When Justin Chin died on Christmas Eve last year, all the obituaries described him as a San Francisco poet. This was only right as the city was his adopted home for 25 years. A few obituaries mentioned that he was born in Malaysia. None said anything about his schooling in Singapore, from the age of 6 to 18, formative years for a writer. I found it out by chance from an on-line comment left by Hossan Leong, a well-known Singaporean comedian and a classmate of Chin's.

This is but one of numerous personal and literary ties between Singapore and the United States that this festival hopes to discover, cultivate, and celebrate. A group of Singaporean creatives who call New York City home, we started the festival two years ago to introduce Singapore literature to New Yorkers. This year, we bring Singaporean and American authors and audiences together for in-depth conversations about literature and society, in the belief that such intercultural dialogues are vitally necessary and mutually enlightening. They give real substance to formal ties.

To mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Singapore and the United States, Singapore’s Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong made a state visit to the White House in August. During his visit, he pressed President Obama on trade agreements. We wished President Obama had pressed him on human rights. At this festival, we certainly hope that authors and audiences will engage one another more deeply, less strategically, in a spirit of open-hearted inquiry. To this end, we have provided excerpts from the authors’ works in this program for your reading pleasure.

The festival theme “Singapore Unbound” is about all of the above: authors speaking in person; intercultural dialogues; and human rights, including the freedom of expression. Reading and writing literature are acts of liberation, from egotism, parochialism, and oppression. Justin Chin knew this very well:

Growing up in an atmosphere of censorship and repression, where one generation who learns to keep silent and play safe passes those fears on to the next generation and the next, takes its toll; it does what it’s supposed to do. Writing is an ongoing risk. And it is a risk that I take on, maybe because I know no better way to make sense of this mud of life. Every day I have to fight my feelings that what I do is trivial, frivolous, and meaningless. And in the dustbin of my history, when all is decaying and rotted, composting to bits, whether my work survives after me, or even survives the next few years, will remain to be seen. What I know is what this work did. It gave me the courage to speak, and to find some semblance of myself worth the words. And that act has in no small way loosened the straps on that old muzzle made in the government store and sent to every home and every parent who willingly, or perhaps not so willingly, put it on themselves and their children, and their children after that.

Singapore Unbound is also the name of the literary non-profit we are launching at this festival. It will integrate and enhance all our efforts to promote cultural exchange, including the Second Saturdays Reading Series, a monthly salon held in different homes around the city for the reading of Singaporean and American literatures. You may read about this exciting new venture on page 22. We count on your support.

I want to express my deepest thanks to our co-presenters and sponsors. You enabled us to keep the festival independent. My heartfelt appreciation to the festival team. Thank you for being innovative, collaborative, and generous. And to you, the audience, we appreciate your presence very much. You inspire us in your belief that literature matters.

Jee Leong Koh
Organizer, Singapore Literature Festival in NYC
singaporeliteraturefestival.com
**LITTLE RED DOT: SINGAPOREAN WRITERS ON LITERATURE AND POLITICS**

Alfian Sa’at
Jeremy Tiang
Ovidia Yu
Moderated by E.K. Tan

Wednesday, September 28, 2016
1:00 – 2:20 pm
Stony Brook University,
Humanities 1006,
Stony Brook, NY

Award-winning authors Alfian Sa’at, Jeremy Tiang, and Ovidia Yu read their works and discuss how politics shape their writing, and how their writing, in turn, aims to shape politics. Writers of fiction, drama, poetry, children’s literature, and crime stories, they explore the possibilities in different genres for social commentary and action. Book signing after the event. Free and open to the public.

**IN)VISIBILITIES: SINGAPOREAN AND AMERICAN WRITERS ON RACE AND SEX**

Alfian Sa’at
Jason Koo
Naomi Jackson
Ovidia Yu
Moderated by Jennifer Hayashida

Wednesday, September 28, 2016
7:00 – 9:00 pm
Asian American Writers’ Workshop
112 W 27th St,
bet. 6th and 7th Avenues, #600,
New York, NY

The event is co-presented by Hunter College’s English Department and Asian American Studies Program.

Racial/ethnic identifications are seen as visible, whereas sexual preferences are deemed otherwise. How do writers make visible, or not, such identifications and preferences, and why do they do so? Award-winning authors Alfian Sa’at and Ovidia Yu from Singapore are joined by their American counterparts Jason Koo and Naomi Jackson in a reading of their works (fiction, drama, and poetry) and a discussion of the topic of (in)visibilities. Book signing after the event. Free but open only to Adelphi faculty, staff, and students.

