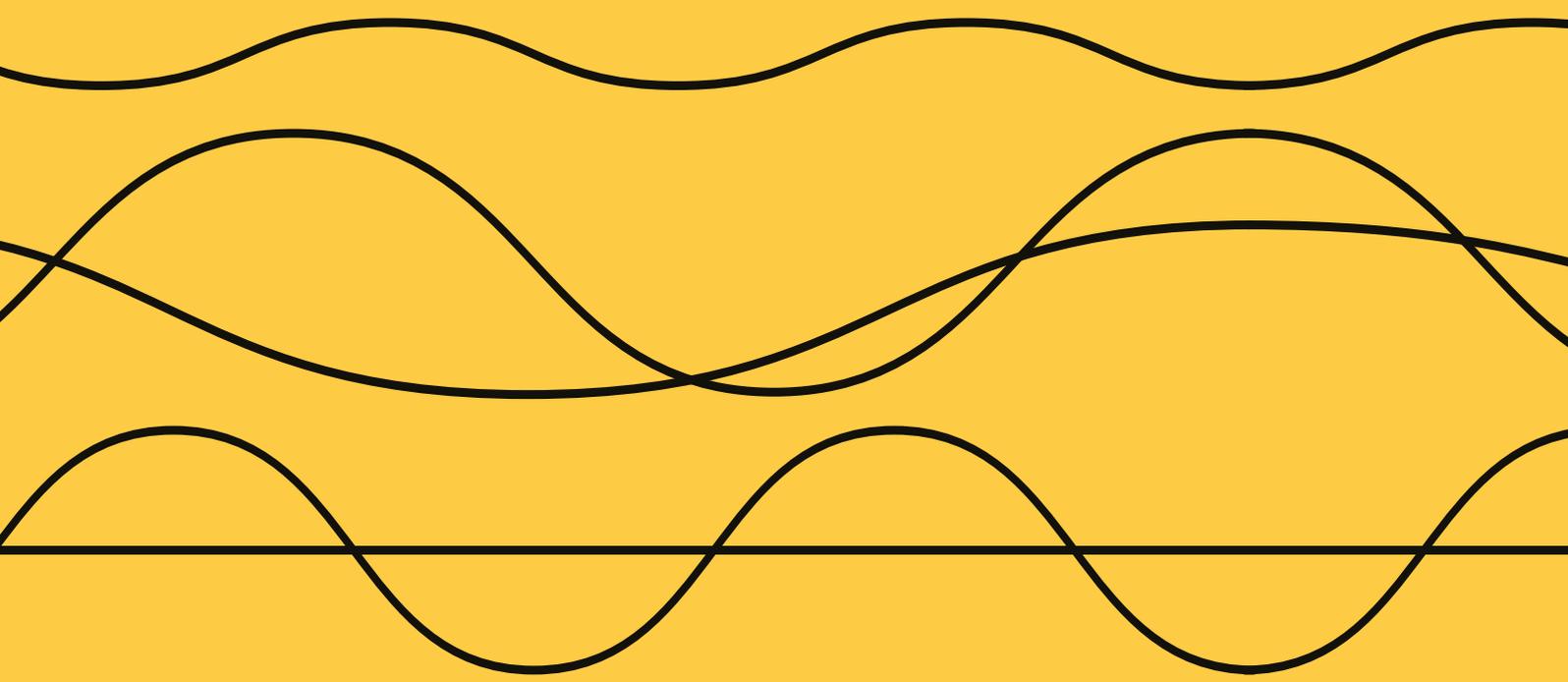


**ASEF—Unplugged
Conversations—on—the—Arts
in—Asia—and—Europe**



Arts Futures

**23 NOVEMBER 2019
SINGAPORE**





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INTRODUCTION

ASEF Unplugged is an event-series of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) that aims to promote more open and informal peer-to-peer conversations amongst cultural professionals on topics related to the arts, culture and heritage. It responds to the demands of traditional conference participants for more interactive formats and keeps in tune with the rapidly changing needs of an increasingly interactive and engaged audience. Each edition is co-organised with a local partner and each topic or theme is conceptualised based on mutual relevance and the needs of the local audience.

ASEF Unplugged: Arts Futures is the last of our 3-part series with our local partner in Singapore, Centre 42, and Arts Futures is borrowed from the Australia Council for the Arts' research work which served as the anchor of the entire event. The main aim of this edition of ASEF Unplugged is to spur local arts workers to begin to have a future-focused mindset and reflect on their evolving roles in society.

ASEF Unplugged: Arts Futures is divided into 2 parts:

- 1) A public conversation with Dr Ruth Williams (Research Associate, Australia Council for the Arts) who joined live by video conference from Australia, Ms Yvonne Tham (CEO, The Esplanade Co Ltd), and Ms Hasyimah Harith (Company Manager, P7:1SMA)
- 2) A closed-door workshop facilitated by Ms Bec Barnett (Co-Director, Relative Creative)

This report will focus more on the outputs of the workshop component. It is meant to document and summarise the thought process and visions of the workshop participants and hopefully it will inspire future action from various stakeholders in the Singapore arts ecosystem.

On behalf of ASEF, I wish to sincerely thank Centre 42 and the Australia Council for the Arts for all their invaluable contributions in making this edition of ASEF Unplugged a success.

Fatima Avila

Project Manager (Culture), Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)

ABOUT ARTS FUTURES

The Australia Council for the Arts is the Australian Government's principal arts funding and advisory body. Our role is to champion and invest in Australian arts and creativity, through our grant programs, capacity and market building work, advocacy and advice, partnerships and research.

Arts Futures is one of our five core research themes, along with public sentiment, artists careers, First Nations art and culture, and diversity. The Arts Futures body of work developed from the results of the latest survey of professional practicing artists. This research highlighted some of the challenges faced by artists, including declining income from creative work, but also highlighted expanding opportunities for artists in the workforces of the future.

Arts Futures situates the Australian arts sector within broader systems of change and disruption - driven by technology, economics, and socio-cultural processes. Arts Futures aims to ensure the challenges and opportunities of disruption can be identified, understood and harnessed.

Arts Futures moves beyond research in to wider sector engagement - aiming to activate and grow the capacity that already exists in the cultural and creative industries through sharing knowledge, experience and networks. With this work, we want to create conversations, generate knowledge, and share ideas on the future of the arts and creativity.

We know we don't have all the answers. We want to share our thinking as it develops, and work with others to develop new knowledge and shape future directions. We believe that the arts and culture sectors can gain strength through their intersections with, and embeddedness in, other industries and sectors.

The Arts Futures work is focussed on three themes:

New and innovative business models and structures.

