



A Home for the Arts

Press Release

For Immediate Release

Does Singapore still need 'A Home For The Arts'?

The Substation launches its second experiment to run an arts centre

19 October 2016, Singapore - The Substation turns its tagline into one of three radical experiments. 26 years ago, the cultural doyen and founder, Kuo Pao Kun launched Singapore's first contemporary art space as "A home for the arts." In 2010, with new outdoor signage for the building, this tagline also disappeared from public view.

This simple but powerful evocation of art spaces being *homes* seems to have lost its significance as the cultural landscape has dramatically changed. Multiple art spaces and museums have appeared, while Singapore's art industry and ecosystem has correspondingly become professionalised and institutionalised.

Alan Oei, the Artistic Director, says that the upcoming one month experiment is not only to reinvent the idea of a home, but to locate this home within a larger landscape: "we cannot envision a home without thinking about the State that dominates almost all aspects of public and cultural life. It has a very different vision of the arts. For instance, in using taxpayers monies to fund the arts as a public good, it must always justify and measure the value of the arts. Its new rhetoric seems to be cultural placemaking — in layman's terms, the idea that artists can value add or bring excitement to places. As artists, we tend to push back against such instrumentalisation. But I also wondered what if we took this rhetoric and logic to its extreme, what would such an arts centre obsessed with cultural placemaking look like? Where art must play a social function, and justify its existence?"

"A home for the arts" is an alternative reality for The Substation. Its first floor, comprising the theatre, gallery and other spaces, is combined into one seamless venue. To accommodate the different kinds of activities, the operating hours will also shift to night-time and all day weekends. Highlights include:

- ❑ Game-like artworks that require participation, eg. Lee Wen's Ping Pong Go Round
- ❑ Recreational facilities like arcade machines, air hockey, pinball
- ❑ Therapy clinic where filmmakers play shrinks
- ❑ A community driven school with eclectic offerings from foraging, to queer tour, to hacking air miles
- ❑ Common space for socialising and lounging
- ❑ Departures where visitors can only leave via a short performance

As part 2 of a 3 part experiment to reinvent Singapore's first and oldest contemporary art space, this experiment follows from an earlier takeover of The Substation by Post-Museum, an artist collective. Alan Oei, the Artistic Director, says, "I invited Post-Museum because they were artists committed to social and cultural change, a role that The Substation had gradually relinquished. But the takeover was pretty messy and difficult. It's one thing to say Post-Museum takes over our space and programmes; it's another to make the transition. We discovered that many of our rules were designed not necessarily to help artists, but to protect our own institutional needs. So if we call ourselves a home for the arts, then we need to evolve a different understanding of the venue and our relationship with artists."

"In that same light, we also want to ask what our relationship with visitors can be? Maybe there's a different kind of experience for art. Less of a walk-in, see art, take selfie and leave. What does it mean to put artists' works next to recreational gaming? Or furniture next to sculpture that intends itself as furniture? Will people accept this at face value, or do they question the boundaries of art, and its use-value? Maybe the questioning is not merely in the introspective, aesthetic encounter, but from the intersection of playing with art, and then also watching others play? I hope to see punks talking to bankers, dancers talking to filmmakers, people from different social strata finding a common space. That's really what The Substation used to be."

"The question is, if we have this vision for a home for the arts, what do people want from the arts? Is there enough space for both the social and the individual, subjective experience? Is there enough space for the art to breathe? We don't know the answers. Well, it's only a one month experiment."

Listings Information

'A Home For The Arts'

Date: 1 – 30 November 2016, free to attend

Times: Tues - Fri 6:00 - 10:00PM

Sat & Sun 12:00 - 10:00PM

Closed Mondays

Venue: The Substation

Info: <http://www.ahomeforthearts.org/>

In 26 years, everything's changed. The Substation hasn't. Now we're changing everything. Founded in 1990, so much love, grit and sweat has been given to make space for artists, activists, filmmakers, musicians, punks and other people who felt they didn't quite belong in Singapore. For all these people who didn't have space, we made space. Their art, their songs, their stories still haunt this place. We are a home for the arts. We say A not The, because ultimately, our dream is that the home for the arts is Singapore: open, plural and willing to embrace those who don't fit in.

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

For more information contact:

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ANNEX

List of facilities

School

Film clinic

Gift shop

List of artists (confirmed)

The School of Uncommon Knowledge

Who teaches and who is taught? Are only specialists qualified to teach? The principle behind The School of Uncommon Knowledge is to be an open platform where all forms of knowledge are shared and valued. The School comprises of almost 40 classes that cover a wide range of topics from how to do the lindy-hop, make home remedies for the flu, forage in the wilderness and other eclectic subjects such as astrology and clowning.

The School aims to be a common space where the boundaries between teachers and students are not carefully delineated. By that same principle, the School does not operate on any monetary compensation, but runs only on barter and the exchange of services.

Armenian Clinic

Every weekend in November, 10 filmmakers will act as 'doctors-in-residence'. Based on the idea that films are as powerful as medicine, the filmmakers will hold individual consultations with 'patients'. They will prescribe films to mend broken hearts, solve life crises, and other existential injuries. Patients will be able to view the films at specially designed viewing booths at The Substation.

Artists

'Playable' artworks are placed next to conventional arcade games such as foosball, air hockey and PacMan. The artworks include Cultural Medallion winner Lee Wen's *Ping Pong Go Round* and sound artist Ang Song-Ming's *350 Onomatopoeic Molecules*, which invites audience members to make music by throwing balls at a collection of electric guitars and drums.



Lee Wen
Ping Pong Go Round 1998



Ang Song-Ming
350 Onomatopoeic Molecules 2003/2013