**MIXING IT UP: HYBRID LITERATURE IN SINGAPORE TODAY**

Alfian Sa’at
Jason Wee
Jeremy Tiang
Ovidia Yu
Moderated by Martha Cooley & Craig Carson

Thursday, September 29, 2016
3:00 – 4:30 pm
Adelphi University,
University Center Rooms 215/216,
Garden City, NY

What is a ‘hybrid’ work of literature? Is hybridity a mode of the imagination, a kind of literary practice, an aesthetic orientation, something else? How does it fare in the current Singaporean political climate? What role does Singlish play? This event is a part of the Soapbox Series roundtable discussions. Book signing after the event. Free but open only to Adelphi faculty, staff, and students.

**CROSSING BOUNDARIES: FOUR WRITERS ON FICTIONALIZING SOUTHEAST ASIA**

Alfian Sa’at
Gina Apostol
Jeremy Tiang
Jessica Hagedorn
Moderated by Harold Augenbraum

Thursday, September 29, 2016
7:00 – 8:30 pm
Asia Society
725 Park Avenue, at 70th Street,
New York, NY

Maritime Southeast Asia—comprising Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore—is an extremely heterogeneous region, by virtue of its geography and history. In the ordinary course of living, its peoples cross all kinds of boundaries: political, economic, cultural, linguistic, and even psychic. The region presents unique challenges to the imaginative writer. What constitutes a boundary? How is a boundary negotiated or broken? When does a crossing become a kind of double crossing? Are boundaries, in fact, enfranchising? Four award-winning writers will read their works and discuss their responses to the challenges, Jessica Hagedorn and Gina Apostol on the Philippines, and Alfian Sa’at and Jeremy Tiang on Singapore. Wine reception and book signing after the event. Free and open to the public. Registration highly recommended.
CONTEXTS AND TEXTS: WRITING AND TRANSLATING IN MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE

Alfian Sa’at
E.K. Tan
Jeremy Tiang
Sheela Jane Menon
Moderated by Jini Kim Watson

Friday, September 30, 2016,
12:30 – 2:30 pm
New York University
The Event Space, 1st Floor,
244 Greene Street, New York, NY

The event is co-presented by Professor Jini Kim Watson and New York University’s English Department.

What are the debates surrounding the writing and translation of literature in multi-lingual Malaysia and Singapore, two countries closely linked through history and geography? How do these debates inform actual and specific translation practices and texts? Scholars of Southeast Asian literature Sheela Jane Menon (Dickinson College) and E.K. Tan (Stony Brook University) will speak on the linguistic, nationalist, and diasporic contexts, with reference to scholars such as Salleh Ben Joned and writers such as Tash Aw, Tan Twan Eng, Preeta Samarasan, and acclaimed writers-translators Alfian Sa’at and Jeremy Tiang will read and discuss their translation of the novels of Isa Kamari and the essays of Wong Yoon Wah respectively. Light lunch and book signing after the event. Free and open to the public. Registration highly recommended.

"THE MUDSKIPPER" AT THE BREARLEY SCHOOL’S BOOK CLUB

Ovidia Yu

Friday, September 30, 2016
11:35 – 12:35 pm
The Brearley School, Library,
610 E 83rd Street, New York, NY

After her father’s death, ten-year-old Lizhi leaves France for Singapore to meet her father’s family. Will they like her? Will she like them? What will they make of her mixed heritage? Written by award-winning playwright and writer Ovidia Yu, The Mudskipper came in second runner-up for the Scholastic Asia Book Award for its simple yet profound take on embracing our differences. Free but open only to Brearley faculty, staff, and students.

KILLER WOMEN: TWO COUNTRIES, THREE CULTURES, COUNTLESS CRIMES

Ovidia Yu
SJ Rozan
Moderated by Ann Aptaker

Friday, September 30, 2016
4:30 – 6:00 pm
NYU’s Kimmel Center for University Life,
60 Washington Square South, Room 803, New York, NY

Co-presented by NYU’s Singapore Student Association.

Ovidia Yu is an award-winning playwright and crime writer from Singapore. Her Aunty Lee crime series features an amateur sleuth who is a feisty widow and proprietor of Singapore’s best-loved home cooking restaurant. She will read from her new book Aunty Lee’s Chilled Revenge (HarperCollins). SJ Rozan, a native New Yorker, has won the Edgar, Shamus, Anthony, Nero, and Macavity for her crime writing. She is also the recipient of the Japanese Maltese Falcon Award. SJ will read from her work-in-progress Paper Son. Reception and book signing after the event. Free and open to the public. Registration highly recommended.