With significant industry changes taking place within and outside the arts and cultural sector we need to consider what the creative or arts organisation of the future might be. Crucially, we need to understand what skills and structures are needed to develop sustainable, agile and innovative business models that will ensure ongoing income generation and more viable artist careers.

The impact of new and emerging technologies.

Artists increasingly rely on technology-driven platforms and tools to create work, to collaborate with others and to reach audiences. But along with these new technologies comes a need to interrogate the societal structures and biases within which they are created and applied. Our work in this area explores the ethical and human rights implications of new technologies, particularly as they impact on the work of artists, arts organisations and the broader diverse populations engaging with the arts on a daily basis.

The changing roles of artists and creativity.

Arts and culture have always been central to societies across the world. By looking across history we can explore the changing roles of artists and creativity in times of disruption and consider possible futures. And by viewing arts engagement as a continuum, that includes creators, audiences and the public, we can sometimes see a blurring of these categories. At times this blurring is mediated by technology. And it presents new opportunities to explore the evolving role of artists, as well as the public value of arts. Creativity is not held solely by artists or the arts. The ability to think and act creatively is embedded in what makes us human and will be increasingly important with the rise of AI and automation.

We have delivered a range of knowledge generating activities and public events, and have a suite of research projects underway. Information on these and much more is on our Arts Futures website.

We were excited to get involved in this ASEF Unplugged event to both share some of our experiences and research findings, but also to engage in a conversation to explore the similarities and differences between the Australian experience and that of Singapore.

<https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/arts-futures>

Ruth Williams

Research Associate, Australia Council for the Arts

Generating conversations within
the arts & encouraging
conversations with other sectors
- imagine & create shared futures –
who is leading the way in
Singapore?

ASEF—Unplugged
Conversations—on—the—Arts
In—Asia—and—Europe



PART 1: PUBLIC CONVERSATION



Dr Ruth Williams,
Research Associate,
Australia Council for the Arts
(joined live via video conference)



Ms Hasyimah Harith,
Company Manager,
P7:1SMA



Ms Yvonne Tham,
Chief Executive Officer
The Esplanade Co Ltd

Video highlights of the public conversation can be viewed here:

<http://bit.ly/unpluggedartsfuturesvideo>



PART 2: WORKSHOP

Relative Creative was kindly invited by ASEF and Australia Council for the Arts to host an Arts Futures Workshop as part of the Unplugged series hosted by Centre42. The workshop, held on 23rd November 2019, acted as a rapid taster of Relative Creative's mapping process and focused around the question: **What is the role of the Arts in the face of uncertain and fragile futures, in an interconnected world?**

An insightful Q & A panel with Dr Ruth Williams (Australia Council for the Arts), Yvonne Tam (CEO, Esplanade), Hasyimah Harith (Company Manager, P7:15MA) focusing on the current research by Australia Council for the Arts and centred around questions of the role of arts organisations in Singapore, key challenges and disruptions faced by both Australia and Singapore and the social role of artists and arts workers in Singapore, set the scene for the workshop and focus of discussion.

The workshop began with a yarning circle. The role of the yarning circle is to break down perceived hierarchies and give everyone the opportunity to speak, introducing themselves and their practice. A connective art process (adapted from work by Prof. Norm Sheehan) was used to engage participants with the question "What is your vision of the arts in Singapore in 2050?" The intention here being to get participants thinking about the sort of future they would like to see.





Participants then laid out their cards, connecting them in the centre of the yarning circle. Immediately the participants recognised the topographic shape of Singapore in the pattern created by the cards. Turning over a few of the cards (in key locations around Singapore) visions of the future included “Everyday art” and “more works related to heritage” and “interdisciplinary, intercultural, intergenerational” emerged.

Participants then chose tables, set with maps, pens, knowledge cards and post-it notes and began the mapping process. The mapping process takes participants on a journey through present, past, current directions (the future if nothing changes), futures arriving and possible clashes. This allows participants to engage with long-term thinking and unpack the role the past has had on the present and future. It allows participants to locate themselves within a more systemic and relational view of the world. Following this process participants are well placed to begin their design fictions, drawing on what they have learnt and unpacked during the previous steps.





In this rapid workshop there were five key threads that emerged:

- ▶ The importance of artists in setting the ethical compass of society, drawing attention to conversations that need to be had through the creation of new works. This will see **the arts being interwoven everywhere, in all sectors of society, as the bridge that connects the digital to the human.**
- ▶ The potential to use new technology to understand and share a “Reflection of our Roots”, using human interaction to curb the negative impacts of technology. In this vision of the future. **In this vision of the future, the arts will be for everyone and everywhere, both in physical and digital spaces, more accessible and participatory.**
- ▶ The increasing importance of pluriversity in the arts (presence of diversity of perspectives and practices, different from the individualism of the past but not universalising the way of the present). In this vision **the arts will be the conscience of society, a source of hope, and a way to bring back humanity’s individuality.**
- ▶ The role of the arts as a driving force where artists and arts workers are supported in acquiring interdisciplinary skills to broaden their practice. **The arts will respond and embrace changes in the face of future challenges, by adopting interdisciplinarity, remaining open, inclusive and accessible.**

- ▶ **“Everyday arts” is how we see the future. The arts will permeate connect disciplines, generations, races – everything!** Here there is opportunity for new ways to support artists and arts workers (financially).

Broadly, there was engaged, energetic and enthusiastic conversation around the role of art in the future of Singapore and a clear recognition of the important role of arts in navigating the socially and ethically-complex futures. There was some engagement with the topic of future technologies, seeing mostly opportunity from this sphere for artists, particularly as a way of “humanising humans in a world of robots” (from the yarning circle) while recognising the disruptive role technology could play in relation to human relationships and social inequality.

It is clear that there is a desire to have deeper conversations around the future role of arts in Singapore and to take this further to develop clear next steps and strategies. A longer version of this workshop with time for deeper reflection and paired with discussions (panel conversations, presentations) that speak to key areas (the future of technology, decoloniality in a Singaporean context, climate change) is recommended. Relative Creative is excited to work with various stakeholders to develop this.

