

For immediate release

NUS Museum wins inaugural award for innovative museological practice

International Committee of University Museums and Collections recognizes efforts to facilitate conversation between audiences and exhibitions



Associate Professor Peter Pang, Associate Provost (Student Life), NUS, accepting the award from UMAC Chair Professor Hugues Dreysse at NUS Museum, 10 May 2016.

SINGAPORE, 10 May 2016 – NUS Museum’s *prep-room* is the first recipient of the University Museums and Collections (UMAC) Award for the most significant innovation or practice that has proved successful in a university museum or collection.

Initiated in 2011, the *prep-room* is conceived as a means of exploring curatorial methods, developing content and scope and seeking audience participation in the lead-up to projects such as exhibitions and programmes. Employing mostly archival materials, curators present content, curatorial experiments and design ideas in an open gallery, inviting visitors to observe the exhibition-making process, engage with content, and potentially begin a long-term interest in the project. Since 2011, a total of ten projects have been incubated as *prep-rooms* at the Museum.

Professor Hugues Dreysse, Chairman of UMAC, shares, “The Board (of UMAC) salutes the museum’s understanding of the basic principle of creating a contact between the audience and the museum, the creative approach to discussion between researchers, interns, artists and the public and the ease of adapting the idea to other museums.”

In 2011, NUS Museum developed the notion of the *prep-room* from the museum’s work with archival materials and methods. With an interest in the Raffles Lighthouse, located on Pulau Satumu (Singapore), curators and collaborators spent eight months sourcing, categorizing and visually mapping archival materials ranging from 15th century cartographic maps to 19th century governmental declarations. The materials and methods revealed rich artistic, exhibitionary and educational potentials. This inaugural *Raffles Light prep-room* later developed into a long term collaboration with Singaporean artist Charles Lim Yi Yong, resulting in three exhibitions: *In Search of Raffles’ Light: An Art Project with Charles Lim* (NUS Museum, 20 November 2013 - 27 April 2014), *SAFE SEA* (National Museum of Singapore, 18 - 27 July 2014) and *SEA STATE 8 seabook | An Art Project by Charles Lim* (National Library of Singapore, 16 January - 19 July 2015).

(More information on the *prep-room* and its conception in [Annex A](#))

“In the *prep-room*, internships, mentorships and encounters bridge knowledges, disciplines, experiences, and even sensibilities in the hope of producing something surprising. Creating diverse sites of learning and means of accessing the processes of exhibition-making, the *prep-room* is an effort toward dispelling traditional understandings and practices of museum engagement,” says Ahmad Mashadi, Head of NUS Museum.

Two projects currently incubated as prep-rooms, *OPEN EXCESS* and *CONCRETE ISLAND*, have involved a wide range of collaborators ranging from researchers, artists, and students to members of the public. *OPEN EXCESS* probes the immense book donation in 2014 by eminent local art historian TK Sabapathy. As part of a broader investigation into Southeast Asian art history, one of Sabapathy’s key research interests, a writing project invites contributions from members of the public. The *prep-room* for *CONCRETE ISLAND*, a project considering the metaphor of Singapore as a ‘concrete island’, has led to the development of multiple programmes, exhibitions as well as a publication reader, involving contributors including curators, poets, artists, filmmakers, writers and academics.

Sharon Tan, Director of NUS Centre For the Arts comments, “This award recognizes the NUS Museum’s commitment to collaboration, education and innovation within the University. The *prep-room*, a space dedicated to sustained engagement between curator, students and other collaborators, is an undertaking that facilitates fresh ways of thinking and engagement that are consistent with the university’s aim of providing transformative experiences to students.”

On behalf of the University, Associate Professor Peter Pang, Associate Provost (Student Life), accepted the award from UMAC Chair Professor Hugues Dreyssé on 10 May 2016 at the NUS Museum. An award presentation is also slated for July in Milan, Italy at the 24th International Council of Museums General Conference.

For more information about the museum, media interviews, gallery tours or high resolution images, please contact:

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Annexes:

- Annex A: About the *prep-room*
- Annex B: About NUS Museum
- Annex C: About NUS Centre For the Arts
- Annex D: About the International Council of Museums (ICOM)
- Annex E: About the International Committee of University Museums and Collections (UMAC)

Annex A: About the *prep-room*



Gallery impression of Raffles Lighthouse *prep-room*, July 20, 2011, NUS Museum

The *prep-room* is a fluid, temporal and dialogic space, conceived as a site for the exploration of curatorial methods and research. Materials and traces accumulated over time will not necessarily amount to an eventual exhibition at the NUS Museum; the aim is to attend to a mode of research which is not immediately tied to an end goal in mind. Research, therefore, entails a certain sense of unknowing, of chance discoveries pursued in earnest, but also a constant push towards the possibilities of failure. To that end, the *prep-room* is a space where things may or may not happen.