OUTSIDE THE LINES: PLAYS BY ALFIAN SA’AT, MARCUS YI, AND OVIDIA YU

Directed by Mei Ann Teo and Marcus Yi
Talkback moderated by Damon Chua

Friday, September 30, 2016
7:00 – 9:00 pm,
National Opera Center
Marc A. Scorca Hall
330 7th Ave, bet. 28th and 29th Streets
New York, NY

Outside the Lines features staged readings of works by Ovidia Yu (The Woman in a Tree on the Hill), Alfian Sa’at (Hotel), and Marcus Yi (After the Merlion Returned Home). Talkback, reception, and book signing to follow after performance. Registration required.
HOW GRAPHIC NOVELS WORK: THE ART OF ‘THE ART OF CHARLIE CHAN HOCK CHYE’
Colin Goh
Matt Humphreys
Ying Sue Pek
Moderated by Douglas Wolk

Saturday, October 1, 2016
2:00 – 4:00 pm
Book Culture Bookshop
586 W 112th Street, bet. Broadway and Amsterdam, New York, NY

Is Sonny Liew’s The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye the Great Singaporean Novel? This New York Times and Amazon bestseller has been widely lauded by critics, with some calling it a masterpiece. How did Sonny Liew weave the history of Singapore into a seamless metafictional narrative? Join How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean author Douglas Wolk, art historian Ying Sue Pek, cartoonist and satirist Colin Goh, and former DC comics editor Matt Humphreys in a discussion on the remarkable art behind The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye. Refreshments and book signing after the event. Free and open to the public. Registration highly recommended.

ALFIAN SAAT

OVIDIA YU

JASON KOO

NAOMI JACKSON

Named one of the “100 Most Influential People in Brooklyn Culture” by Brooklyn Magazine, Jason Koo is the author of two collections of poetry, America’s Bestest Poem and Man on Extremely Small Island. He is also the editor of Poems for Kobe, a private limited edition of poems presented as a retirement gift to Kobe Bryant by the Brooklyn Nets and Brooklyn Poets, and coordinator of the forthcoming Bettinng American Poetry Anthology and Brooklyn Poets Anthology. He has won fellowships for his work from the National Endowment for the Arts, Vermont Studio Center and New York State Writers Institute. An assistant teaching professor of English at Quinnipiac University, Koo is the founder and executive director of Brooklyn Poets and creator of The Bridge.

Naomi Jackson is the author of The Star Side of Bird Hill, which was longlisted for the Center for Fiction’s First Novel Prize and the National Book Critics Circle’s John Leonard Prize and nominated for an NAACP Image Award. Jackson studied fiction at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop and traveled to South Africa on a Fulbright scholarship, where she received an M.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Cape Town. Her work has appeared in literary journals and magazines in the United States and abroad. A graduate of Williams College, she is the recipient of residencies from the University of Pennsylvania’s Kelly Writers House, Hedgebrook, Vermont Studio Center, and the Camano Foundation.

How did Sonny Liew weave the history of Singapore into a seamless metafictional narrative? Join How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean author Douglas Wolk, art historian Ying Sue Pek, cartoonist and satirist Colin Goh, and former DC comics editor Matt Humphreys in a discussion on the remarkable art behind The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye. Refreshments and book signing after the event. Free and open to the public. Registration highly recommended.
GINA APOSTOL

Gina Apostol’s last novel, Gun Dealers’ Daughter, won the 2013 PEN/Oopen Book Award and was shortlisted for the 2014 William Saroyan International Prize. Her first two novels, Bibliology and The Revolution According to Raymundo Matu, both won the Juan Laya Prize for the Novel. She recently finished a fourth novel, The Unintended, anthologized in A Kind Of Compass: Stories on Distance. She is working on William McKinley’s World, a novel set in Balangiga and Tacloban in 1901, during the Philippine-American War. She was writer-in-residence at Phillips Exeter Academy and a fellow at Civitella Ranieri in Umbria, Italy, among other fellowships. Her essays and stories have appeared in The New York Times, Los Angeles Review of Books, Foreign Policy, Gettysburg Review, Massachusetts Review, and others. She lives in New York City and Western Massachusetts, and teaches at the Fieldston School in New York City.

JESSICA HAGEDORN

Jessica Hagedorn is the author of Teolojia, Dream Jungle, The Gangster Of Love, and Dogasters, which won the American Book Award and was a finalist for the National Book Award in fiction. Other publications include Danger Area Beauty, a collection of poetry and prose, and Burning Heart: A Portrait Of The Philippines. Hagedorn edited both volumes of Charlie Chan Is Dead: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian Fiction, and Maina Noir, a crime fiction anthology. Her plays include Most Wanted, Stairway To Heaven, It’s In The Desert, and the stage adaptation of Dogasters.

E.K. TAN

E.K. Tan is Associate Professor in Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature at Stony Brook University. She specializes in modern and contemporary Chinese literature, Sinophone studies, Southeast Asian studies, Queer Asia and Postcolonial theory. Her recent works include Rethinking Chineseones: Translational Sinophone Identities in the Nanyang Literary World (Cambridge Press) and an essay, “In Search of New Forms: Impact of Bilingual Policy and “Speak Mandarin” Campaign on Sinophone Singapore Poetry,” in Intervention: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies. She writes in both Chinese and English.

