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# Art Stage Singapore cancelled for 'commercial reasons'; community steps up

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Koh Mui Fong/TODAY

Artwork on display during Art Stage Singapore 2016. This year's edition of Art Stage Singapore was to have taken place at the Marina Bay Sands convention centre next weekend from Jan 25 to 27 before it was cancelled.

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SINGAPORE — As news of major art fair Art Stage Singapore's shock cancellation sank in on Wednesday (Jan 16), gallerists and other members of the arts community rallied to offer exhibition spaces and other support to affected participants.

Local outfit Plural Art Mag started a Facebook page called "Art Stage SOS" to link the "casualties" of Art Stage Singapore 2019 — such as artists and galleries — with those who had spaces to offer. The page attracted more than 200 members by 11.30pm on Wednesday.



Separately, the authorities said that they were disappointed by the cancellation, which they understood was a commercial decision.

“It is unfortunate that exhibitors, partners and collectors who had planned to take part in the fair will be impacted by this development. We understand that the cancellation is a commercial decision,” the National Arts Council, Singapore Tourism Board and Economic Development Board said in a joint statement.

The three agencies have supported Singapore’s main art fair since its launch in 2011, they said.

This year’s Singapore Art Week — with more than 100 programmes including boutique art fair S.E.A. Focus at Gillman Barracks — will continue as planned, the agencies said.

Art Stage Singapore was to take place at the Marina Bay Sands convention centre next weekend from Jan 25 to 27, but the fair’s president Lorenzo Rudolf announced the cancellation in an email to galleries on Wednesday morning.

“The given circumstances, about which we shortly will inform you, unfortunately leave no other choice,” Mr Rudolf wrote.

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“We ask you to cease all preparations for Art Stage Singapore 2019 from your side as well, or to reverse them. We will soon inform you about the next steps,” he added, apologising for the inconvenience caused.

A total of 45 international and local galleries are affected.

Several of them told TODAY that they were disappointed, but had heard rumours about it in the past week.

The slide in Art Stage Singapore’s fortunes was apparent in recent years, and Mr Rudolf had hinted last year that he could pull the plug on the event.

From 143 booths rented at Art Stage Singapore in 2016, the number dropped to 131 in 2017 and 97 last year.

“Strong economic growth has led to many new galleries and private museums opening in the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand. Everywhere, everywhere, the art scene booms. The only place we have stagnation is Singapore,” the South China Morning Post reported Mr Rudolf as saying last year.

“If the market doesn’t grow, then I will have to reflect on what I do. I sure won’t be sitting here until the end.”

Calls to the Art Stage Singapore on Wednesday were not answered.

### **‘LOSS FOR PUBLIC AND ARTISTS’**

Prices for booths at Art Stage Singapore 2019 ranged from S\$26,250 for a 35sqm booth to S\$67,500 for a 90sqm booth.

Director of South Indian contemporary art gallery Gnani Arts, Mr P Gnana, 48, said that the cancellation was “very terrible”.

“If they had wanted to cancel the fair, they should have informed us earlier and told us not to bring in the art works.”

Mr Gnana said he paid S\$37,450 for a 65sqm booth and an extra S\$12,000 to pack and ship several art pieces from India. He had also forked out the airfare and hotel costs for three Indian artists.

He tried to contact the organisers last week to find out his booth number, only to receive news this morning on the cancellation.

“We are in a panic now and we don’t know what to do... We will talk to the other galleries first. We all want to get our money back, but we are not aware of the legal steps we can take,” he added.

Mr Guillaume Levy-Lambert, the co-founder of Art Porters Gallery, said that the cancellation of Art Stage Singapore was a blow to Singapore’s reputation.

“The announcement has been catastrophic for international galleries. They have had to get air tickets, hotels, ship the art works, but now, they are left stranded,” he said.

“If foreign galleries are affected, it will be hard to get them back to Singapore. It’s a loss for the public and the artists.”

While the Art SG event in November could be an alternative avenue for international galleries to showcase their works, the fallout from Art Stage Singapore could put international galleries off, he added.

Mr Gnana and Mr Levy-Lambert said that they may feature the works brought in for Art Stage Singapore at their galleries.

## LENDING SUPPORT

Among those who offered space for the affected artists and galleries on the Art Stage SOS Facebook page was Singapore art gallery Chan + Hori Contemporary.

Its assistant curator Deborah Lim, 27, said: “We feel that it is time for the art community to step up and offer each other support. Some affected galleries have already done their logistics work. We feel that we should give these art galleries the respect they deserve.”

Two affected parties have contacted her so far, she said.

Ms Lim declined to reveal the rental rates for the gallery’s space, saying they would be in line with the rates charged by the art fair and would take into account the expenses that the galleries had already incurred.

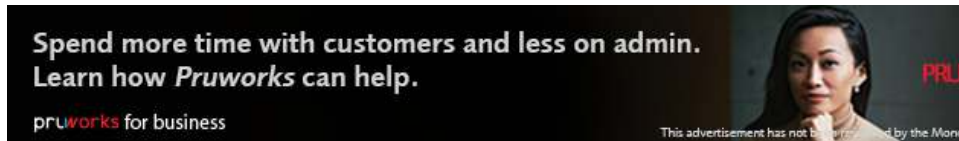
For artist and Coda Culture gallery manager Seelan Palay, 34, the cancellation points to larger issues in Singapore's arts scene.

Mr Palay, who was to participate in Art Stage Singapore for the first time, said: "I personally don't think that the art market here is healthy. We may have many millionaires, but they don't seem interested in collecting art. They appear more interested in property or collecting cars."

He said that he would continue to find spaces and art fairs to display his works.

"Art Stage or no stage, we artists will keep going."

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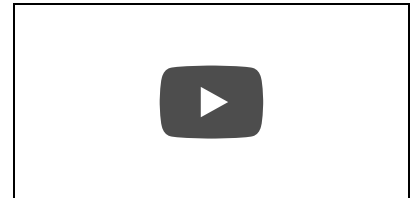
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