

Singapore: The Making of a New Art Capital

by Oz Mendoza

Many travelers have this picture of Singapore as a staid, businesslike city—the straight-laced square at the raucous beach bash where all of Southeast Asia is partying. It's somewhat true... but lately, Singapore has been working overtime to reinvent this stodgy image. The year 2011 saw the inauguration of **Art Stage Singapore**, an art fair that's the city's standard-bearer in the push to transform itself into the cultural capital of the region.

Singapore capitalizes on the event to boost its cultural cachet through **Singapore Art Week**, which takes place every January. This happens concurrently with Art Stage, which is still the main draw for international visitors. Art Stage is essentially a massive visual arts expo hosted in the Marina Bay Sands Convention Centre. It presents showcases for hundreds of galleries from around the world—though always with an eye towards granting exposure to the Asia Pacific arts community.

This year's Singapore Art Week on Jan. 21-24, 2016 sees two new players arriving on the scene. The newly-opened **National Gallery Singapore** is re-creating a 1980 show by esteemed native artist Tang Da Wu. Furthermore, a major new art fair is being launched: Singapore Contemporary, a project of the same group that organizes Hong Kong's Asia Contemporary showcase.

Whether or not you visit Singapore during Art Week, you'll encounter a profusion of art events and spaces to explore. Definitely check out **Singapore Art Museum**, whose palatial white halls once housed a Victorian-era boys' school.

A visit to **Artspace @ Helutrans** exposes you to a side of Singapore that tourists rarely see—a drab industrial port alongside the Keppel Viaduct. A bleak, imposing structure greets you there. You can be forgiven for thinking you've made a wrong turn. Yet this dreary bloc houses a conclave of gleaming modern galleries: Ikkan Art International, ReDot Fine Art, Richard Koh, and Galerie Steph. One contemplative stroll past the artworks on display, and you'll forget that you're inside a huge industrial facility.

Once a British military encampment, **Gillman Barracks** is now a leisurely contemporary arts enclave, housing an assortment of international galleries, including transplants from New York and Tokyo. The area has a pleasant campus-like air, and you can while away an afternoon walking from gallery to gallery.

Avant-garde art enthusiasts will have a blast at **The Substation**. This brash arts venue hosts numerous cutting-edge events, from sound art performances to experimental theater.

Venue Info:

Artspace @ Helutrans

39 Keppel Rd, #02-04/05, Singapore 089065

Web: <http://www.helutrans.com>

Phone: +65 6329 6847

Gillman Barracks

9 Lock Road, Singapore 108937

Web: <http://www.gillmanbarracks.com>

Email: gillmanbarracks@gmail.com

National Gallery Singapore

1 Saint Andrew's Road, #01-01, Singapore 178957

Web: <https://www.nationalgallery.sg>

Email: info@nationalgallery.sg

Phone: +65 6271 7000

Singapore Art Museum

71 Bras Basah Rd, Singapore 189555

Web: <http://www.singaporeartmuseum.sg>

Email: enquiries@singaporeartmuseum.sg

Phone: +65 6589 9580

The Substation

45 Armenian Street, Singapore 179936

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