Bec Barnett
Co-Director, Relative Creative



WORKSHOP DESIGN

- 1 Entry Provocation (15 minutes)**

The entry provocation gave Bec the opportunity to introduce herself and locate her work around the discussion topic.
- 2 Yarning Circle and Connective Art (35 minutes)**

The visual yarning process allowed participants to introduce themselves and respond to the question What is your vision of the arts in Singapore in 2050? using blank cards. Participants were then asked to place their cards, beginning in the centre of the room (a 'Connective Art' method developed by Wiradjuri man Prof. Norm Sheehan).
- 3 Mapping and Design Fiction Creation (1 hour 40 minutes)**

After the yarning process participants mapped and created Design Fictions. We mapped pasts that have brought-forth presents, and are gathering as futures. We then mapped alternative future opportunities and identified the beginnings of future scenarios; a design fiction. Knowledge cards were provided to participants to support them in thinking about the varying impacts of new technologies.
- 4 Design Fiction Sharing (20 minutes)**

Each of the five tables shared a summary of their process and design fiction.
- 5 Moving Forward (10 minutes)**

The evening finished with time for participants to ask Bec questions about the process and ask questions about next steps.

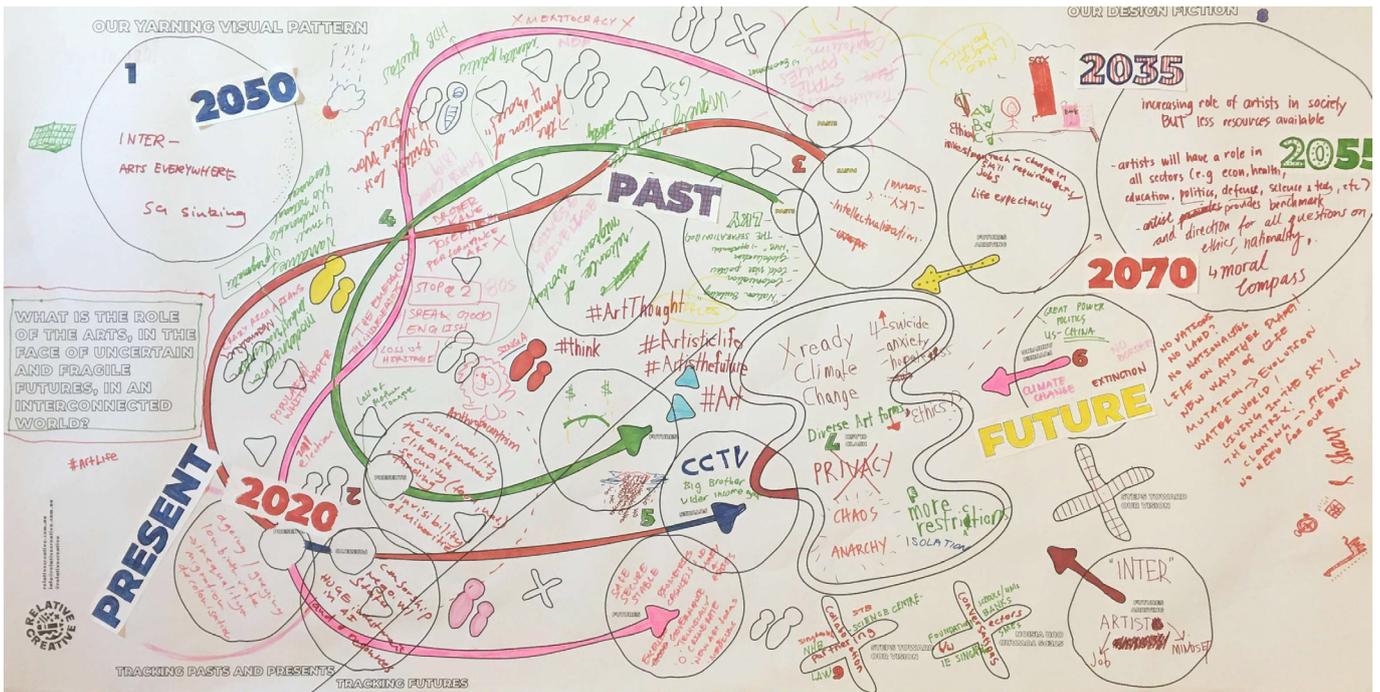


“It is clear that there is a desire to have deeper conversations around the future role of arts in Singapore and to take this further to develop clear next steps and strategies.”



GROUP 1

The arts will be interwoven everywhere, in all sectors of society, as the bridge that connects the digital to the human.

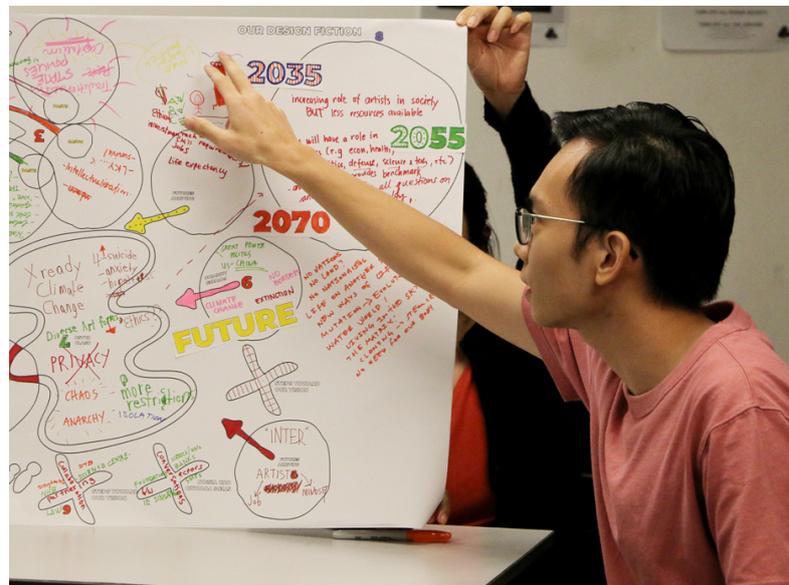


We envision an ‘arts everywhere’ future, embodying this unique concept of ‘inter’ – as in interdisciplinary, intersectoral, intermediary, interlocutor, interrogator and so on. In the Singapore context, we began the designing future process by identifying current trends, issues and status-quos. These include an ageing population, low birth rate, inequality, migration, invisibility of minorities and climate and environmental sustainability. Not all is bleak, however, as there are many positives to Singapore’s current landscape such as a low crime and corruption rates, high quality of life, high innovation and productivity rates, and highly skilled talent pool.

Next, we unpacked the pasts that these current conditions come from. State policy, capitalism, colonial history and globalisation all played huge roles in shaping the present. But how do all these pasts and presents connect? We identified the following concrete points: the ‘Stop at 2’, ‘Speak Good English’ and ‘Speak Mandarin’ campaigns have impacted population, demographics and heritage. Meanwhile, meritocracy, upskilling, and ‘hubbing’ (in finance, shipping, petrochemical and artificial intelligence) have led to the rapid increase of foreign talent and the productivity of the local talent pool. Moreover, consumerism, the ‘Uniquely Singapore’ and ‘Great Singapore Sale’ campaigns that have fuelled tourist arrivals and construction of shopping malls have contributed to the ongoing concerns of environmental sustainability.

