

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

15 April 2009

## Singapore at 53<sup>rd</sup> Venice Biennale

7 June – 22 November 2009  
(Vernissage: 4 - 6 June 2009)

**Venue: Palazzo Michiel del Brusa, Cannaregio**

Internationally recognised visual artist Ming Wong will represent Singapore at the 53rd Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition this year.

A graduate of the Slade School of Art (UK) and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Singapore), Wong is presently based in Berlin, Germany, where he undertook a one year artist residency at the prestigious Kunstlerhaus Bethanien in 2008. Wong has made significant in-roads internationally with his participation in numerous group and solo visual arts exhibitions in Europe, North America and Asia; notable recent showcases include the *Images Festival* in Toronto Canada, *Vain Efforts* in Sydney Australia, *S1 Salon* in UK and the Jakarta Biennale. Wong's works are currently on display at the *At Home Abroad* showcase at 8Q SAM, for Singapore artists who are well received overseas.

This will be Singapore's 5th consecutive presentation at the Venice Biennale. The Commissioner for the Singapore Pavilion is Lim Chwee Seng, Director of Visual Arts & Resource Development, National Arts Council (NAC), while Tang Fu Kuen, an authority in managing multi-disciplinary arts showcases, serves as curator.

Said Lim Chwee Seng, "The Venice Biennale is a global cultural platform that provides high visibility and connectivity for participating artists and curators from around the world. Together with the Singapore Biennale and the Singapore Art Show organised by NAC in Singapore, our participation in the Venice Biennale forms part of our all-rounded approach to the development of Singapore's traditional and contemporary art practices. This year the international art community will have the opportunity to witness the talents of Singapore artist Ming Wong and curator Tang Fu Kuen at the Pavilion through a multi-disciplinary, multi-lingual work that embodies a strong Singaporean character."

Being featured as a solo artist in the Singapore Pavilion this year is an acknowledgement of Wong's highly internationalised status, and recognition of his potential. As the most established and prestigious contemporary arts event, the Venice Biennale is an excellent springboard for Singapore artists to the global visual arts stage. Singapore's participation in what is commonly referred to as the Olympics of the art world, provides the best opportunity not only to showcase our promising arts talents, but also to gain mindshare internationally and broaden Singapore's global art footprint.

The Singapore Pavilion, entitled *Life of Imitation*, stages the co-existence of multiple worlds where language, gender, appearance and traditions constantly negotiate with one another. In playful and imperfect acts of mimesis and melodrama, this exhibition attempts to hold the mirror up to the Singaporean condition related to roots, hybridity and change.

Wong explores the performative veneers of language and identity through his own “world cinema” - a series of video installations based on well-known works and artistes in Asian cinema. The mood is further enhanced by billboards painted by Wong and Singapore’s last surviving billboard painter Neo Chon Teck, and movie memorabilia such as photographs of old cinemas in Singapore, paintings, drawings and transcripts, depicting the creation process of Wong’s video installations and the entire exhibition itself.

Wong joins 12 other artists who have represented Singapore at the oldest and most prestigious international contemporary art platform over the last 10 years. They were Matthew Ngui, Suzann Victor, Salleh Japar and Henri Chen (2001); Francis Ng, Heman Chong and Tan Swie Hian (2003); Lim Tzay Chuen (2005); Zul Mahmud, Jason Lim, Vincent Leow and Tang Da Wu (2007). The curators were Joanna Lee and Ahmad Mashadi (2001); Low Sze Wee (2003); Eugene Tan (2005); and Lindy Poh (2007).

The 53<sup>rd</sup> Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition charts the highest number of participating countries at a record 77 country pavilions with a significant increase in number of single-artist representation.

We invite you to publicise the participation of Singapore at the Venice Biennale 2009.

Please refer to the attached annexes for more information:

Annex 1 – Curatorial Theme

Annex 2 – Profiles of Artist and Curator

### **Singapore Pavilion at 53<sup>rd</sup> Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition**

Exhibition date	:	7 June – 22 November 2009
Vernissage	:	4 June – 6 June 2009
Opening of Pavilion	:	6 June 2009, 11am
Location of Pavilion	:	Palazzo Michiel del Brusa Cannaregio 4391 VENEZIA
Commissioner	:	LIM Chwee Seng
Curator	:	TANG Fu Kuen
Artist	:	Ming WONG
Presenter	:	National Arts Council, Singapore
Sponsor	:	Lee Foundation

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## **SINGAPORE AT 53<sup>RD</sup> VENICE BIENNALE INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION**

### **CURATORIAL THEME**

#### ***LIFE OF IMITATION***

Cinema and performativity form the core of the Singapore pavilion at the 53<sup>rd</sup> Venice Biennale. We re-imagine the golden era of the multi-ethnic film industry in Singapore before Independence in 1965, so as to re-read 'national cinema' constructed through language and identity.

