The Substation mounts three radical experiments to run an arts centre

22 August 2016, Singapore – Today The Substation reveals its first full-scale theme and programme since the announcement of future directions under new Artistic Director, Alan Oei. Is That All There Is? is comprised of three month-long chapters: a takeover by Post-Museum in September, a playful shifting of spaces and functions in November, and a programme of activities designed by a co-op in February.

The catalyst for the programme was the multiple open sessions leading up to The Substation Town Hall (March 2016) where issues such as discourse, transparency, plurality, and experimentation were intensely debated. For Oei, the discussions revealed more than a deep sense of ownership of The Substation by the arts community; they also exposed a general anxiety about art in Singapore.

"While the government has heavily invested in the arts and culture in promoting Singapore as a global city for the arts, the investment has naturally come with strings attached. We fear the arts are instrumentalised, and the ways in which the public engage with art have become more limited, rather than expanded. We also fear The Substation is losing its unique identity within this cultural landscape. These perfectly valid concerns shouldn’t be papered over," Alan Oei, Artistic Director, The Substation

Is That All There Is? is fuelled not only by the arts community’s questions, but also by all of our expectations and ambitions for the arts. How do we negotiate the rhetoric and values of the global city? Why and how do we make art? How should art spaces be run? What good are the arts? These questions are not easily answered, and it’s our hope that with this programme, these questions will loom even larger.
Chapter 1: SURVEY: Space, Sharing, Haunting by Post-Museum

1-30 September 2016

Post-Museum finds a home in our premises since it closed its physical space in 2011. For one month, the arts collective will run its programme SURVEY: Space, Sharing, Haunting at The Substation, offering over 30 activities that invite audiences to examine and reflect upon the state of the arts and culture in Singapore.

SURVEY includes So It May Seed (urban farm growing food crops), Murder Most Foul (interactive murder mystery show), and Club House (multi-purpose social space). SURVEY will also encompass other activities such as renaming the building and reconfiguring the space.

Many of Post-Museum’s projects blur the line between art and social causes, and it is precisely for this reason that it was invited, to ask what if The Substation returned to its early years in civic and social causes?

Woon Tien Wei, Founder, Post-Museum, comments, “Today, we are in a crisis situation where the very ideals on which The Sub was founded are being interrogated and even subjugated in the ‘Renaissancing’ of Singapore’s cultural landscape. SURVEY asks: How have the values of Singapore’s arts community changed in the last 20 years? What are the values of the arts community today?”
Chapter 2: A Home for the Arts
1 – 30 November 2016

With art spaces being asked to play a part in cultural place-making, perhaps the way we use The Substation is inadequate. What if we fully embraced the logic and operations of cultural place-making? What kinds of facilities, infrastructure and programmes would we need? Taking a playful approach to space, venue, and function, we reimagine what our 25-year-old tagline, ‘A Home for the Arts’ might represent in today’s cultural landscape.

An outdoor obstacle course jointly built by scouts and artists, a pseudo-clinic where filmmakers prescribe films as therapy, a School of Uncommon Knowledge, a recreation room filled with games and playable artworks — each of these parts blurs the boundaries of what art and art spaces can be. Inevitably, this experiment also asks how we value, engage and participate in the arts.

Chapter 3: The Co-op
1 – 28 February 2017

What if The Substation didn’t have programmers or an Artistic Director? What if it was run by a co-operative, or at the very least, in a decentralised form? The Co-op is a research inquiry designed to test if an arts centre can tangibly embody values of openness and plurality by inviting a diverse range of participants to be stakeholders and co-authors of the site.

Participants of the co-operative are determined through an open call in August. They will arrive at their own terms of engagement: how they will work together, make decisions, resolve conflicts, and collectively work towards programming a month of activities in February.

IS THAT ALL THERE IS? – Listings Information

Each chapter of Is That All There Is? represents a live experiment that offers a radically different proposition for The Substation, not only in its individual programmes and values, but also in its approach to the art centre’s familiar physical form and function.
SURVEY: Space, Sharing, Haunting by Post-Museum
Date: 1 – 30 September 2016, mostly free, prior registration required.
Venue: The Substation
Post-Museum: https://postmuseum.wordpress.com/survey/
Opening hours: Daily except Mondays and Public Holidays
Sunday, Tuesday - Thursday 12pm - 9pm
Friday & Saturdays 12pm - 12am

Arts collective Post-Museum will take over The Substation, occupying its premises to present their own programme SURVEY: Space, Sharing, Haunting. Through over 30 talks, workshops, exhibitions and activity stations, SURVEY invites audiences to examine and reflect upon the state of the arts and culture in Singapore.

A Home for the Arts
Date: 1 – 30 November 2016, free to attend
Venue: The Substation
Information: http://www.substation.org/a-home-for-the-arts

Taking a playful approach to space, venue, and function, we are reimagining what our 25-year-old tagline, ‘A Home for the Arts’, might represent in today’s cultural economy. Inevitably, this experiment also asks how we value, engage and participate in the arts.

The Co-op
Date: 1 – 28 February 2017, free to attend
Venue: The Substation
Information: http://www.substation.org/coop

A research inquiry into the co-operative model, The Co-op tests if an arts centre can tangibly embody the values of openness and plurality by inviting a diverse range of participants to be stakeholders and co-authors of the site for one month.

High resolution images: https://we.tl/1F4YNotMjA
Link expires 1 September 2016
ABOUT THE SUBSTATION

The Substation is Singapore’s first independent contemporary arts centre. Established in 1990 by the late Kuo Pao Kun, it is known for its pioneering and experimental arts programming. Over the years, The Substation has worked with some of Singapore’s most critically acclaimed artists, writers and intellectuals including Ong Keng Seng, Alvin Tan, and Ivan Heng. The Substation is a recipient of the National Arts Council’s Major Grant 2014 – 2017.

For additional information visit www.substation.org

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