If nothing changes, we are heading into a clash of the present and future that we are not prepared for. This includes loss of privacy and unclear ethical boundaries in governance driven by the huge investments in AI and big data, and anxiety and hopelessness (i.e. higher suicide rates) from climate and existential crises.

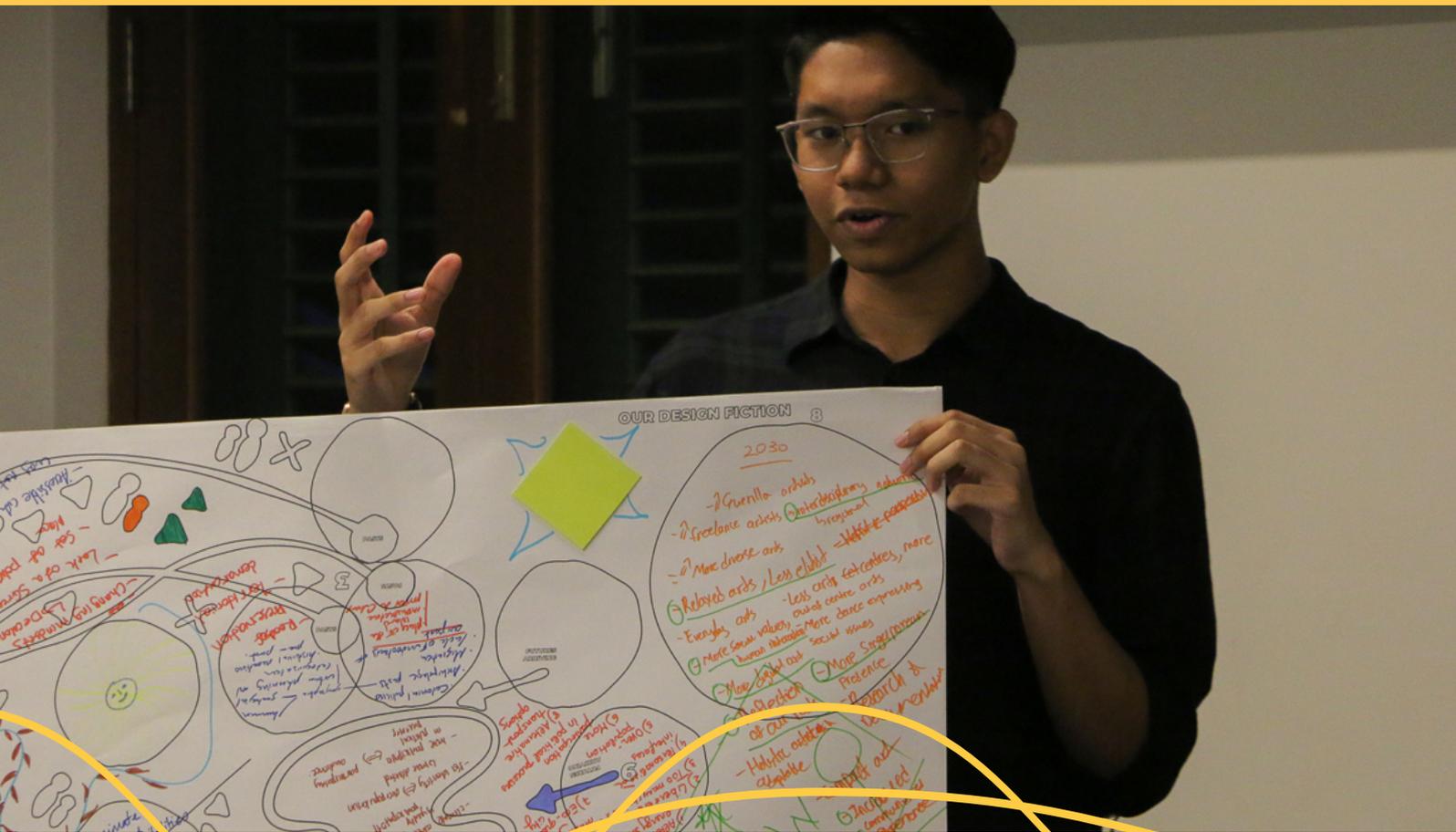
“In designing the arts future of Singapore, we decided to focus on understanding our ground realities that are unlikely to change”



In designing the arts future of Singapore, we decided to focus on understanding our ground realities that are unlikely to change (e.g. cultural landscape, state policies, pragmatism), as we have to navigate through them to be future-ready. As a talent-driven economy, Singapore will continue invest in education, re-skilling and upskilling as it has for decades. As one of the key beneficiaries of these investments and driven by initiatives to share and diversify resources across sectors, artists will find themselves immersed in many different sectors of society – health, law, finance, trade, etc. Aside from creating art across multiple disciplines, artists will also play critical roles in (1) bridging advanced technologies to the human creativity, instead of validating human versus robots debates and (2) leading ethical governance in the face of these new technologies.

