

**SPEECH BY GUEST OF HONOUR, MS GOH SWEE CHEN, CHAIRMAN,
NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL AT THE ANNUAL CULTURE ACADEMY
CONFERENCE ON “THE FUTURE OF CULTURE, CULTURE FOR THE FUTURE –
WHAT LIES AHEAD?” ON THURSDAY 5TH DECEMBER 2019, Ngee Ann
Kongsi Auditorium, National Gallery Singapore**

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Youth and Chief Executive National Arts Council

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

1. Good morning. Thank you for giving me the honour to deliver the opening address for the Annual Culture Academy Conference.
2. There is a regular corporate speak - “Culture eats Strategy for Breakfast”. It does not mean Strategy is not important. What it means is that a powerful culture, the tacit understanding amongst employees and employers on behaviours, relationships and believes gives more assurance for success of an organization than a great strategy.
3. I recognize that the Culture referenced in this conference is specific to Art and Heritage. I wanted to draw parallels between the corporate and the art worlds, and how culture is developed in these two worlds. In both worlds, culture coalesces people, corporations and societies. In both worlds, culture evolves naturally over time through human intelligence, through collective experiences.
4. As we explore this year’s conference topic – “The Future of Culture, Culture for the Future, What Lies Ahead”, I wanted to also remind the audience that history shapes the present and inform the future. As we explore what lies ahead, the more we

learn and understand about the past, the more prepared we will be for the future.

I am paraphrasing a quote from Teddy Roosevelt.

5. To this end, let me start first with Singapore's past.
6. Most Singaporeans' ancestors came from mostly Asia, both my parents sailed from Fujian, China to Singapore when they were toddlers. From being a part of the sultanate of Johor, to a British colony to Independence in 1965, Singapore has developed a distinct ethnic makeup and a globally oriented city-state. This history gives rise to a blend of multi-cultural art scenes in a plural society that is uniquely Singapore. Singapore also mark its bicentennial this year. How will emerging trends influence Singapore's culture in the years to come?
7. Today, uncertainty and volatility dominate conversations. We are witnessing an increasing feeling of turbulence and change. Are such feelings as old as mankind, or is the world today truly more complex?
8. The topic for today's conference is timely. As cultural institutions – whether we are an administrator, professional, policy maker, arts practitioner or heritage enthusiast, it will be necessary to constantly reflect on how Singapore's culture may evolve and how the fabric that have been weaved can remain relevant with time.
9. In this light, let me share my perspectives on what the operating context can be for Singapore. How can the arts, culture and heritage sector respond and play an even bigger role in the future of Singapore?

Drivers of Future Society

Ageing Population

1. By 2035, one in four Singaporeans will be aged 65 years old and above. This was one in eight in 2015. The ageing population means that we will face a shrinking workforce. But at the same time, with better healthcare and standard of living, people will live longer and healthier lives.
2. This demographic shift along with declining birth rate could put immense pressure on the society.
3. On the other hand, can Art play a role in turning old to gold? How can the matured population be tapped on to develop and grow the art sector? What are jobs in the art sector that would be well suited to the silver workforce?

Changing Texture of Society

1. Singapore's concept of multiracialism and multiculturalism is changing due to immigration, inter-ethnic and transnational marriages. We are home to a potpourri of ethnicities and religions. Look at how our hawker stalls have evolved – today, we can find French, British, Korean and in Singapore's hawker stalls.
2. Our diversity is our treasure – we must not allow this to sow discord. So, how can we continue to harness this diversity and to define art & culture that is uniquely Singapore?
3. How can we define and ingrain a sense of national pride and identity and a sense of belonging and rootedness to Singapore?

Technology as Disruptor

1. The World Economic Forum has raised the spectre of a technology revolution that will fundamentally alter the way we live, work and relate to one another. It could

be unlike anything that humankind has seen before, it added. Technology has also raised questions about ethics, values and integrity and safeguarding one's privacy. It has made jobs redundant but created new jobs; it has enabled people to learn and complete tasks at the click of a button. It has made places and events more accessible. So, how can we harness the potential of technology to change the way we work and serve the needs of future society?

Climate Change and Sustainability of Societies

2. The challenges of Climate Change cannot be underestimated. Its impact will be inescapable, touching every facet of our lives from livelihood to well-being. In short, our very survival.
3. How can arts, culture and heritage be deployed as forces for good?
4. Can our local artists, volunteers, patrons and stakeholders and audiences to be advocates?

Rising China and ASEAN

1. The economic centre of gravity is pivoting towards Asia – ASEAN, China and India. By 2030, ASEAN will be the 4th largest single market in the world. Our traditional trading partners will have more choices in accessing emerging markets plus skilled labour force.
2. We need to always ask ourselves what is Singapore's differentiation and values to our region? Where can we co-create value with our neighbours and collectively, be recognised in the international arena?

Responses to Trends

What lies ahead for Singapore's culture scenes will largely be dependent on the alliances we establish and our responses to emerging trends.

1. I started this speech with a plea to understand the history of Singapore's Art & Culture. A central archive cataloguing art pieces of national and historical interests and their existence and whereabouts would be a good starting point.
2. Through fostering cultural understanding, Art can also contribute to Singapore's economic progress and prosperity.
3. To know ourselves is to know South East Asia well, given our geopolitical ties and deep historical roots to this region. Do we have the depth of scholarship in art history, museum studies or related fields that are centred on South East Asia? Can we collaborate with our Southeast Asian scholars to add to knowledge, for instance in conferences or joint publications?
4. We can deepen our knowledge in Southeast Asian history, art and heritage to become subject matter experts relied upon by other government agencies so that together we can enhance the attractiveness of Singapore to investors and tourists alike.
5. What can jobs in the Art sector can look like, for all facets of our population – from young to old, from unskilled to skilled? In a world of Artificial Intelligence – those who can create, those who can continue to use human intelligence – can build value, for themselves and their society.
6. Arts and culture bring communities together. We should actively increase access and reach so that all Singaporeans can access and appreciate culture regardless of economic or social background. Find ways to make Art more collective, and experiential. Art and Heritage will remain vibrant, if it is representative of our changing demographics including gender and ethnicity.
7. The National Arts Council, National Heritage Board, the Esplanade, our visual arts galleries, have all done a good job in bringing arts, culture and heritage to the

public. They have also collectively made concerted efforts to reach the underserved communities to engage them in arts and culture in order to bring cheer and value to their lives.

8. In many respects, Art is also an incubator of ideas, a facilitator of innovations.
9. You have heard this many times – our sector has to innovate continuously and learn to use technology as a strategic lever and even be bold enough to turn issues on its head to attract and retain new audiences.
10. BBC shared an article on what Art could be like in 20 years. I want to share an extract which I think is particularly pertinent. It says “No conclusions should be drawn about art, present or future because it is the force against universalism, which must be interrupted by artists, as if to tell the world “wake up”. We can have a role, to create that space for dialogue, for expressions that would enable Singaporeans to grow as global citizens. More importantly, to strengthen cohesiveness of the Singapore society and develop a strong sense of Singapore, our home.
11. Finally, my request to our cultural institutions and organisations - consider how much further you can play a role in engendering a sense of Singaporean identity in our Singaporeans and new citizens to help them be confident about their future in this country? This is especially so because of the Singaporean identity that is changing with new immigrants and long-term residents. How can all of you working in this sector collectively bring pride and the many communities together to look forward to a very bright future despite global strife and economic challenges?
12. Thank you. I wish you a very fruitful and enjoyable conference.