

Media Release

Embargoed until 18 June 2018

The Substation presents

Cities change. People die. Everything you know goes away.

How heritage and its discourse shape the city through conservation and nostalgia

Singapore, 4 June 2018 — ***Cities change. People die. Everything you know goes away***, is an exploration of *how* and *why* heritage is a political and emotional topic for the public.

Alan Oei, Artistic Director says, “for the longest time, Singaporeans bought into the narrative of progress that requires pragmatic and constant redevelopment. The tearing down of the red-bricked Old National Library in 2004 created ‘a groundswell of public dissent’¹ that is symptomatic of the narrative’s fracture with Singaporeans. In recent years, we’ve seen a wide range of responses, from anger to indifference to nostalgia, which shape discourse about the loss of our cultural markers. These responses may baffle state planners, but they reflect a real and deep-seated anxiety about a city that is constantly in flux.”

The overarching theme is part of a 3-year curatorial direction for The Substation in examining the city. Through annual themes centred on artists and field specialists, The Substation expands, leads, and supports cultural conversations, engaging the public and exposing them to the full possibilities of contemporary art in shaping larger questions about Singapore:

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_National_Library_Building

2017: Discipline the City

How architecture and design are co-opted to organise and control space—and by extension—the city’s inhabitants

2018: Cities change. People die. Everything you know goes away.

How heritage and its discourse shape the city through conservation and nostalgia

2019: Stupid City

How the triumphalist narrative of Smart City influences urban life through data, algorithms, and surveillance

In 2018, The Substation collaborates with artists, academics, and specialists whose works engage with and contribute to the complex conversations around heritage. Programmes explore heritage in its multifarious forms: from landmark architecture and national icons, to the everyday commodification of nostalgia.

Dr Chua Ai Lin, executive director of the Singapore Heritage Society who is also Lead Resident at The Substation, says: “Conservation is important because places are the foundation of our sense of place and sense of identity. For example, icons like Pearl Bank Apartments, People's Park Complex and Golden Mile Complex, are internationally-acclaimed solutions to urban living which were groundbreaking in the 1960s and 70s, and designed by Singaporean architects. Yet these landmarks are at now risk of demolition. We are collaborating with The Substation because it is a space for critical conversations about issues that impact our society.”

Oei says, “*Discipline the City* was about spatial control; heritage is another form of control. It’s about making sense of the past so we know what matters in the present and future. To that end, heritage is a contested field to be defined not only by the state and heritage specialists — all of us have to participate in what, why, and how we remember.”

To bring that message home, The Substation is inviting anyone to express their art or ideas about heritage through social media. It is organising two generous cash prizes with its partners. The first is a creative writing prize hosted on Facebook and chaired by Dr. Boey Kim Cheng, acclaimed poet, writer, and current Head of English at the NTU School of Humanities and Social Sciences. The second, presented in

collaboration with the Singapore Heritage Society, is a short film competition on Instagram.

In addition, The Substation's programmes examine national icons that are familiar and dear to Singaporeans. For example, the programme in October looks at the making of a national icon, the Singapore Girl, and veteran producer and actress Tan Kheng Hua is creating a theatre-variety show, ***She's a Great Way to Fly***. Alongside this production, The Substation is also programming an eclectic range of events like panels, speed-dating, and trial-interview chambers that will open up discussion on the Singapore Girl. Oei says, "love her or hate her, the Singapore Girl resonates with the Singapore Story. She's shaped by colonial discourse: self-orientalised and re-presented as Asian-ness. This is one of the early instances of heritage repackaged and exported to a global audience."

Oei hopes that this, amongst other issues led by artists and collaborators, will help Singaporeans crystallise our relationship with heritage, nostalgia, and the city.

Of writing on the city, Dr. Boey says, "So much has been lost already. The Singapore writer, especially if he/she has witnessed and experienced the beauty that was there before, can recreate the past in memory and imagination, and restore a sense of place and continuity, which can be vital to the older generations displaced and bewildered by the spate of changes. The imaginary Singapore of older writers may not have existed in reality, and may be alien to the younger generations, but it can give them living glimpses of the past, and also warn and alert them to what they have lost and are continuing to lose with each erasure of old buildings and streets. Meaningful nostalgia is not mere sentimental wallowing in the past; it can be a subtle form of activism and resistance."

For more information and the latest updates on the public programmes, please attend our media preview on Thursday 21 June from 5pm to 6.30pm.

Website: citieschange.sg (live on 18 June)

Facebook: [@thesubstation](https://www.facebook.com/thesubstation)

Instagram: [@the_substation](https://www.instagram.com/the_substation)

Images can be found [here](#).

The Substation

A Home for the Arts

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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 Alvin Tan, Goh Boon Teck, Amanda Heng, Lee Wen and Kok Heng Leun. The Substation is a recipient of the National Arts Council's Major Grant from April 2017–March 2020.

www.substation.org