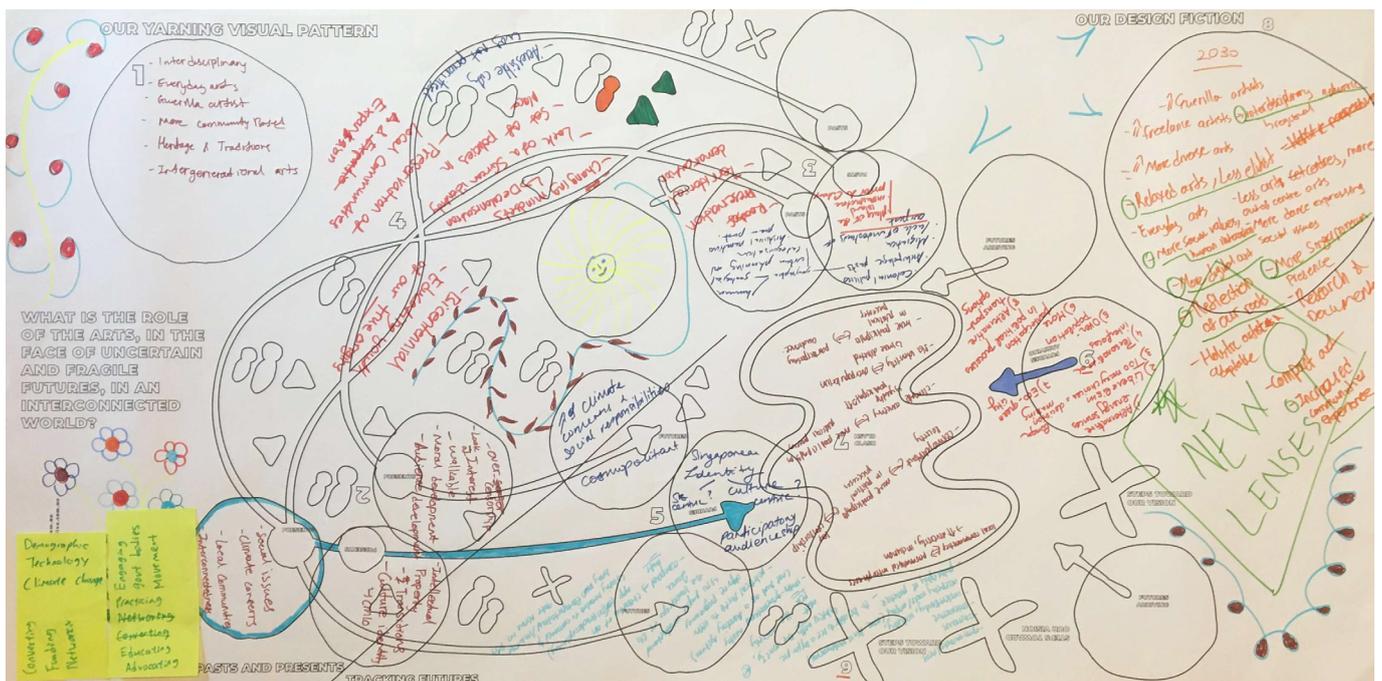
To exist and expand in pragmatic Singapore, the arts will have to wear multiple hats by engaging with and providing value in creativity, empathy, strategic design and out-of-the-box thinking to ALL sectors of society, not in a small little art corner where only ‘patrons of the arts’ reap its benefits.

In sum, the future that we wish to design is one where the arts is not shaped by external factors such as other industries and government policy, but rather transforming itself to be the ‘inter’ in a world undergoing disruption.



GROUP 2

In our vision of the future, the arts will be for everyone and everywhere, both in physical and digital spaces, more accessible and participatory.



In the Singapore context, we began the designing future process by identifying current trends, issues and status-quos. These include issues around ethnicity and cultural identity, climate concerns, over-censorship and involvement of local communities in the arts. On the positive side, Singapore is already showing signs of interconnectedness that we foresee will be very useful to develop possible futures.

Next, we unpacked the pasts that these current conditions come from. Singapore colonial past as well as its position both geographically and politically in Southeast Asia are part of the pasts that have formed present situations. In particular, the group felt that there was a lack of understanding of our past before the British colonial era and that a lot was missing in the present narratives on Singapore history before that time. How are these pasts connected with the present? The main identified issue was the tension between policies set in place to create a Singaporean identity versus ethnic groups identities, particularly minority groups that struggle to preserve their roots. However, with the advance of technologies, younger generations are increasingly more connected to the idea of a Singaporean identity that goes beyond race.

If nothing changes, this generation of young people will be more liberal and more involved in political processes. They will also be more engaged in fighting climate change with alternative and new ways of consuming content as well as alternative transport options. However, overpopulation will remain a major issue faced by Singapore in the very near future.

So how did we envisage Singapore arts future to be in 2030? The overpopulation and the concerns over climate change will make Singaporeans more adaptable to changes and difficulties. This will be reflected in more freelance interdisciplinary artists, able to wear several hats, more diverse arts less elitist and more accessible to all levels of society, including youth and older generations. In order to make the arts more participatory, artists and arts managers will have to bring the arts to the people, outside of the traditional venues and explore new spaces, both physical and digital.

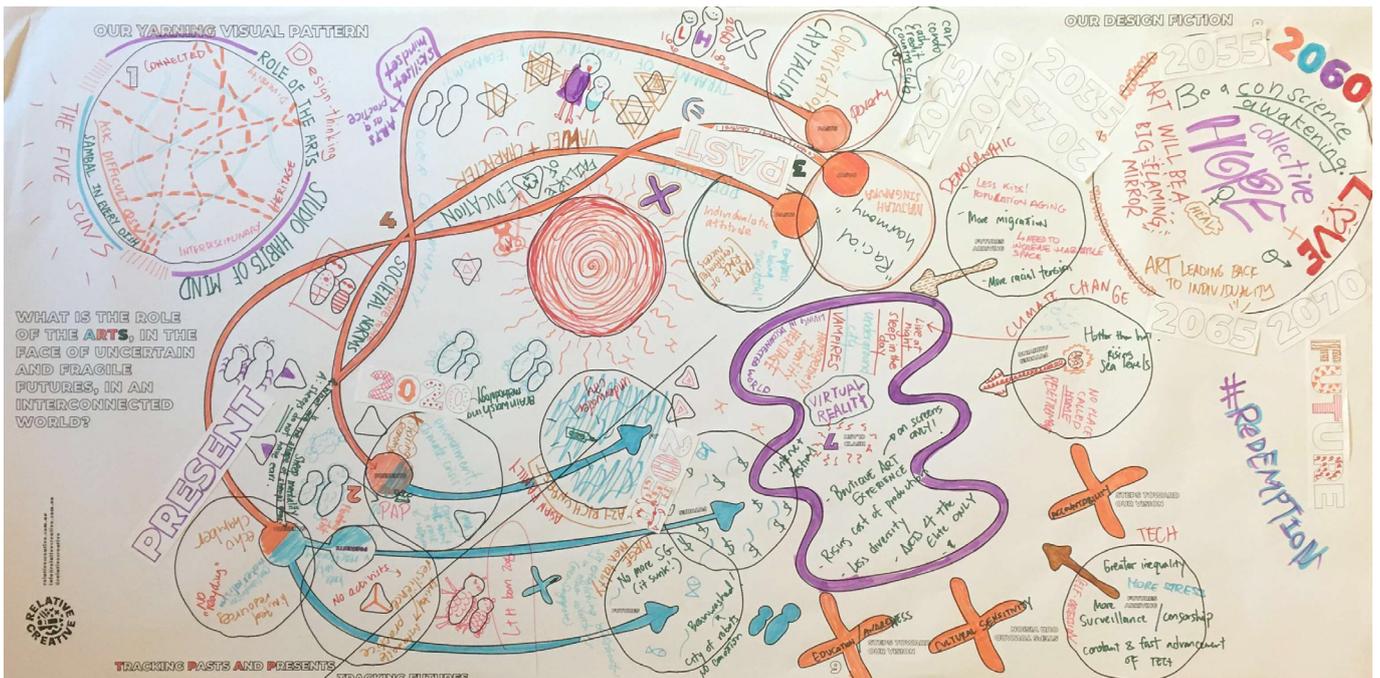
In the future that we envision, arts will be for everyone and everywhere. They will address issues of cultural and social identity and will be the catalyst for a more interconnected society.