Hitherto little known, the 1950s and 60s screen history in Singapore records some of most charming cinema architecture, prolific film production studios in Asia, award-winning movies, and vibrant socio-cultural milieu. This phenomenon arose amidst rapid modernity, de-colonisation and nation-building struggle. Multiple worlds co-existed where language, gender, appearance and traditions were continually negotiated. Cinema was the site par excellence that captured the complex relations and knowledge production of this historical period of change and fluidity.

Inspired by this rich heritage, artist Ming Wong illuminates on Singapore's significant cinematic legacy, while inserting a set of performative video interventions that reflexively address identity formation. His aesthetic strategy is to re-enact the characters and lines in specific scenes or situations that relate to otherness. The mimicry is sly and comic, and the video loops soon expose slippages in acting guises and stances. These imperfections of copying allow for a critical recognition of difference and ambiguity.

For his performative operations, Ming Wong has chosen to re-present films that are related to or set in the 50s and 60s, and are familiar to audiences spanning 2 generations. These films engage with notions of non-authenticity and parroting. The first is a compendium of works by P. Ramlee, the wunderkind of Malay cinema whose stereotypical characters and memorable lines have endured popular taste. The second is the Hollywood melodrama 'Imitation of Life' (1959) by Douglas Sirk about a black mother and a 'white' daughter. The third is Wong Kar Wai's 'In the Mood for Love' (2000) with actress Maggie Cheung rehearsing for a confrontation with her spouse about his infidelity.

As part of commemorating yesteryear cinema, the country's last surviving billboard painter, CT Neo, has been commissioned to collaborate with Ming Wong to create 3 canvases to be unveiled in Venice. Also seen for the first time outside Singapore are the rare artefacts by private collector HM Wong who has lovingly reconstructed - in the form of A4 paper 'artworks' - the evolution of local cinema buildings in the last century. This complements Ming Wong's journey from Singapore to Malaysia photographing the fate of once beautiful but now deserted 'architectures of entertainment'. In parallel, film-maker Sherman Ong's 'creative documentary' brings us encounters with fabulous individuals whose deeds and aspirations constitute Singapore's collective film memory.

Mediating the way the past and present histories intersect, the pavilion unfolds a voyage of truth where both archival and re-invented materials, real and fictional processes, contest one another. The tones and moods in each room shift: from nostalgia to actual to playful. Beyond the local cinematic frame, the historical Singaporean condition related to roots, hybridity and cosmopolitanism resonates within a contemporary global context.

## SINGAPORE AT 53<sup>RD</sup> VENICE BIENNALE INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION

### ARTIST

**Ming WONG** (b. 1971, Singapore)

Based in Singapore and Berlin, Ming Wong is an internationally emerging visual artist who exhibits significant potential to become a major global art talent. An active practitioner and well profiled in Europe, Wong was awarded the Wollita Kulturpreis 2008, and was also on an artist residency programme at the prestigious Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin, where he presented a solo exhibition *Angst Essen – Eat Fear*.

Armed with a Masters in Fine Arts from Slade School of Art (UK), and a Diploma in Fine Arts from Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Singapore), Wong has participated in numerous group and solo visual art exhibitions in Singapore, Indonesia, North America and Europe. His works have been showcased notably at the *Images Festival* in Toronto, the *Jakarta Biennale*, *Vain Efforts* in Sydney, *S1 Salon* in UK and *At Home Abroad* in Singapore this year, as well as *the Art Forum Berlin 2008* in Germany. Wong has exhibited twice at *mononoaware*.

A recipient of the London Artists Film & Video Award from Film London, Wong explores the performative veneers of language and identity through his own 'world cinema' in the Singapore Pavilion this year.

