

**SPEECH BY MS SIM ANN, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND YOUTH, CULTURE ACADEMY'S INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2018, THURSDAY 6 DECEMBER 2018, 9:15AM, ESPLANADE RECITAL STUDIO**

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning. It is my pleasure to join you today for the Culture Academy's Annual Conference 2018 to discuss "*Accessibility for Diverse Communities: The Role of Cultural Institutions*".

**THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCESSIBILITY**

2 Accessibility is an important topic that has increasingly occupied the minds of policymakers, commentators and philanthropic donors. Barriers, whether visible or invisible, can prevent people in society from enjoying the services and facilities intended to bring about improvements in their quality of life. In arts and culture, we need to remain conscientious in preventing the formation of such barriers, or removing them where they are found. Only by doing so can Singaporeans from all backgrounds and walks of life be able to enjoy what the arts and culture can bring. This includes not just positive aesthetic experiences, but also a sense of

belonging to our community, the development of strong friendships, and a good understanding of where we have come from and what we stand for today.

3 At the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, we are committed to fostering a caring people, promoting a cohesive society, and developing a confident nation. Our arts and culture offerings support these efforts by giving us opportunities to reach out to and serve those who might be in less fortunate circumstances. They can also create environments where we can learn more about one another and share experiences as Singaporeans. Finally, our arts and culture reflect who we are as a nation and give us a sense of pride and rootedness. We want the arts and culture to be accessible to the widest audience possible, so that it can enrich our lives, and help us stand strong as a nation.

## **ACCESSIBILITY THROUGH THE ARTS AND HERITAGE**

4 Our commitment to improving accessibility through culture is clearly articulated in the National Arts Council's (NAC's) ***Our SG Arts Plan***, and the National Heritage Board's (NHB's) ***Our SG Heritage Plan***. A key priority of Our SG Arts Plan is to harness the potential of the arts for community building across cultures, generations and socio-economic

backgrounds, and to bring the arts to under-reached groups in society. Similarly, Our SG Heritage Plan seeks to make our museums and their collections more accessible to the public, and engage under-served communities in a more meaningful manner through heritage programmes co-developed with the community. These priorities are manifested through our programmes, spaces and resources.

5 For example, NAC's annual ***Arts in Your Neighbourhood (AYN)*** programme in March and November provides opportunities for residents in our heartlands to appreciate and participate in music, dance, theatre and visual arts activities in a community setting. To cater to underserved communities, NAC also organised two ***Singapore Writers Festival*** events in 2018 to provide opportunities for children with special needs to engage with the arts alongside their peers. On NHB's part, its ***HeritageCares*** initiative includes a range of activities such as guided tours of heritage trails, hands-on workshops, and interactive programmes for the elderly, and children from low-income families. Since its launch in March 2016, over 400 programmes have been organised, engaging over 3,000 volunteers and serving over 13,000 participants.

6 In addition, NHB is currently taking steps to ensure that our museums and heritage institutions are inclusive social spaces. For example, NHB is conducting an **accessibility audit** that will review all aspects of accessibility – from the physical to the intangible – such as how well our exhibitions cater to the diverse needs of visitors. NHB will also continue to support more ground-up **place-making efforts** at heritage precincts such as the Civic District, Little India, Kampong Glam and Chinatown, to facilitate more inter-community understanding of our shared heritage.

7 Both NAC and NHB have also made resources available to encourage volunteers to take ownership of, and promote our arts and heritage to the wider community. Since its launch in July 2018, 1,200 of NAC's **Befriender's Arts Toolkit** have been distributed to over 800 befrienders from 16 social service organisations, who have in turned reached out to over 1,100 beneficiaries. Similarly, NHB's **Conversation Starter Kit for Seniors** has been distributed to over 60 eldercare centres across Singapore, with requests for more kits coming in!

## **STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS**

8 The Government's efforts alone are not sufficient to bring our arts and heritage to everyone, everywhere. We are fortunate that we have committed partners who are equally passionate about increasing the accessibility of our arts and cultural offerings.

9 Let me share one example with you. A few months ago, I attended a very interesting community engagement project presented by Drama Box, ArtsWok Collaborative, Lien Foundation and Ang Chin Moh Foundation, which touched on end-of-life issues. Led by Artistic Director Kok Heng Leun, the project saw the team reaching out directly to the community through participatory arts activities, installations and dialogue sessions. I was impressed by how the arts transformed what some viewed as a taboo topic into something that people could come together to proactively discuss. This exemplifies the potential of the arts in bringing different groups together, helping us engage with difficult issues, and being richer for it. I hope to see more of such partners working with us to reach out to different communities in Singapore through the arts and culture.

10 Beyond our shores, there is also an opportunity for our cultural institutions to work with overseas partners to exchange views, share best practices, and learn from each other's experiences. Later this morning, NHB will be signing an MOU with the University of Melbourne (UoM) which aims to help both parties develop new capabilities. In implementing this MOU, I hope that NHB and UoM will consider how they can work together to ensure greater accessibility in their cultural offerings.

## **CONCLUSION**

11 We have made some progress in increasing accessibility to and through arts and heritage. Nevertheless, there remains much more that can be done. This Conference is an opportunity to learn more about where we may have done well, and where we can still improve. I wish everyone a productive and enjoyable next two days exploring these questions. Thank you.