Sheela Jane Menon is an Assistant Professor of English at Dickinson College whose research centers on questions of race and identity in Malaysian literature and culture. Her dissertation, “Balayut Malaysia: Contesting Nationalism and Exceptional Multiculturalism,” maps the contradictions of Malaysian multiculturalism through integrated readings of Orang Asli/Orang Asal activism alongside Malaysian literature, film, theatre, and political rhetoric. In the classroom, she teaches Postcolonial, Asian American, and World Literature. Menon’s teaching and research are informed by her upbringing in Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and Honolulu. Menon’s teaching has been recognized by awards from UT Austin, and her writing on Malaysian politics has been published by The Conversation and The Malaysian Insider.

JASON WEE

Jason Wee is an artist and a writer, who lives in Singapore and New York. He founded and runs Grey Projects, an artists’ space, library and residency. He is an editor for Softflow poetry journal. He is a regular columnist for Pipeline magazine (Hong Kong). He was a 2005 – 2006 Studio Fellow at the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program. He has shown in the Chelsea Art Museum, Photo New York, Sundaram Tagore Gallery, Casino Luxembourg, Ifa galerie (Stuttgart and Berlin), Singapore Art Museum, Singapore Biennale, Valentine Willie Kuala Lumpur, and Manila Contemporaries. Residences include Artspace Sydney, ISEA 2008, Tokyo Wonder Site, Contemporary Art Japan, and Gyegong Creation Center in Korea.

SI ROZAN

SJ Rozan has won multiple awards, including the Edgar, Shamus, Anthony, Nero, and Macavity, and the Japanese Maltese Falcon. She has written fifteen novels, thirteen under her own name and two with Carlos Dreis as the writing team of Sam Cabot. Many of her dozens of short stories have appeared in various “Best Of” collections, and she has edited two anthologies. SJ was born and raised in the Bronx and now lives in Lower Manhattan. She teaches and lectures widely, including in New York at Crime Fiction Academy and during the summer in Assisi, Italy, at Art Workshop International—she is a Master Artist at The Atlantic Center for the Arts and a Writer-in-Residence at Singapore Management University. Her newest book is Sam Cabot’s Skin of the Wolf.

MARCUS YI

Originally from Singapore, Marcus Yi is an award-winning writer/ director and performer based in New York. The artistic director of Living Room Theater, he has created work in Singapore, Atlanta, and New York. Recent work include Micro Shrimp The Musical (Winner of 11th Annual NJ Playwrights Contest), 2007 (Wild Project, Paradise Factory), Pretty Little Mouth (Roy Arias), The Procedure (Gene Frankel Theatre), The Ephemeral Lightness of Dreams: the dream plays (Lynn Redgrave Theatre). His work has been produced by the National Asian Artists Project, Yangtze Rep, Asian American Film Lab, The Secret Theatre, New Jersey Playwrights Contest, Inge turquoise Theatre, The Grist Theatre, among others. His work has been seen at the Midtown International Festival, Planet Connections Theatre Festivity, Fresh Fruit Festival, and the Midwinter Madness Festival. Marcus was named one of Indie Theater Now’s 2014 People of the Year and is an Indie Theater Now Playwright. Marcus is the festival producer of the theatrical evening “Outside the Lines.”

Authors

SINGAPORE

JESSICA HAGEDORN

JASON WEE

GINA APOSTOL

E.K. TAN

SHEELA JANE MENON

SI ROZAN

JEREMY TIANG

MARCUS YI

Authors

UNBOUND

2ND SLF NYC

Authors

SHEILA JANE MENON

SJ ROZAN

2016

2016
MEI-ANN TEO

Mei-Ann Teo is a Singaporean theatre/film maker working internationally and based in the U.S.A. Her work has toured extensively including Belgium’s Festival de Lange (Lyrics From Lockdown), Edinburgh International Fringe (MiddleFlight), M1 Singapore Fringe Festival (The Shape of a Bird), INFANT Experimental Theatre Festival in Novi Sad, Serbia, Beijing International Festival (Labyrinth), Dumbo Arts Festival, Shanghai International Experimental Theatre Festival, and the Montreal World Film Festival. She has directed and developed new work at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (Phil Killian Fellow 2015), Goodman Theatre, Public Theater, Berkeley Rep, and was the first Asian American to direct at the National Black Theatre. She is in the first cohort for the Hemera Foundation Tending Space Fellowship and ArtEquity Facilitator Training, and has received grants from the Center for Cultural Innovation, the Asian Cultural Council, NET, and LMCC. She is an Artist-in-Residence for The Performance Project at University Settlement 2015/2016 and the Asst. Professor of Directing and Dramaturgy at Hampshire College.

