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SINGAPORE
BIENNALE
2013
IF THE
WORLD
CHANGED
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Education Kit
Artist Folios

Angie Seah
(Singapore)

How to use this artist folio

This artist folio contains information about the featured artists in the Singapore Biennale 2013, their artworks as well as artistic processes, to let visitors have a better understanding and appreciation of the artworks displayed.

Questions and activities found at the back of the folio are meant for visitors to have a deeper engagement with the artworks. The questions can be used for discussions when looking at the featured artwork, while the suggested activities are for educators or parents to conduct with students or children for further exploration beyond the visit.

The suggested reading and viewing lists also provide more information about the artist's practice, artwork themes and related ideas or issues, which helps educators and readers make connections and relate them to their daily life.

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Singapore Biennale 2013

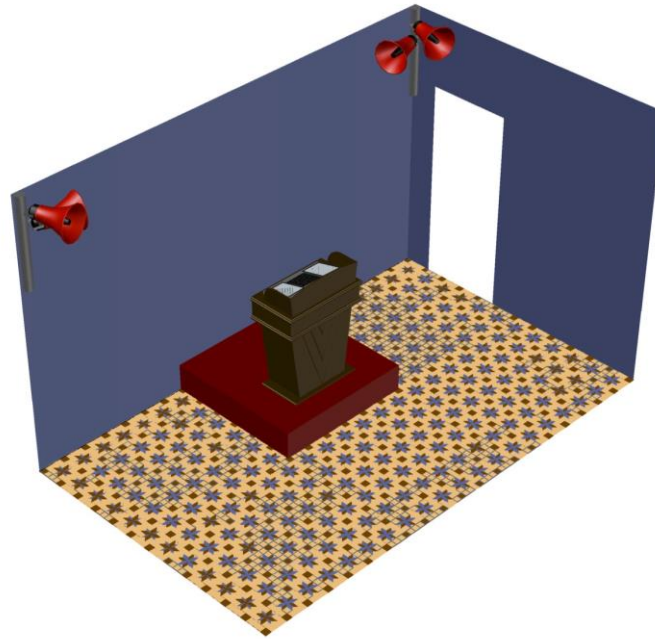
If the World Changed...

The Southeast Asian region has historically been the corridor of the major civilisations, as well as a place of cultural interactions. Within this fluid region, many individuals and populations inhabit different societies, from agrarian communities, coastal settlements, to urban metropolises.

21st century Asia, and particularly Southeast Asia, is an increasingly active participant in current global movements. These global happenings and changes have brought up localised responses to issues of land, water, borders, resources, memory and identity, among others. However, the experiences of change have also been uneven and varied across the region. Against this backdrop of past and continuous change, a multiplicity of responses has emerged from Southeast Asia, including large-scale activism, invitations for open dialogue and personal philosophical meditations, all of which can be seen in the Singapore Biennale 2013 (SB 2013).

The theme of SB 2013, **"If the World Changed"**, is an invitation to reconsider the world we live in, and the worlds we want to live in.

The artwork



Conducting Memories (artist impression)

Angie Seah

2013

Multimedia installation

Dimensions variable

Collection of the Artist

Singapore Biennale 2013 commission

Image courtesy of the Artist

About the artwork

Sound can be a powerful medium for evoking memories, and the sounds of Singapore are captured and presented through Angie Seah's interactive installation for SB 2013. Her work, *Conducting Memories*, presents memories of her home country through the use of pre-programmed sound clips that are **aural vignettes** of everyday life in Singapore.

The artist describes her installation, "The sound imagines the site. It elaborates on the invisible. It presents time in the density of visions". Rather than using visual images, she draws on the voices, music and noises from nature and the surroundings as an **auditory scrapbook**. Not only does Seah's work record the past and present, but it also lay out hope for the future by presenting sounds of promise.

Sounds from the past include clips from local advertisements, television shows and former government campaigns, such as the "Speak Mandarin" campaign of the 1990s. The present is captured through announcements from train services, whizzing airplanes on National Day and a cheering New Year's countdown. The years to come are **illustrated** through sounds such as the cries of a newborn baby, the noise of buildings being torn down, and non-native speakers conversing in Mandarin.

Conducting Memories is an interactive artwork where visitors are invited to create and conduct their own memories through their choice of sounds. By following the instructions provided, visitors can **formulate** their own **composition** by pushing the buttons on the console, creating their own **symphony** of memories with their sound selection.

