

New exhibition tracks the careers of eight young artists



Part of artist and printmaker Zhang Fuming's installation at YTP Reunite 2019. PHOTO: ZHANG FUMING



Toh Wen Li

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SINGAPORE - Before moving to the United States in 2014, light artist Vellachi Ganesan would often go to East Coast Park to watch the sunrise.

Now, she has created an abstract art installation - comprising 17 LED tubes with colour gels in pastel peach, orange, azure blue and pink arranged in horizontal layers- evoking these vivid memories.

"It is a collective of all the sunrises I have seen," says the 33-year-old artist, who is also a professional lighting designer, and an associate instructor at the University of Utah.

Ganesan is one of eight young artists - presenting an installation each - at the Ion Art gallery from Jan 18 to 27.

The exhibition, titled YTP Reunite 2019 is a collection of recent works by artists Alecia Neo, Lavender Chang, Ganesan, Hilmi Johandi, Noor Iskandar, Khin Thethtar Latt, Ezekiel Wong Kel Win and Zhang Fuming.

All held solo shows during the first three editions of the Affordable Art Fair and ION Art's Young Talent Programme, which was launched in 2012 to give young artists born or living in South-east Asia - who do not have gallery representation - a platform to showcase their art.

Every year, 70 to 100 people apply for the programme. Eight are chosen to exhibit their work at the Affordable Art Fair in Singapore, and a final three later embark on a 10-month mentorship programme with veteran curator Seah Tzi-Yan.

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The resulting work is displayed at the Ion Art gallery, as part of a showcase called the Young Talent Programme Winners' Solo Exhibitions.

Now, seven years after the launch of the programme, the organisers felt the time was right to hold an exhibition where they could look at how far the artists have come, says curator Seah Tzi-Yan.

All the works are for sale.

"The programme has become a launchpad for the artists involved... they get picked up quite quickly by galleries and museums after this," adds Ms Seah, who is the director of the arts training and outreach company T.H.E.O. Arts Professionals.

Some artists say the programme raised their profile, and gave them the space to realise their creative vision in a nurturing environment.

Having a larger gallery space for their work - and not just three or four walls - encouraged them to "dream big", says artist and printmaker Zhang, 29.

His installation at Reunite, which features ladders, interrogates the idea of what success means.

These ladders - made from red masking tape, as well as plywood covered with gold paint - appear against a backdrop of charcoal drawings and prints on paper. They look rough-cut or flimsy on closer examination - alluding to the false impressions people might have about success.

"In the modern world, what defines us is our occupations... and there are certain stereotypes involved," says Zhang, who also works as a courier with food delivery company Foodpanda.

In the years since they took part in the programme, Neo and Hilmi have received the Young Artist Award - Singapore's highest award for art practitioners aged 35 and below.

As part of Reunite, Neo will present a video as well as several kites bearing images of caregivers and their loved ones performing various gestures.

The idea is to highlight the contributions and needs of those who care for people with mental illness - both from her project *Between Earth And Sky*, shown at the Objectifs arts space last year (2018).

Hilmi's showcase will feature dreamy visions of Singapore's old amusement parks, part of his President's Young Talents 2018 installation at the Singapore Art Museum.

The humble beansprout, meanwhile, looms large in a series of photographic diptychs by conceptual artist Lavender Chang first shown at the Alliance Francaise in 2016.

Chang, 35, planted beans - such as green beans, kidney beans, and lentils imported from other countries - near the pedestrian paths of neighbourhoods in Toa Payoh, Marine Parade, Katong, Clementi and Bedok, where she used to live.

The piece of work is about "searching for a sense of belonging, and the feeling of an outsider wanting to be an insider", says the Taiwan-born artist.

Ms Yeo Mui Hong, chief executive of Orchard Turn Developments which manages Ion Art, says: "It is heartening to know that our platform has enabled participants to push their creative boundaries and create a name for themselves, from partnerships with art galleries and museums, to winning awards, in Singapore and abroad."

Meanwhile, Mr Alan Koh, the fair director of the Affordable Art Fair, says the upcoming exhibition "recognises the significance of early engagement with these young artists and the benefits of the framework provided by the programme".

Ms Seah, the curator, adds: "The attrition of artists is a problem in Singapore - it's not an easy career path. I hope this encourages artists to keep plugging on."

BOOK IT/ YTP REUNITE 2019

WHERE: ION Art, ION Orchard level 4, 2 Orchard Turn

WHEN: Jan 18 to 27; daily from 10am to 10pm. Artists Talk: *Where I've Been*, an event featuring Alecia Neo, Lavender Chang, Hilmi Johandi, Noor Iskandar, and Zhang Fuming, will be held at the gallery on Jan 22, at 7.30pm

ADMISSION: Free

INFO: <https://affordableartfair.com/fairs/singapore/young-talent-programme>

BOOK IT/ ZHANG FUMING AND DRAWING PEOPLE

WHERE: ION Art, ION Orchard level 4, 2 Orchard Turn

WHEN: Jan 19, 3pm to 4pm

ADMISSION: Free

INFO: A charcoal drawing workshop where Zhang will teach the public how to draw people.

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