COLIN GOH

Colin Goh is one half of the team behind Dim Sum Warriors, a Mandarin/English bilingual iPad app and graphic novel series about kung fu-fighting dumplings that has been featured by Ref Company, Time, The New York Times and Publishers Weekly. It is now being adapted for a stage musical which premieres in Shanghai in 2017. He is also a filmmaker whose multiple award-winning feature film Singapore Dreaming has been screened at numerous festivals worldwide, and also at the Smithsonian Institution and the Brooklyn Museum of Art. In Singapore, he is perhaps best known for founding the satirical website TalkingCock.com and authoring the bestselling Coxford Singlish Dictionary. In his meager spare time, he is an attorney.

MATT HUMPHREYS

Matt Humphreys recently joined Dynamite Entertainment as an assistant editor, after working at DC Comics in the same capacity. At DC, he helped edit Batman, Grayson, Gotham Academy and other comics (as well as serving as the inspiration for the character of Coach Humphrey). Previously, he worked for Arthritis and RoshiForum magazines. He is a graduate of Yale University, and in his spare time is hard at work writing a horror novel.

YING SZE PEK

Ying Sze Pek is a PhD candidate in the Department of Art and Archaeology at Princeton University. Based in New York City, she is a Helena Rubinstein Fellow of the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program for 2016 – 2017.

Authors
Douglas Wolk writes about comics and graphic novels for The New York Times Book Review, Time, Rolling Stone, The Washington Post, The New Yorker, and elsewhere. Wolk is the author of Percy, the recipient of an Ovation Award (Best World Premiere Play) for Four Clinics, which made its Off-Broadway debut with the Pan Asian Repertory Theatre in 2015. His TVX play The Emperor’s Nightingale recently opened at Adventure Theatre MTC and his historical play Incident at Haldor Temple will receive an Off-Broadway world premiere in 2017. A National Endowment for the Arts, Dramatists Guild Fund, UNESCO and Durfee Foundation grant recipient, Damon is published by Samuel French, Smith & Kraus, Plays for Young Audiences and Poissonium Journal. He is also a published poet and short story writer.

A member of The Public Theater’s Emerging Writers Group 2014-15 and Mo-Yi Theater Company’s Writers Lab, Damon Chua is the recipient of an Ovation Award (Best World Premiere Play) for Fire Clinics, which made its Off-Broadway debut with the Pan Asian Repertory Theatre in 2015. His TVX play The Emperor’s Nightingale recently opened at Adventure Theatre MTC and his historical play Incident at Haldor Temple will receive an Off-Broadway world premiere in 2017. A National Endowment for the Arts, Dramatists Guild Fund, UNESCO and Durfee Foundation grant recipient, Damon is published by Samuel French, Smith & Kraus, Plays for Young Audiences and Poissonium Journal. He is also a published poet and short story writer.

When I first entered Pak Joko’s house the first thing I noticed was an ornate birdcage, hung near a window. There was a spotted dove cooing inside it. Another birdcage hung next to it, but was empty. I asked Pak Joko how he managed to catch the bird.

“From the jungle,” was his terse reply. “I wanted him to elaborate. Did he set up a trap, and could I see one?”

Pak Joko looked at me incredulously. “All you have to do is open the cage door, and one will fly in.”

It was my turn to be incredulous. Did he perhaps lay some bait inside the cage?

Pak Joko turned his attention to the dove, making clucking noises at it. I was getting quite tired with his mystifications. This was what was considered the ‘wisdom’ of village people, and I began to think that it was built on secrecy and evasion.

Exasperated at not getting straight answers, I asked Pak Joko, “Don’t you think that it’s wrong to keep birds like that? Shouldn’t they be allowed to fly freely?”

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FROM ‘DOGEATERS’

BY ALFIAN SA’AT

“VILLAGE RADIO” FROM ‘MALAY SKETCHES’

When I first entered Pak Joko’s house the first thing I noticed was an ornate birdcage, hung near a window. There was a spotted dove cooing inside it. Another birdcage hung next to it, but was empty. I asked Pak Joko how he managed to catch the bird.

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Exasperated at not getting straight answers, I asked Pak Joko, “Don’t you think that it’s wrong to keep birds like that? Shouldn’t they be allowed to fly freely?”

Lopito appears on the TV screen, waving to the noisy audience. Before he can even thank her, the young girl rushes off the stage. Lopito throws up his arms in mock exasperation. She gestures toward her departing back. “GIVE HER HOY, NEIL!”

The audience in the studio cheers.

Pak Joko turns towards me. He smiled and said, “You come from the city, where you have radios to keep you company. But I have this dear bird to fill my house with music.”

I thought there was something unfortunate about having to imprison an animal merely for entertainment, but I held my tongue. Anyway, he had already drawn a line, putting me in my place. What did I know, as a ‘city person’, about how these village-dwellers furnish their solitude?