“If nothing changes, this generation of young people will be more liberal and more involved in political processes. They will also be more engaged in fighting climate change with alternative and new ways of consuming content as well as alternative transport options.”



GROUP 3

The arts will be the conscience of society, a source of hope, and a way to bring back humanity's individuality.



We began the designing futures process by identifying current trends, issues, and status quos in the Singapore context. These include the bleak ground realities of present-day Singaporean society: censorship, the proliferation of a 'sheep mentality' or most people following a bandwagon of popular belief, concerns about climate and environmental sustainability, and the general lack of 'activists' or voices that oppose the long-term governing political party. However, one redeeming factor that the group acknowledged is that Singapore is one of the safest cities to live in and it is very much possible to make a life here with a high standard of living.

In attempting to unpack the pasts that these current situations come from, we have identified the following conditions which shaped the present: colonialism, capitalism, the lack of harmony among races, the overwhelming pressure to achieve the societal definition of 'success' (high level of education, ticking the '5C's' – car, condominium, cash, credit, country club, certifications for skills) which inevitably results in a materialistic attitude as well. However, the biggest factor the group identified is the existence of an individualistic attitude – only caring about oneself and a mindset that the bigger issues are a responsibility of others e.g. the environment and speaking out against a ruling party.

If nothing changes, we are heading towards a future characterised by the absence of emotion, critical thought, and diversity. We would be living in a highly disconnected and artificial world (Singapore being an 'underwater' city is not too far-fetched from impending reality). While one of the main causes for our current situation is our overly individualistic mindset, in the future, there is a high chance of losing our individuality altogether. While we recognise that action must be taken now in order to prevent the bleak future from happening, we also accept that certain things will still happen regardless of intervention, including: increased migration, an aging population, rising temperatures and sea levels.

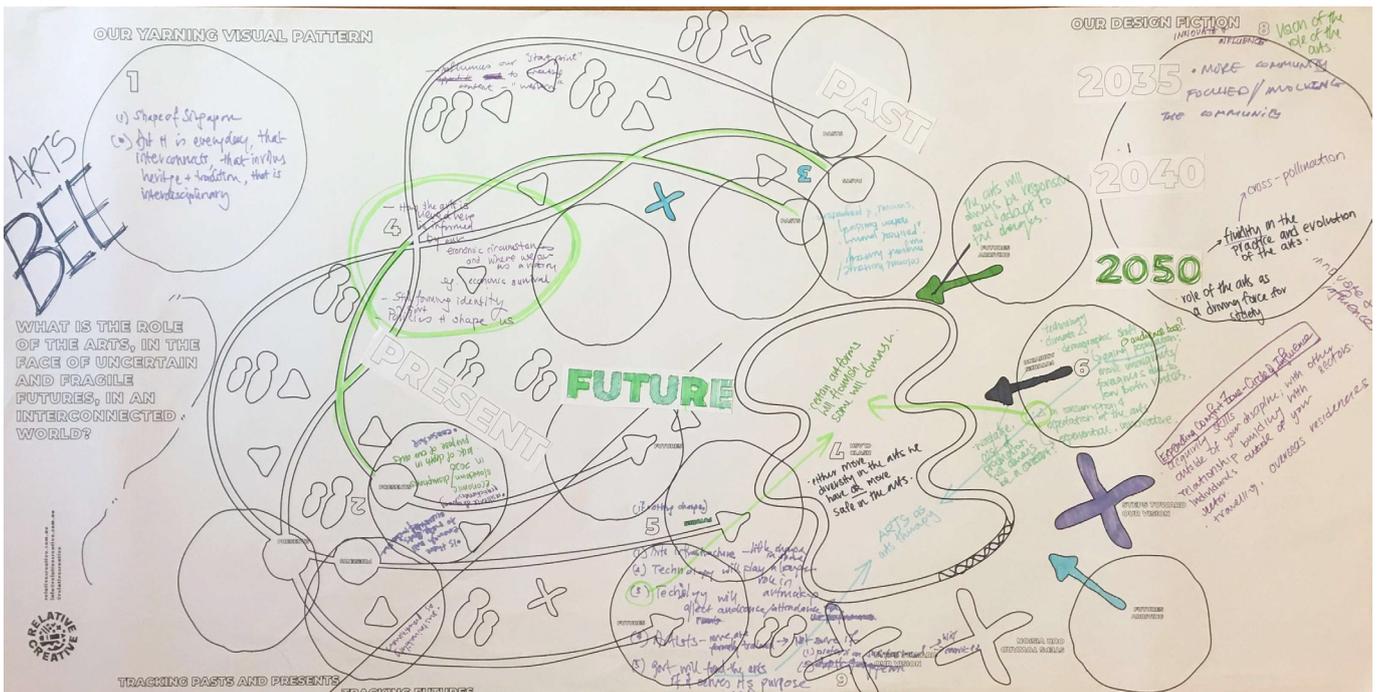
However, there are certain things that we have more control over which creates a possibility for positive change. As part of Singaporean society, we should strive to increase our cultural sensitivity, increase our awareness about issues outside ourselves, and increase our accountability for things that happen around us. We should care more and share more. And art plays a big role to both enable and channel these positive changes. Art is our mirror, our avenue for social awakening, our beacon of hope. It has the ability to provoke and engage and bring people together – while at the same time safekeeping each one's distinct identity and individuality. It is that which connects us – both with each other in the present, and with our pasts (learning from them) and futures (designing and creating them).

“While one of the main causes for our current situation is our overly individualistic mindset, in the future, there is a high chance of losing our individuality altogether.”



GROUP 4

The arts will respond and embrace changes in the face of future challenges, by adopting interdisciplinarity, remaining open, inclusive and accessible.



The role of the arts in the future, is one that is closely connected to us in our everyday lives and is interdisciplinary in nature. Yet whilst drawing on knowledge from other sectors and fields, we will continue to remain inclusive and accessible, ensuring that our heritage and tradition will not be overlooked or neglected.

After considering probable and plausible futures of the arts, we then reflected and mapped out present concerns of the arts in the Singapore context. As Singapore continues to be more diverse (culturally and ethnically), there must be effort and willingness (from the government as well as those working in the arts) in enhancing arts access to everyone and ensuring the arts continue striving to be inclusive and accessible. Other concerns include the anticipated economic slowdown in 2020, censorship, and the lack of depth in the purpose of our arts. With these in mind, the most crucial concern is the resilience of younger arts practitioners, where their tenacity to continue pushing boundaries of Singapore's arts sector is questionable.

