

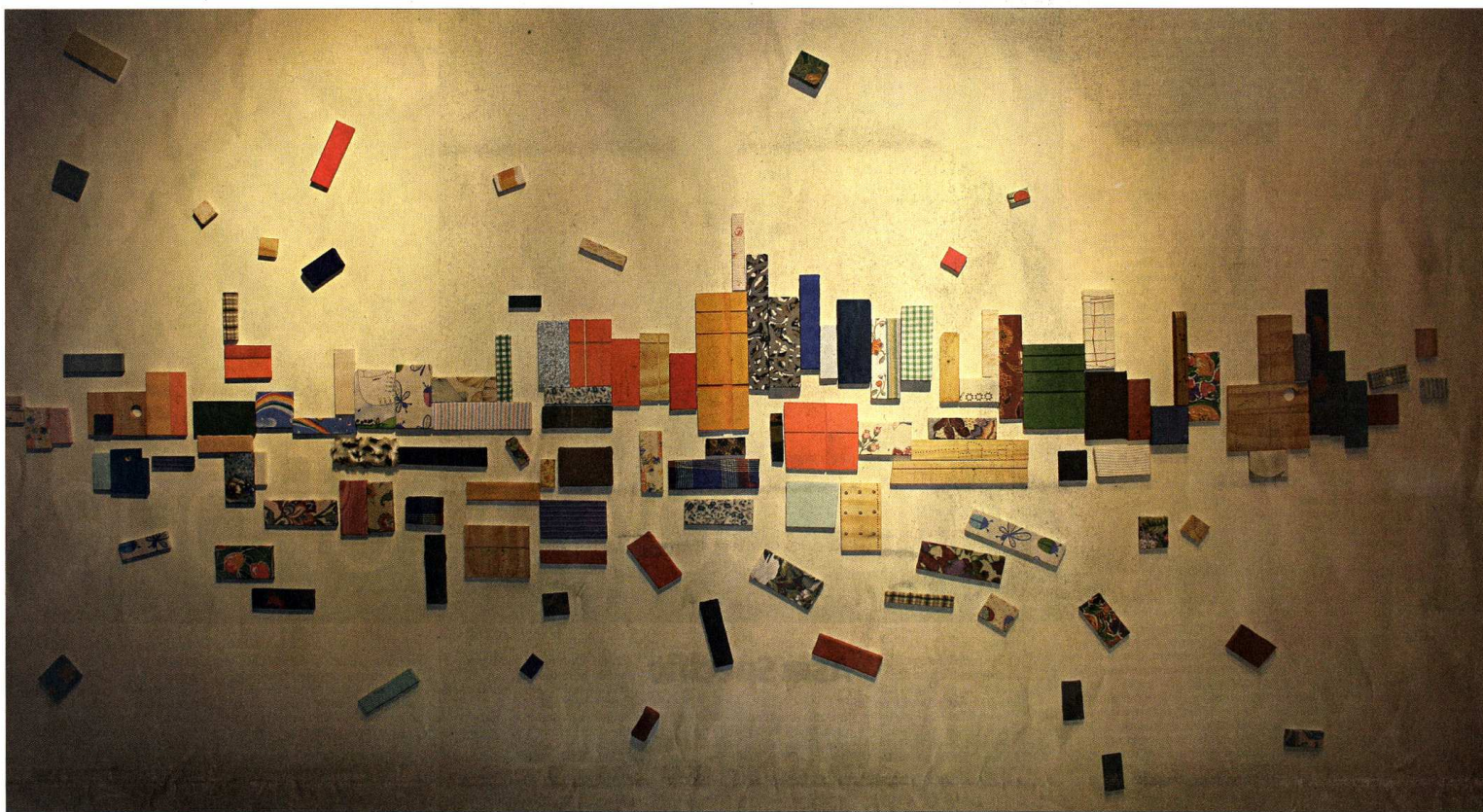


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# Show and tell



A Singapore art event is spreading the word about the next generation of Lion City artists, writes **Clara Chow**

In a little room in the Singapore Art Museum stands a gutted, whitewashed piano. Its keys, wrenched from the busted case, hang by stretched strings from the ceiling. Its reconfigured innards cast film noir-ish shadows on the walls, changing as visitors pull at the strings.

The remains of the instrument are an installation, called *Muted Silence*, by art student Ng Wen Jie. Inspired by British artist Cornelia Parker, the 20-year-old dismantled the piano after becoming frustrated with practising for a music exam.

Ng, an exhibition debutant, is among 60 artists participating in the Singapore Art Exhibition (SAE), a show put together partly through an open call to the island state's visual artists. The event also has a themed section, Imagining the City (comprising works by 20 established artists such as Ong Kim Seng, Chua Ek Kay and Terence Lin), and is a major part of the second Singapore Art Show (SAS), which opened this month to showcase the city's artists. This year's SAS involves more

than 300 Singapore artists, 31 partner programmes and 47 exhibition locations, ranging from galleries to shopping malls, and a disused public swimming pool. The biennial event, organised by the National Arts Council, aims to provide a platform for Singaporean visual art.