A few months lapsed before I returned to Terengganu. This time, the two cages in Pak Joko’s house were both empty. I asked him what happened to the dove. Pak Joko merely smiled and brought me to the kitchen. He showed me his brand new transistor radio. Then his wife served us some tea with Jacob’s cream crackers.

Throughout the six days that I stayed with him, Pak Joko never once turned on the radio. He would, instead, sit in the living room, smoking and staring at his two empty cages. His head was itself a cage, in the cage was a jungle, and in the jungle was music both private, and faraway.

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2016

SINGAPORE

UNBOUND

Moderators

2ND SLF

NYC

Excerpts

2016
There are six of them, five boys and a girl, all in sloppy T-shirts, dirty jeans and plastic-stimmed glasses. Probably underdress for the event of St. Mark’s Place to loom with them. They are gazing furtively at the MacBook Air on the table, angled for optimal viewing, hooked up to small but powerful speakers.

On the screen, a phalanus of schoolchildren in sunflower yellow are singing tunelessly—the Combined Schools Choir, her brain whispers unbidden. It was her job one year to supervise rehearsals, two of her classes having been forcibly volunteered to take part. She remembers the sweaty late-afternoon stillness, waiting for the event to start—how unnatural it was for a large space in the city center to be so silent.

The undergrads are looking at her. She must have been staring for too long, too closely, as she is about to smile apologetically and move on, one of them addresses her.

Singaporean, is it? You Singaporean or Malaysian?

She stares at them, wondering if this is a mindfulness, sit with us, the Wi-Fi here damn fast, shiok. Just as she is about to be so silent.

To start—how unnatural it was for a large space in the city to be so silent.

Fewer than ten years separate her from them, but they seem to exist in a different universe—more sturdily—built, surer of their place in the world. Looking at them stare expectantly, she knows she ought to say something polite, make an excuse. But something chokes her so instead she smirks tightly, unable to speak, and leaves, almost tripping over a barstool. She says the girl.

Yes, probably, Seow, her so instead she smiles tightly, unable to speak, and leaves, behind her, not unkindly, and she thinks, Yes, probably, I probably am a bit crazy.

FROM ‘GUARDIANS’ DAUGHTER’ BY GINA APOSTOL

Jed was a millionaire who dressed like Saint Francis and acted like Saint Jerome, his growing rage against the Filipinos, and all the girls wanted to be his Mary Magdalene. When he spearheaded the food drives and the orphan visits, his cleats with oil, plus myrrh and frankincense. But when he made that speech at graduation, denouncing our imperial terms, I was just a well-mannered bourgeois with unspoken misgivings about my own desires. And yes, I’d be the first to say that recalling the idiocies of teenage days has the tinge, mescapably, of a young adult novel—the irritatingly unexamined opinions of unfixed lives. Touché.

In dumb pumps and op-art clothes, I looked radically ill advised, not chic. But even when I joined Soli and Jed on their rainy marches through the potholes of Manila’s streets, I did have the feeling of being left out, though who knows if my sense of abandonment was my own fault.

FROM ‘IT NEVER RAINS ON NATIONAL DAY’

As I said, I did not begrudge Jed and Soli their performance for her benefit, if they have coarsened their grammar and dialed up the Singlish as—what? A claim of authenticity? A provocation? I’m not—she begins, I’m from—

But that is enough for her accent to expose her, for them to exchange knowing looks. Confirmation.

Trevor grinned, his eyes caught on the amber lace

Dionne’s years of practice meant that she could work tasteful makeup was her tether to the life she’d stolen from her grandmother’s chest of drawers, but she wore it anyway, because makeup was her tether to the life she’d left back home. Hibiscus, she knew that sex was not Cleaning dishes right after dinner to put off the dread. Doing, this here, this now, this coffee with autumn with you.

Dionne Braithwaite was two weeks fresh from Brooklyn and Barbados’s fierce sun had already transformed her skin from its New York shade of caramel to brick red.

She was wearing foundation that was too light for her skin now. It came off in smears on the white handkerchiefs she stole from her grandmother’s chest of drawers, but she wore it anyway, because makeup was her tether to the life she’d left back home. Hibiscus, why do you think so much about death anyways?” Dionne asked Trevor.

“We are in a graveyard,” Dionne said. She traced its New York shade of caramel to brick red.

I don’t know. Seems to me it’s just like going to sleep. Except you never wake up. Why do you think so much about death anyways?”

Dionne gripped, her eyes caught on the amber lace

Instead of, I paint infinity, less the Yes possible, less the Yes possible, love as exactness, this exactness. Exactly what I want to be doing, nothing I would rather be doing, this here, this now, this coffee with autumn with you.