Our colonial and migrant heritage could have possibly played a role in contributing to the current issues we face. Singapore's cultural policy has been very much driven and steeped in the ideologies of nation building, survival and pragmatism, which undeniably led to the development of a remarkably strong economy in a few decades.

What remains constant from the past and present, is how the arts in Singapore is informed by our economic circumstances and where we are as a nation, driven in

part by our state policies as well. While changes such as technological advancements are imminent, there could potentially be positive outcomes as well as it could mean more variations in terms of art making. More diversity in terms of art forms and certain artforms will either flourish (i.e. filmmaking and visual arts etc.) or diminish (i.e. traditional artforms etc.).

Regardless of action taken, there would be a shift in Singapore's demographics as Singapore's elderly population starts to supersede the young, resulting in changes in consumption and expectation of the arts in Singapore, impacting on audience and attendance numbers as well.

In designing the future of the arts in Singapore, we envision more initiatives that would innovate and influence and more 'cross-pollination' would occur –where knowledge and skills from one artform is shared with another, and know-how from the arts sector is transferred to another sector and vice versa, creating new varieties in the arts.

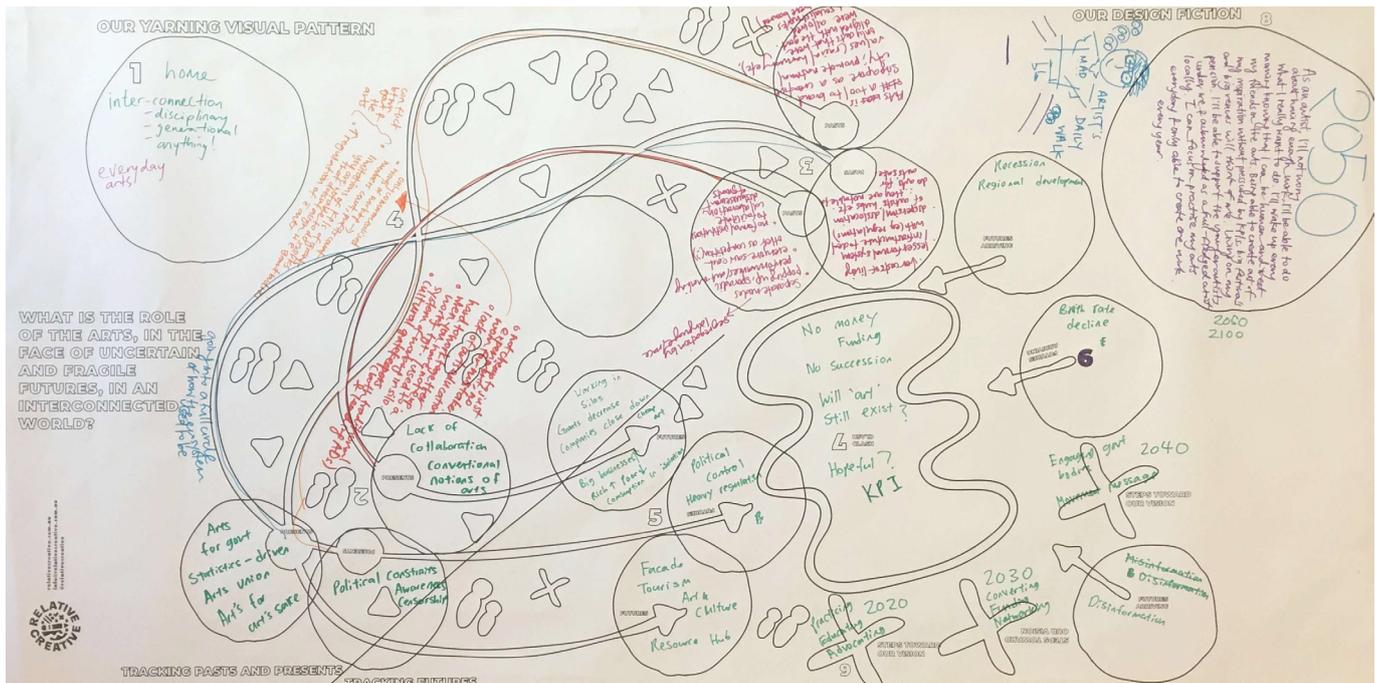
To attain such a vision, it involves arts practitioners being fluid in their practice and adapting as the future approaches. We should continuously expand our comfort zones, by acquiring skills outside of our disciplines and building relations with individuals outside our sector. This also includes travelling internationally for exchanges and dialogues, seeking for opportunities that would aid in our professional growth and development.

“Regardless of action taken, there would be a shift in Singapore’s demographics as Singapore’s elderly population starts to supersede the young, resulting in changes in consumption and expectation of the arts in Singapore, impacting on audience and attendance numbers as well.”



GROUP 5

“Everyday arts” is how we see the future. The arts will permeate and connect disciplines, generations, races—everything!



We began the designing futures process by looking at the current situation in Singapore today. At present, there seems to be a conventional notion of the arts and there is a lack of collaboration in this sector amongst the artists themselves and other stakeholders. The art world, similar to other industries, seem to be statistics-driven and serve what the government aspires for. There is also a lot of constraints that exist including censorship.

In the past, there were no formal institutions to facilitate collaboration or disbursement of grants. Everyone saw each other as competition. Art-making was sporadic and ad-hoc and there were separate nodes because of segregation by language or race. Further, there was a less formal system in place in the past and several artist hubs were dislocated or dispersed. Eventually art was seen by the government as a tool to brand Singapore as a creative city and a means to promote national values (e.g. racial harmony) - however, only arts that were aligned with the government's vision were allowed (e.g. social works were banned).

If nothing changes, we will continue to work in silos, grants will decrease, companies will close down. The inequality, in particular, the gap between the rich and the poor will continue to rise. We will consume more but in isolation. Heavy regulation will continue to control us. Arts and culture will be a tool for tourism.

Therefore we must take action by increasing education and strengthening advocacy. We must continue to take part in networking activities but strive to convert this in concrete things like funding. We must engage the government, send a message, create a movement. Arts can make all this happen.

We aspire for a future where as an arts practitioner, we will be able to do what we really want to do and get enough remuneration for work done. We aspire for a world where we create work out of inspiration and not just to tick KPIs (key performance indicators). We want to be able to support younger artists. We aim for a sustainable future where art is everywhere.

“We must continue to take part in networking activities but strive to convert this in concrete things like funding. We must engage the government, send a message, create a movement. Arts can make all this happen.”

