

## Media Announcement

### Permanent Closure of the Substation

2 March 2021

It is with profound sadness that the Substation Board announces the permanent closure of the Substation. This difficult decision was made after lengthy deliberations and several discussions with the National Arts Council (NAC) and with members of the arts community.

As recently reported in the local media, the Substation has to vacate 45 Armenian Street in July 2021 for two years because of much-needed renovations to the building. However, while NAC has suggested that the Substation may return to 45 Armenian Street as a co-tenant when renovations are over, NAC made it clear that the Substation will be one of several co-tenants and will not occupy the building in its full capacity.

In light of the inability to return fully to its place of origin, the Board has arrived at two key conclusions. Firstly, the Substation will lose a fundamental part of its identity and heritage if it cannot return fully to 45 Armenian Street. From its opening in 1990, the identity of the arts centre has been inextricably linked to the building, generating a unique and creative buzz that has been central to placemaking in Armenian Street for 30 years. There is no other place like it. In its 30 years at 45 Armenian Street, the Substation, Singapore's first independent contemporary arts centre, incubated 98 Associate Artists or Artists-in-Residence, developed 10 President's Young Talents Award winners, and nurtured 20 Young Artist Award recipients. 13 Cultural Medallion winners are associated with the Substation.

Secondly, even if it returns as a co-tenant, the Substation will be unable to control the building facilities integral to its operations such as the theatre and gallery. This has two implications, namely, the loss of autonomy over the spaces and facilities crucial for its mission, and the loss of income from venue hiring. These factors impact the Substation's ability to operate as an independent arts centre and incubator. The Substation will not be in a

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Woon Tien Wei

**UEN: 199506857R**  
Donations to The Substation Ltd in 2020 are eligible for a 250% tax exemption  
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The Substation is a recipient of the National Arts Council's Major Grant  
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position to fulfil its mission to support and provide a safe space for artists to do pioneering and experimental work. With respect, the Board does not agree with NAC's decision to convert 45 Armenian Street into a multi-tenanted building.

To be sure, there are also broader reasons that have contributed to our closure. The economic downturn triggered by Covid-19 has made fundraising for the arts especially difficult. The Substation relies heavily on fundraising and several donors have been understandably cautious with their funds. Other donors have refocused their philanthropic outreach which has resulted in a lower priority for the arts. Like many arts groups in Singapore, the Substation has been severely impacted by the pandemic. NAC did offer grants to help the Substation tide over the next two years and a subsidised office space at Goodman Arts Centre, but this will still result in halving our current budget, entailing a drastic reduction in staff strength and programming.

Mr Chew Kheng Chuan, Chairperson of the Substation, said: "With the loss of 45 Armenian Street, which has been synonymous with the Substation for the past 30 years, the Substation will lose a fundamental part of its identity and heritage. The Board feels a deep responsibility to the local arts community to preserve the identity and heritage of the Substation as an independent arts centre.

"With our closure, we hope that other arts organisations in Singapore will continue to carry the torch to give budding artists a safe space in which to experiment and develop their art. We also hope that the NAC will take a chance on young unproven passionate artists, and support the work of independent arts incubator spaces that have been vital to these artists, as it did for the Substation through the prior 30 years. The development of any society can be marked by the value it places on the arts. We hope Singapore will not only value risk-taking, bold, boundary-breaking and innovative ideas from which great art emerges, but also support our artists without whom such ideas would never see the light of day."

The Substation Board

**Annex**

**Statement of our Joint Artistic Director, Raka Maitra:**

*“The closure of The Substation, is to some extent inevitable.*

*This is the moment to ask ourselves, honestly, who are we as a society?  
Who are we as people?*

*There was a time when poetry was luxury.*

*And now, the one place that spoke for all arts and artists has to close,  
because it has become a luxury.*

*We as people know the price of everything and the value of nothing”*

**Statement of our Joint Artistic Director, Woon Tien Wei:**

*“While I thought that I should be prepared for this moment, there are  
still many feelings to process.*

*I am deeply sorry to be announcing this outcome. I know this is a tough  
decision for the board to make. For many in the community, it is an  
outcome that is both difficult and disappointing to accept.*

*I am saddened by the permanent closure of The Substation. The  
Substation provided a place for meaningful connections (people, ideas  
and spirit) on my art journey. This is valuable not just for me but also to  
many others who have come forward and commented generously over  
the weeks regarding Substation's future. It is sad to know that arts  
practitioners and audiences in the future will not be able make their own  
meaningful connections in a place like the Substation.*

*The closure of the Substation signals the shrinking of 'self-organising' spaces within our arts ecosystem. 'self-organising' spaces are essential for developing our arts ecosystem. It grows our practitioners' capacity and is instrumental in creating this vibrant art scene that we know today.*

*As such, I am increasingly anxious about the future of our arts ecosystem. I see the shift from the Arts Housing Policy towards a Framework for Arts Spaces to adapt to the evolving art landscape as a worrying trajectory. The Framework for Arts Spaces may be practical for some arts organisations; it alters our sense of ownership of these spaces and affects how arts organisations make places in the future.*

*Lastly, I am thankful to the community for speaking your mind on the Substation and our arts ecosystem's future. It is strong reminder that we need this dialogue to continue beyond the Substation and it needs to be an on-going conversation with all the stakeholders in the arts ecosystem."*