Less recklessness. Less wrecking, more reckoning. More wreckage in the reckoning. Less she and no other, less another and another, less logic, more logic, against all logic, who is the master, the logic or I, Is the logic there for me or am I the logic for the logic, Is there no reason, no sense, in this unreasonableness, this lack of sense! Less sense in more sense. The sentence. Less activity in the looking, begging the brushwork Out of the body, the God out of the body, getting the god Out. More riming, more ironing, more soup. More rimed.

Less love as nothing rather than, love as exactness, this less love as nothing rather than, love as exactness, this unreasonableness, this lack of sense! Less sense in more sense. The sentence. Less activity in the looking, begging the brushwork Out of the body, the God out of the body, getting the god Out. More riming, more ironing, more soup. More rimed.

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I hadn’t returned to do battle with my father and his new wife, but I did want to hear the news my father said he had for us, news he wanted to deliver in person. Though what could trump his ‘just married’ letter? I also wanted to take a look at his new Thai wife, Songsuda. I would be calm and friendly, I reminded myself, no shock or surprise. This was not a battle worth fighting.

But once inside the house I was taken aback to find it full of packing boxes. My father was sitting alone on a folding chair next to a barcalounger wrapped in plastic. “What are you doing? Did you pack all these?”

“Of course not, lah! We had a removal company come and pack. They’re not finished yet.”

“Why? Is it termites? Are you renovating? And what is the big news you couldn’t write in your letter?”

“I am selling the house,” Dad said. “Songsuda and I are planning to move to Australia. Even at my age, it is easy for me to get in with enough money and a Singapore passport.”

“What money?”

“You know I have a life interest in this house. So if I sell the house and move to Australia and buy a house with the money, I get a life interest in that house. It’s the same thing. And for the same money I can get a much bigger house there. All I need is for you and your brother to sign the consent to sell. Thanks to your mother, I cannot even sell my own house.”

I managed not to remind him that Mum was the one who had paid for the house. All Dad’s money had disappeared into various get-rich-quick schemes.

“You worked all this out yourself?”

“With my wife. She has the forms for you to sign. And you must go and get your brother to sign also.” My father looked towards the kitchen. It was clearly a signal, but no one appeared. Dad looked much older than I remembered, his speech seemed to come with more effort. I had wondered whether his sudden marriage would rejuvenate him. I was not sorry to see it hadn’t.

Becky was alone under a blazing blue sky with Albanians who’d kidnapped her and an American who’d come to get her and no one to help her. Her first steps into the country of her birth: a horrible homecoming. She wanted to cry.

The driver nodded to someone behind her. She half-turned to see Leka limping down the steps. “Hey, American asshole,” Leka shouted. “Here is girl. Now you pay, I go. I don’t like it here.”

“You’re Leka?”

“No, thi’s Mongolia, da? So I’m Genghis Khan. You have my money?”

The driver shrugged. “What if I don’t?”

Leka stuck his hand under his jacket and yanked out a gun. Straight-armed, he pointed it at Becky. Becky froze. The driver laughed. “Oh, Jesus, don’t lose your shit.” Casually, he pulled back his jacket to show he had a gun, too. He left it holstered until he’d slipped an envelope from his pocket and tossed it at Leka’s feet. Then he drew the gun, pointed it at Becky, and said, “Get in the van.”

Two guns. She had two guns pointing at her on an airstrip in Mongolia. Becky’s legs began to melt. She clenched all her muscles to keep from falling and was concentrating so hard on standing that she barely heard herself say, “No.”

The American spoke low, like a dog’s warning growl. “Get in. Or I can hogtie you and throw you in.”

Leka said, “All yours now, American asshole. Have fun.” He turned to limp away. Becky almost ran after him. No, she wanted to shout, don’t leave me! But that’s why he’d brought her across all those miles and hours. To leave her where some crazy person had paid him to.

Heart pounding so hard she was dizzy, Becky watched the American start towards her. She tried to say all right, she’d get in the van, tried to ask him please not to hurt her, but she was paralyzed. Her voice, arms, legs, nothing could start. Only her eyes worked, tracking his approach.

Her eyes, and her ears. She heard a rumble, maybe just the wind, but no, it grew, erupting into a roar. Dust flared at the crest of the hill. The American and Leka both spun around. Four motorcycles, no, five, no, six, poured down the slope and raced toward them. A howling, gun-toting motorcyclist started blasting the air.
JEE LEONG KOH
Organizer

Jee Leong Koh is the author of four books of poems and a book of zuihitsu. His latest book of poems Steep Tea (Carcanet) was named a Best Book of 2015 by UK’s Financial Times, and a Finalist by Lambda Literary. His work was shortlisted for the Singapore Literature Prize and translated into Japanese, Chinese, Russian, and Latvian. Originally from Singapore, Jee now lives in New York City, where he runs the arts website Singapore Poetry, the Second Saturdays Reading Series, and the Singapore Literature Festival in NYC.