### Exhibitions (\*denotes one man show)

2008-2009

- *Images Festival* Art Gallery of York University, Toronto, Apr 09
- *Vain Efforts\** Gallery 4A, Asia Australia Arts Centre, Mar-Apr 09
- *S1 Salon* S1 Artspace, Sheffield, UK, Feb 09
- *Jakarta Biennale* Jakarta Indonesia, 6–27 Feb 09
- *At Home Abroad* 8Q Singapore Art Museum, Jan 09
- *mononoaware\** MK Galerie Rotterdam, 10 Jan-6 Feb 09
- *And the Difference Is* National University of Singapore, 12 Dec 08–8 Feb 09
- *ART FORUM BERLIN* Berlin Exhibition Grounds, 31 Oct–3 Nov 08
- *PREVIEW BERLIN* Tempelhof Airport Berlin, 30 Oct–2 Nov 08
- *mononoaware\** MK Galerie Berlin, 5 Sep-18 Oct 08
- *Das Piraterieproblem* Brandenburgischer Kunstverein Potsdam, Aug-Sep 08
- *Everybody Knows This is Nowhere* Galerie Wendt + Friedman, Berlin, Jul–Aug 08
- *Streng Verdaut* ZKM Center for Art & Media, Karlsruhe, Jun–Oct 08
- *Angst Essen – Eat Fear\** Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, 5-22 Jun 08
- *Kunstinvasion* Initiative Berliner Kunsthalle, 31 May–1 Jun 08
- *Projecto MONOLOGS* Galatina, Italy, 29-30 May 08
- *Film Programme* Kunstverein Dusseldorf, May-Jul 08
- *Damn! I Wish I'd Done That!!* Zabłudowicz Art Projects, London, Feb 08
- *Filem-Filem-Filem\** Singapore Fringe Festival, The Arts House, Jan 08

#### 2005-2007

- *S.T.O.R.A.G.E: Ming Wong\** The Agency Gallery, London, Sep-Oct 07
- *Word of Mouth* Curating Lab, Singapore Art Show, Aug-Oct 07
- *WE* National University of Singapore Museum, Jul-Nov 07
- *Futurama and Re-inventing Tradition* Collegium Hungaricum Berlin, Mar-May 07
- *100 Tage=100 Videos* Heidelberger Kunstverein, Sep-Dec 06
- *The Mothership Collective* South London Gallery, Aug 06
- *A Complete Guide to Rewriting Your History 2* Sparwasser HQ, Berlin, Mar-Apr 06
- *Peninsula* Singapore History Museum, Feb/Mar 06
- *Lassie Come Home* Camden Arts Centre, Feb 06
- *LabiLabu* The Esplanade, Singapore, Oct 5–Jan 06
- *Whodunnit?\** Toynbee Studios, London, Jun 05
- *Homofonia\** The British Library, London, Feb 05

#### Awards/Commissions/Residencies

- Awarded the Wollita Kulturpreis 2008 in Berlin by Wolfgang Müller & Françoise Cactus
- One year residency at Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin (2007/8)
- Nominated for Jerwood Artists Platform London (2006)
- The Fire Station Residency and Bursary, awarded by ACME Studios (Apr 2005)
- Pearson Creative Research Fellowship, at the British Library (Nov 2003 – Feb 2005)
- London Artists Film & Video Award from Film London (2002/2003)

#### Recent Publications/Weblinks

- *Zitty Berlin* Das Jahrbuch 2009 interview by Matthias von Viereck, 2009
- *ArtAsiaPacific* exhibition review 'Ming Wong: Angst Essen/Eat Fear' by Astrid Mania, Nov/Dec 2008
- *Yishu* Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art 'Vain Efforts – Ming Wong in conversation with Sally Lai' Nov 2008
- *artnet.de* exhibition review 'Fragebogen Essen Seele Auf' by Ludwig Seyfarth, Sep 2008
- *Art Review magazine* exhibition review 'Ming Wong – Eat Fear' by Axel Lapp, Sep 2008
- *artmagazin.de* featured artist in 'Radar' by Wolfgang Müller, Sep 2008
- *SLEEK magazine #19 Summer 2008* Berlin 2008
- *Word of Mouth* exhibition publication, Curating Lab/Singapore Art Show, 2007
- *WE* exhibition publication, National University of Singapore Museum, 2007

## **CURATOR**

**TANG Fu Kuen** (DENG Fuquan) (b. 1972, Singapore)

Tang wears many hats in the arts arena. As an active art impresario with networks in Southeast Asia and Central Europe, Tang is experienced in organising and managing multidisciplinary projects. He has collaborated in *Alpha 3.0: GPS Piece – A Web Walkabout* by Charles Lim and Woon Tien Wei, selected for *Documenta 11*, Germany in 2002, and *Murmurmurmurmurmur* by Heman Chong at the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003.

As a researcher/writer focused on performativity and multi-disciplinary courses, Tang conducted full-time research and development for the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation – Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SEAMEO-SPAFA). He is an active contributor to arts publications and academic journals

Tang is currently the Programming Advisor for the Singapore Arts Festival 2009, and has commissioned and presented over 30 artists and produced festival hits for the Bangkok Fringe Festival from 2004 to 2007. In 2001, Tang inaugurated and presented a performance series from four continents to launch the 1<sup>st</sup> World Proclamation of Intangible and Oral History at UNESCO HQ in Paris. As a professional dramaturg, he has toured in all TheatreWorks' major productions from 1994 to 2000.