The inaugural *prep-room*, launched in 2011, focused on the Raffles Lighthouse, a site located off the Singaporean mainland, on Pulau Satumu. The curator of the project, Shabbir Hussain Mustafa, and research collaborator Fiona Tan worked together in the space to bring together archival materials on the lighthouse, sourced through public archives and libraries. The materials ranged from 15th century cartographic maps to 19th century governmental declarations, visual materials and more contemporary extracts from the public archives. Over time, they were clustered into seven broad categories with accompanying source information and annotations, and were also visually mapped onto a magnetic chalkboard (specially installed to facilitate *prep-room* projects housed in the gallery). The volume and complexity of materials amassed potentiated the artistic and educational projects that could be created around it. Stationery such as chalk, pens, post-it pads, and a guest book was also provided for visitors to note down their reactions, suggestions and reflections of the project.

More information on the *prep-room* and its associated projects may be found on the NUS Museum blog: <http://nuseum.blogspot.sg/search/label/Prep-Room>

Annex B: About NUS Museum

NUS MUSEUM

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NUS Museum is a comprehensive museum for teaching and research. It focuses on Asian regional art and culture, and seeks to create an enriching experience through its collections and exhibitions. The Museum has over 8,000 artefacts and artworks divided across four collections. The Lee Kong Chian Collection consists of a wide representation of Chinese materials from ancient to contemporary art; the South and Southeast Asian Collection holds a range of works from Indian classical sculptures to modern pieces; and the Ng Eng Teng Collection is a donation from the late Singapore sculptor and Cultural Medallion recipient. A fourth collection, the Straits Chinese Collection, is located at NUS Baba House at 157 Neil Road. NUS Museum is an institution of NUS Centre For the Arts.

10am–7.30pm (Tuesdays–Fridays)
10am–6pm (Saturdays & Sundays)
Closed on Mondays & Public Holidays
Free Admission

B: nusmuseum.blogspot.com
F: facebook.com/nusmuseum
T: twitter.com/nusmuseum

Annex C: About NUS Centre For the Arts

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Established in 1993, NUS Centre For the Arts (CFA) is a vibrant space for the appreciation of the arts and nurturing of the creative and inquiring spirit. It supports student engagement with the arts and the integration of the arts into the life of the University.

NUS CFA encompasses the NUS Museum, NUS Baba House and a Talent and Development arm that oversees 22 student arts excellence groups. Through its myriad of programmes, practices, exhibitions, workshops and outreach, such as NUS Arts Festival and the ExxonMobil Campus Concerts, the Centre enhances and augments the university experience and contributes to the building of knowledge and transformation of students.

CFA also manages facilities such as the University Cultural Centre, with its 1600-seat Hall and 450-seat Theatre, and rehearsal spaces in Runme Shaw CFA Studios and University Town.

Annex D: About the International Council of Museums (ICOM)

ICOM is the only international organisation representing museums and museum professionals.

Since 1946, ICOM has assisted members of the museum community in their mission to preserve, conserve and share cultural heritage. ICOM also takes advice from institutional partners to achieve its objectives.

ICOM is governed in an inclusive and hierarchical manner, on an international level. The organisation gathers more than 35,000 members and is made up of National Committees, which represent 136 countries and territories, and International Committees, which gather experts in museum specialties worldwide. The ICOM Secretariat is situated at UNESCO House, Paris, France.

Annex E: About the International Committee of University Museums and Collections (UMAC)

Founded in 2001, UMAC is one of the specialised committees of ICOM. UMAC is a forum for all those working in, or associated with, academic museums, galleries and collections (including herbaria and botanical gardens). UMAC is concerned with the role of collections within higher education institutions and the communities they serve. It provides its members with a forum to identify partnership opportunities concerning the resources in the collections, to share knowledge and experience, and to enhance access to the collections. The aim is to protect the heritage in the care of universities. UMAC communicates with its members and when required, advises ICOM and other professional bodies on matters within its jurisdiction. It currently has 311 members in 56 countries and regions.

NUS Museum is the only Singaporean member of UMAC. In 2012, the museum hosted the 12th Annual UMAC Meeting, held for the first time in Southeast Asia.