Artistic process

Angie Seah describes her SB 2013 work as “a site of cultural **displacement** as well as a living **archive**”. This accurately demonstrates her perception of present-day Singapore, which has experienced vast and rapid changes over the years. By recording and presenting the familiar sounds of daily life in Singapore, *Conducting Memories* holds the hopes for the future of tomorrow and serves as a way to **preserve** the culture of Singapore for generations to come.

The artist explains, “Technology presents us with a promise of record-keeping, of retaining memory, and the privilege of truth. These records are fragments of the past and visions for the unknown future. It gathers sound and speech as a commentary...it is important as cultural memory”. Obtaining archival sound clips from the National Archives of Singapore, National Library and National Museum of Singapore, with funding from the National Heritage Board, Seah’s ties with institutions focusing on the preservation and cultural development of Singapore’s heritage and knowledge in her work exemplifies her intentions.

Seah shares, “The liquid of the present originates in the **dialogue** with the past, which we help to dissolve into the future”. The use of technology can be used to preserve or erase a memory. By creating this interactive dialogue with museum visitors through the use of audio and technology, she literally puts the sound of the future in the hands of Singaporeans.

About the artist

Singaporean artist Angie Seah received her Bachelor of Arts in Sculpture from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Melbourne, Australia in 2000. She continued her studies in art as she received a culture scholarship from the Goethe Institute, Berlin, Germany in 2005. In addition to exhibiting her works both locally and internationally, Seah has also taken part in various artist residencies in Switzerland, Indonesia, Belgium and Romania.

A multidisciplinary artist, Seah has worked with mediums of drawing, installation, performance, sculpture and sound art, with a focus on vocal sounds. Her work often speaks of the human condition as it comments upon the social environment of today. She has also participated in performance art festivals across Europe and Asia, including those in the Philippines, Singapore, Belgium and Sweden.

In recent years, Seah has also been actively in community art projects, conducting workshops for the community including those for families, underprivileged children and the elderly.

Discussion time

- *Conducting Memories* is an interactive artwork that requires your participation. Follow the instructions provided for the artwork and press the buttons on the console. What do you hear? Do you recognise the sounds? What do you think these sounds are?
- Different sounds can make you think of different past events and memories. As you are pressing the buttons and listening to the sounds they play, what kind of memories come to your mind when you hear those particular sounds? What do these individual sounds make you think of?
- Visitors are encouraged to create their own composition of sounds and memories with the audio clips available in this artwork. Think of a special memory in your mind – it could be the best birthday party you have had or the time you won first prize in a sports meet. What kind of sounds would that memory have? Experiment with the buttons to create your own unique medley.
- Listen to the composition of sounds that your friends or family have created. In what ways are they similar or different from your own composition? Why do you think they chose those particular sounds, and what do those sounds say about them?
- The artist has differentiated the sounds available as sounds of the past, the present and the future. Do you think the same sounds could represent the past, present and future of other countries? Listen to the installation again and decide which sounds might be unique to Singapore alone.
- In addition to recording sounds of yesterday and today, how else might you use technology to preserve the memories of Singapore's past? In your opinion, is it important to preserve such memories? Why do you say so?
- This installation requires the visitors to participate and engage with the artwork. Would this artwork have the same effect if the audience are not allowed to interact with it? What do the interactive and participatory aspects of this work tell you about the importance of the role of the audience in contemporary art?
- Compared to painting and sculpture, sound as a medium is less common. Yet it is an element that is an integral part of our everyday lives. What do you think the artist is trying to do when she uses sound as the key medium in her work? What can sound as a medium reveal that other mediums cannot?

