



CCA launches its artist residency programme at Gillman Barracks

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AUGUST 16, 2014

The inaugural batch of 18 includes Singapore-based artists and beyond

SINGAPORE — For the past 20 years, artist and archivist Koh Nguang How's HDB flat has also been his art studio. It's not a mean feat, considering he works with boxes and boxes of newspapers and archival materials.



Singaporean artist Koh Nguang How in his studio space. Photo: Koh Nguang How

"I wake up and I have to manoeuvre around everything," he joked.

However, space won't be an issue for Koh until the end of next month. He is part of the first batch of 18 artists chosen under the Centre for Contemporary Art's (CCA) inaugural Residencies programme. (In a separate collaboration with CCA, art group Post-Museum has also recently set up a pop-up art space at Gillman Barracks.)

Seven studio spaces at Gillman Barracks are open up for artist residencies, which can last from two months to a year. All will be occupied at any given time, with three studios reserved for Singapore-based artists (the remaining spaces are allotted for those from South-east Asia and beyond). Along with Koh, this first batch includes Singaporeans Charles Lim, Ana Prvacki (who shares her studio with husband, American artist Sam Durant) and Cultural Medallion recipient Lee Wen' as well as Vietnam's Tiffany Chung and Romania's Mona Vatamanu and Florin Tudor.

Others are slated to move in early next year, including Singapore's Bani Haykal, and Yee I-Lann and Simryn Gill from Malaysia. The residencies form an integral part in the CCA's programme, which also includes exhibitions and public engagement events. Its presence is there as a "contribution to knowledge production," said the centre's founding director Ute Meta Bauer.

The chosen artists are primarily there to make work or conduct research, or they can open their studios to the public. That is what Koh has done for his site-specific Singapore Art

Archive Project, an informal resource centre open to visitors with an extensive selection of sound recordings of arts performances, videos, photographs and posters, with some artefacts dating to the 1920s.

“So far, I’ve had students, writers, lecturers coming in. Visitors can treat it like a real archive,” he said of his material at CCA, which is a fraction of what he still has at home.

For Prvacki, the residency has been a way of reconnecting with Singapore after being away for five years. She’s currently working on three consecutive projects, including a recently finished video piece which will find its way to a show by LASALLE College of the Arts alumni later this year. The artist is also thinking of doing a new video with T’ang Quartet, with whom she collaborated in 2006.

Another artist-in-residence that has been keeping busy is the Vietnam-based Chung. One of her ongoing projects is about the French colonial legacy in Indochina and she’s currently looking at the English counterpart in the former Straits Settlements (on her wall are old aerial maps of Singapore from the 1890s). At the same time, she is working on another project on the current Syrian crisis, which will be shown in Milan next month.

There are some benefits to having a fellow artists-in-residence next door. Chung found out about a former Vietnamese refugee camp in Singapore from Koh, who’ll be taking her to look at the site. “These research-based residencies is very relevant (to my practice). Not all artists simply paint,” she said.