**Skin: Intimate Canvas (above) is among the works on show at the SAS**

There have been questions about whether it may be better to merge the art show, which has a budget of S\$1 million (HK\$5.1 million), with the Singapore Biennale, which was launched last year with a budget of up to S\$8 million. But SAS supporters say it offers a unique opportunity for emerging talents to showcase their works.

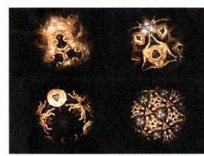
Former fashion designer Jane Lee, 43, now creates mixed-media works that seek to redefine traditional ideas about painting. Her two SAE pieces are front-runners in a poll of viewers for the most popular work. *Purple Drape* hangs like a mantle from the wall, looking more like a piece of fabric than sculpted coats of paint. *Wrap* is a cheery, striped painting wrapped around the corner of a wall.

"My work questions the form of painting," says Lee, who was one of the five artists shown at the inaugural SAS in 2005. "With so many diverse art forms competing against it today, painting has got to find its own meaning beyond telling a story."

Namiko Chan Takahashi works mainly in realist portraiture. *Tribute to Sargent* shows a ballet dancer, in the style of John Singer Sargent's darkly luminous *Portrait of Madame X*. "She's already made a name for herself," says consultant Martin Tran. "And she's actively promoting her works. I'd like to see how she develops from here."

New media gets a look-in at one of the SAS satellite events, called We, at the National University of Singapore's NX Gallery. *No Man's Band*, by sound artist Ang Song Ming, comprises recordings of a secondary school band tuning their instruments before a rehearsal. Despite having the free time to improvise, they don't jam, says curator Heman Chong. "It's revealing of a suppression of individual identity."

Chong discovered 27-year-old Ang through his *Guilt Pleasures* project this year at a fringe festival spearheaded by theatre company the Necessary Stage. Ang had organised what he called a listening party, with people broadcasting cheesy pop songs after talking about their choice. "I thought that really worked because it created a temporary community," says Chong. "There's this sensibility about Ang's work that's not found in other work in the same medium." Performance art has been slowly developing since becoming eligible for government funding in 2003.



**Terence Lin's Spectrum (top) features wooden blocks covered in different materials; viewers of Lynn Lu's Peepshow (above) are forced to contort themselves to see images of two nude women doing yoga**

One of the more promising artists is Lynn Lu, 32, who's studying at Musashino Art University in Tokyo. Her performances—videos of which are on show at SAS—include a 2004 kaleidoscope peepshow, with viewers contorting themselves to peer through a hole at a fragmented, mirrored scene (two nude women practising yoga). Lu has also asked strangers to exchange clothing and

footwear with her in a Bangkok park in 2005—an exercise in "walking in someone else's shoes".

Having studied sculpture at Carnegie Mellon University and new genres at San Francisco Art Institute, Lu began working primarily in performance after moving to Japan in 2003 and became hooked on the immediacy of interacting with an audience.

"I'm interested in finding intuitive ways of articulating the complex, subtle shared human experiences, which fall between the gaps of verbal communication," she says.

The SAS is a launching pad for a diverse range of talent. ArtIt shows that Singapore's artists are becoming increasingly savvy and internationally marketable.

"A number of works in this year's exhibition selection reminded me of works in the Chelsea gallery circuit," says Low Kee Hong, a member of the exhibition's selection panel and general manager of the Singapore Biennale. "Perhaps younger artists are acutely aware of the intimacy of the art market with artistic production." Artist-curator Michael Lee Hong Hwee, 35, says it isn't necessary to create a distinctive Singaporean identity in works by local artists. "Conscious efforts at weaving in local references can be contrived," he says. "Artists should just do their own thing rather than speak on

behalf of the rest of Singapore." Given the government's plans to promote the arts and expose the public to more culture, artists are enjoying greater support and more opportunities than before. Last year, about 660 art exhibitions were mounted.

Still, some artists say that audiences aren't growing fast enough. Tang Ling Nah, 36, is a pharmacist-turned-artist whose booklet of charcoal drawings of

**Artists should just do their own thing rather than speak on behalf of the rest of Singapore**

Michael Lee, artist-curator

empty urban spaces is being distributed in the underground CityLink mall as part of the *You Are Not a Tourist* art project. "We need a stronger local audience who want to visit museums and galleries to appreciate art," Tang says. "And not just concerned with shopping, shopping, shopping and winning contests."

**Singapore Art Show. Ends Oct 8. For programme details, go to [www.singaporeartshow2007.com](http://www.singaporeartshow2007.com)**