Suggested activities

- What are some of your favourite sounds? Make a collection of your favourite sounds – it could be the sound of your mother cooking in the kitchen, or the sound of your pet dog barking excitedly. Share your collection with your friends and family – are they able to guess what those sounds are? Get them to participate in this activity as well!
- Do you agree that the sounds Angie Seah has chosen to represent the present accurately depicts Singapore today? What sounds might you add to those listed for the present day? Search your community and your own home for sounds you think accurately represent Singapore today. Record these few sounds and share them with the class. Discuss why you feel these sounds might symbolise what is important in Singapore today.
- The artist sees her artwork, *Conducting Memories*, as a way to preserve the culture of Singapore for generations to come. Within your class, think about what makes up the culture of Singapore. Is it the food, the people, the festivals or the language? How can you preserve this unique, Singaporean culture?
- Rather than remembering just in sounds, consider what images illustrate the history of Singapore you have experienced. Create a visual scrapbook remembering significant places and sights you have seen in your country and neighbourhood. Compile them together and create a scrapbook to share with your friends and family.
- View the website <http://www.singaporememory.sg/clusters> and decide which memories might be similar or different from your own. Have you had memorable experiences in the same places or events? You can try adding your commentary on selected images or your own memories to the page if you want.
- If sounds could be interpreted as visual images, how would your favourite sounds look like, visually? Create an artwork that visualises your favourite sounds in the most creative way as you can. Consider the mood and emotions evoked by those sounds, and share your completed artwork with your friends and family.

Glossary

aural

relating to the ear or sense of hearing

vignettes

a brief evocative description, account, or episode

auditory

relating to the sense of hearing

scrapbook

a book of blank pages for sticking cuttings, drawings, or pictures in

illustrated

explain or make (something) clear by using examples, charts, pictures, etc.

formulate

create or prepare methodically

composition

a creative work, especially a poem or piece of music

symphony

an elaborate musical composition

displacement

the action of moving something from its place or position

archive

a collection of historical documents or records

preserve

maintain (something) in its original or existing state

dialogue

a conversation between two or more people

Further reading

Angie Seah's Blog

<http://angieseah.wordpress.com>

Website showing collected images recording personal memories of events and places in Singapore

<http://www.singaporememory.sg/clusters>

Website showing personal stories contributed by local citizens about their memories in Singapore

<http://www.iremember.sg/>

Website of The National Archives of Singapore offering a wide selection of images related to Singapore's national history

<http://www.nas.gov.sg/>

Website showing a white paper on sound art in public spaces

[White Paper: Sound Art in Public Spaces by Charlie Morrow](#)

Book on the history and varieties of sound art

[Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art by Brandon LaBelle](#)

Further viewing

Angie Seah's video channel

[Angie Seah](#)

<http://vimeo.com/angiesimplicity>

Video on the *Sounding Motion* project by Angie Seah and Zai Tang

[Community Arts Project Series 2 – Sounding Motion by Angie Seah with Zai Tang](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMSoCQnS5kw>

Video of Angie Seah's performance at the Performance Art Meeting at Galeria Labirynt, Lublin

[Angie Seah – Performance art meeting, Galeria Labirynt, Noc Kultury 2012](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcO53Hsmdpg>

Talk by artist-technologist Honor Harger on the sounds of the universe

[Honor Harger: A History of the Universe in Sound](#)

http://www.ted.com/talks/honor_harger_a_history_of_the_universe_in_sound.html

Annex: The Singapore Biennale

About the Singapore Biennale

The Singapore Biennale was established in 2006 as the country's pre-eminent platform for international dialogue in contemporary art. It places Singapore's artists within a global context, and fosters collaborations with the international arts community. The Biennale provides new opportunities for local visual artists, arts organisations and businesses, cultivating deeper public engagement with the arts and enhancing Singapore's international profile as a vibrant city in which to live, work and play. The 2006 and 2008 editions of the Biennale were organised by the National Arts Council. As with the 2011 edition, Singapore Biennale 2013 is organised by the Singapore Art Museum of the National Heritage Board, and supported by the National Arts Council.

About the Singapore Art Museum

The Singapore Art Museum (SAM) advocates and presents contemporary art practices of Singapore, Southeast Asian and the Asian region. Since 2009, SAM has focused its programming and collections around contemporary Southeast Asian art and art practices, and has built up one of the most important collections of contemporary art from the region. Through strategic alliances with arts and cultural institutions and community organisations, SAM facilitates visual arts education, exchange, research and development within the region and internationally. SAM is also organiser of the Singapore Biennale 2013 and the past edition in 2011.

About the National Arts Council, Singapore

NAC was set up to spearhead the development of the arts in Singapore while advancing the country's aspiration to be a distinctive global city for the arts. NAC's mission is to nurture the arts and make Singapore's rich and diverse culture an integral part of people's lives. Anchored on the twin strategies of excellence and engagement in the arts, NAC aims to build a vibrant arts sector by creating a conducive environment where the arts is accessible to all, and artistic talents have the necessary resources and capabilities to excel and achieve long-term sustainability.