MAUREEN HOON
Communications & Non-profit Arts Consultant

Maureen Hoon has extensive expertise in non-profit arts management and marketing communications. To date, she has worked with over 30 global clients on high-profile media campaigns, Corporate Social Responsibility outreach, and community engagement. She is also a New York-based visual artist with her studio based in Long Island City, Queens. She has a bachelor’s degree in English Literature and graduated with a Master’s degree from Pratt Institute’s School of Art & Design.

FLORA CHAN
Design Consultant

Flora Chan is a Singaporean designer based in New York City, and a graduate of the Communication Design program at Parsons School of Design. Aside from transforming brands and designing identity systems, she is also deeply invested in exploring language and linguistics, and their relationship to visual design. Her work has been recognized by the Art Directors Club, The One Club, the AIGA and the Society for News Design.

HONG-LING WEÉ
Fundraiser

Dr. Hong-Ling Weé is a scientist-turned-ceramicist whose work straddles sculptural objects and functional art. Her creations are in several public collections including the National Gallery (Singapore) and the Guangxi National Art Center (China). Besides art-making, Hong-Ling is also interested in bringing to fruition projects that have never been done before. In 2015, to celebrate Singapore’s Golden Jubilee in New York City, she organized Something To Write Home About, the first grassroots Singapore Arts Festival, held at La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club.

KIMBERLEY LIM
Event Manager

Kimberley Lim is a professional audience member and consumer of various art forms. When she’s not volunteering for Singapore-related arts events in New York City, she works as an assistant editor at Skyhorse Publishing, an independent publishing house, and runs the online literary magazine www.OfZoos.com.

BONNIE BEE
Event Manager

Raised in Singapore and educated in the United States, Bonnie Bee specializes in music industry marketing, publicity and branding, as well as non-profit performing arts management. She has rubbed elbows at Carnegie Hall, Warner Music Group, The Boston Symphony Orchestra, New York City Ballet, Capacity Interactive and more. Bonnie is an avid fan of tennis, football and golf. Her dream is to attend all four tennis Grand Slams and so far she’s been to the U.S. Open and Australian Open.

GENEVIEVE LIM
Event Manager

Currently doing her Master’s in Forensic Psychology at John Jay College, Genevieve Lim would travel the world for the rest of her life if she could and occasionally go back to Singapore for her all-time favorite drink: Teh C peng siew dai.

TOMSON TEE
Video Director and Producer

Born in Malaysia, raised in Singapore, Hong Kong, and the San Francisco Bay Area, Tomson “T-$$$” Tee is an award-winning filmmaker based in NYC. Tomson likes to spend his free time ... well he doesn't really have any. He's usually off finding ways to make his next project.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR INTERN KIMBERLY CHARLES AND OUR VOLUNTEERS CELESTE TENG, DENISE SHU MEI, GENEVIEVE ANG, MARIE EE, MATHILDA XIU, PATSEY YEO-RAMAKER, AND SAM STEVENSON-YANG
Singapore beyond Singapore. Beyond territorial sovereignty and legal fictions. Beyond political controls and cultural straitjackets. Singapore Unbound is an invitation to dream new possibilities for the idea of Singapore.

Starting in the USA, Singapore Unbound builds people-to-people understanding by facilitating cultural exchange, publishing literary works of merit, and presenting insightful events.

Our flagship activity is the biennial Singapore Literature Festival in New York. Started in 2014, the festival brings together Singaporean and American authors and audiences for in-depth conversations about literature and society. Between festivals, we extend the dialogue by running the Second Saturdays Reading Series, a regular platform for the reading of Singaporean and American literatures in various intimate venues around New York City. Our boutique press, Bench Press, puts out works of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction by authors from both countries. We are especially interested in publishing new and non-mainstream voices. Finally, Singapore Poetry is our on-line arts and news magazine focusing on all things poetic about Singapore and beyond.

Our activities are guided by three core values. We aim to be independent, innovative, and inspiring. A staunch proponent of the freedom of expression, Singapore Unbound upholds the creative autonomy of the committed writer. We challenge censorship of the arts and support fair opportunities for all artists. Motivated by a spirit of innovation, we create opportunities and collaborations where none exists before. In our audience outreach, we seek always to inspire a love for literature. The arts, for us, are not a hobby or a tool, but a way of life.

Singaporeans and Americans have been living in one another’s country for a long time. The history of this two-way expatriation is yet to be written. More recently, with the growth in arts education, creative industries, and academic ties between both countries, more writers and artists are making their home abroad. Singapore Unbound is born of this movement of people and ideas. We invite you to dream with us and shape the course of this migration.

Jee Leong Koh
Founder and Executive Director
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