/2182641/singapore-sos-exhibitors-cancelled-art-stage-fair-brings)

[art-stage-fair-brings](https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/arts-culture/article/2182641/singapore-sos-exhibitors-cancelled-art-stage-fair-brings)

[4] <https://pluralartmag.com/>