SPEAKERS, PARTICIPANTS, ORGANISING TEAM

Speakers (Part 1: Public Conversation)

Hasyimah Harith
Ruth Williams
Yvonne Tham

Facilitator (Part 2: Workshop)

Bec Barnett

Workshop Participants

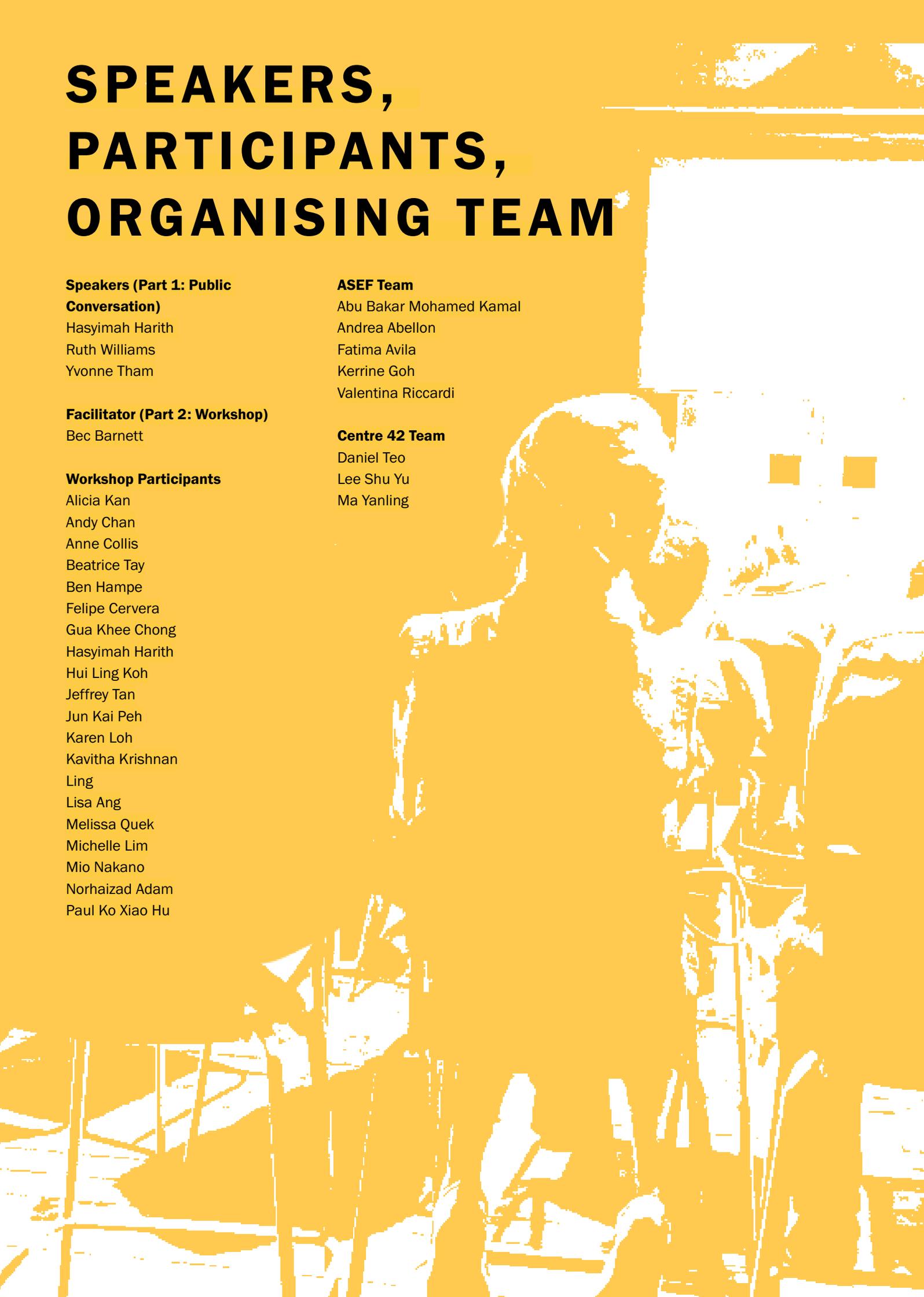
Alicia Kan
Andy Chan
Anne Collis
Beatrice Tay
Ben Hampe
Felipe Cervera
Gua Khee Chong
Hasyimah Harith
Hui Ling Koh
Jeffrey Tan
Jun Kai Peh
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About the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)

The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) promotes understanding, strengthens relationships and facilitates cooperation among the people, institutions and organisations of Asia and Europe. ASEF enhances dialogue, enables exchanges and encourages collaboration across the thematic areas of culture, education, governance, sustainable development, economy and public health.

ASEF is an intergovernmental not-for-profit organisation located in Singapore. Founded in 1997, it is the only institution of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM).

ASEF runs more than 25 projects a year, consisting of around 100 activities, mainly conferences, seminars, workshops, lectures, publications, and online platforms, together with about 125 partner organisations. Each year over 3,000 Asians and Europeans participate in ASEF's activities, and much wider audiences are reached through its various events, networks, and web-portals. For more information, please visit www.ASEF.org



CENTRE 42

CENTRE 42 is a non-profit theatre development space in Singapore, committed to the creation, documentation and promotion of texts and writings for the stage. As an intermediary in the Singapore performing arts scene, Centre 42 incubates original writing for production development; provides space and a supportive environment for artists and new work creation; and develops a functional archive documenting the histories and processes of Singapore theatre.

For more information, please visit www.centre42.sg



The Australia Council for the Arts

The Australia Council for the Arts is the Australian Government's arts funding and advisory body. Our focus is on increasing the visibility of Australia's vibrant arts and culture, and recognising the evolving way that Australians make and experience art. Our role is to support the unimagined along with the reimagined, the unknown and experimental along with the keenly anticipated. We are a champion for Australian arts both here and overseas. We invest in artistic excellence through support for all facets of the creative process, and are committed to the arts being accessible to all Australians. For more information, please visit www.australiacouncil.gov.au

WORKSHOP CONSULTANT



Relative Creative

Relative Creative is a strategic design company based on the Gold Coast, Australia. We design communication, strategies, experiences and events that help people think, talk and mobilise sustainable futures.

We offer our collaborators Gold Coast's leading strategic design agency and design lab. We are a passionate, multi-disciplined design studio with expertise in strategic foresight and systemic design theories, methods and practices. We work to advance transitions towards more sustainable and socially responsible ecological, socio-economic, political, policy, governance, cultural & arts paradigms. For more information, please visit <https://relativecreative.com.au/>