

# SPEECH BY MRS ROSA DANIEL

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## Introduction

Good morning to all and a special welcome to our friends from France. On behalf of the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, and our Culture Academy, it is a pleasure to jointly host this event with the French Ministry of Culture and Communications, and the French Embassy in Singapore.

In line with the Seminar theme, I would like to share some thoughts on cultural innovation in Singapore.

## The Importance of Cultural Innovation

The world today is characterised by continuous disruption. The geo-economic centre of gravity is shifting East. While the rise of China is by now a familiar tale, the Belt and Road initiative is a bold and ambitious retelling of the transformative power of the Silk Road for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A quieter transformation is happening here in Southeast Asia, as middle class households are projected to double, from 67 to 125 million, between 2010 and 2025<sup>1</sup>. Meanwhile, the fourth industrial revolution is hurtling ahead, with technology transforming our work and lives, but also displacing jobs and heightening uncertainty. Societies are becoming increasingly polarised across visceral lines of race and religion, as well as newer tensions such as economic inequality, immigration and inter-generational divides.

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<sup>1</sup> McKinsey Global Institute Analysis

## Singapore at the crossroads of Asia

Like our neighbours in Southeast Asia, Singapore is part of a rising Asia. We sit at the crossroads between East and West and have long been an open and connected economy. Today, Singapore has the highest smartphone penetration and use of 4G networks globally<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, we are also the most religiously diverse city in the world<sup>3</sup> and one of the most rapidly aging countries in Asia. And while globalisation has been a catalyst for Singapore's development, we are more exposed to the challenges that come with it.

### Three strategies in the face of globalisation

I would like to suggest three strategies to successfully seize the opportunities of being in the vanguard of globalisation, while avoiding its pitfalls. First, we must continue to embrace innovation and technology to stay relevant. Second, we must strengthen our regional networks, particularly in Southeast Asia, while building on our friendships with the rest of the world. Third, our social and cultural policy must help us to bridge differences and make diversity a strength rather than a source of division. This will be key to successful and sustainable societies of the future.

For culture to create opportunity and serve as social ballast in our time, I believe cultural innovation should adopt these same three strategies. Let me elaborate.

## Embracing innovation and technology

The imperative behind Singapore's Smart Nation initiative also applies to cultural institutions and artistic practice. To remain relevant in a world increasingly inhabited by digital natives, we have no choice but to embrace technological innovation, and experiment with different ways of making, presenting and promoting culture.

A number of our artists have tapped on technology to inspire their work. If you have visited the National Museum of Singapore, you would have noticed Suzann Victor's *Wings of a Rich Manoeuvre*—an interactive kinetic artwork made up of more than 14,000 Swarovski crystals, better known as the swinging chandeliers. In the *Story of the Forest*, science and art come together where 69 drawings from the William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings have been reimaged by TeamLab as an immersive 3D animation experience. This digital installation has prompted a 25% increase in those wanting to see the original drawings.

### Digimuse

Such successes have paved the way for Digimuse, a new initiative where the National Museum of Singapore acts as a test-bed for experiments and ideas about how collaboration between the technology industry and artists can enhance visitor experience at the museum. These exciting initiatives reflect a fundamental shift in how we as a society consume culture. Technology provides

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<sup>2</sup> Deloitte Mobile Consumer Survey 2017

<sup>3</sup> Pew Research [April 2014]



an opportunity to improve audience engagement, grow new audiences and a new generation of art lovers. It opens up potential new partnerships with industry and academia—in important areas such as data analytics to understand different audience segments, and better cater for their needs.

### **Tapping networks in Southeast Asia and the world**

The second strategy that Singapore has adopted is that of tapping the rich networks in Southeast Asia and the world. The meeting of cultures has given rise to new innovations throughout history. Peranakan culture was borne of the maritime Silk Route. The “Nanyang Style” paintings in National Gallery Singapore, integrate Chinese ink and Western oil traditions. This distinctive blend of East and West was adopted by Singapore artists who trained in both China and Europe, and were inspired by the faces and places of Bali, Java, and Malaya as they travelled neighbouring lands.

At the Venice Biennale in 2017, Singaporean artist Zai Kuning and his team brought to life an imagined vessel steered by the spirit of the first Malay King, Dapunta Hyang. The 17-metre-long installation of a ship, made from rattan, string and beeswax, brings viewers back into the 7<sup>th</sup> century and immerses them in the stories of the *orang laut* or sea people

who were indigenous to the Riau Archipelago. Through works like this, we are reminded of our shared history as part of the Malay world, which continues to enrich the culture and identity of modern Singapore.

### **Asian Civilisations Museum**

Our cultural ties to the region must be continually renewed, refreshed and reinterpreted for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hence, it is good to see our performing and visual arts institutions actively exploring closer collaborations between Singapore artists, producers and curators and their counterparts in the region through joint exhibitions, residencies, showcases and capability development initiatives. The Asian Civilisations Museum, for example, has designated 2018, as the “Year of Southeast Asia”, and is collaborating with international partners in a series of programmes and exhibitions. Such initiatives will create greater awareness of the rich cultures within modern Southeast Asia, while strengthening cultural networks and seeding innovation.

### **Creating inclusive identities and managing diversity**

The third strategy is to explore cultural innovations that bring people together, create inclusive identities, and make diversity a strength<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> IPS’ “Study on Social Capital” found that:

- a) Diversity in social networks (on race, religion or status) among Singaporeans strengthens social capital, trust, trust towards other racial and religious groups, national identity and national pride. It increases the variety and richness of one’s experiences and knowledge beyond one’s own group, which facilitates thinking in national terms, rather than only narrowly in terms of only one’s own group and its interests.
- b) Social domains such as education, work, voluntary association, sports and cultural participation are positively correlated with many kinds of network diversity—they promote social interaction and integration across groups. Programmes in these domains, including **cultural participation**, facilitate network diversity leading to these positive outcomes.

We want Singaporeans from all walks of life to be able to experience the power of the arts, how it can help us appreciate the other, celebrate our shared heritage and common humanity. Hence, under the Arts and Culture Strategic Review (ACSR), initiatives like *Arts In Your Neighbourhood* and *PassionArts*, were deliberately designed to bring the arts and heritage into the community and reach the man in the street. Today, any Singaporean can easily go to their nearest community centre, library or park to experience or participate in a cultural activity. So we are delighted that attendance figures of non-ticketed cultural activities hit over 9.2 million, and museum visitorship hit a record high of over 5.1 million visitors in 2017.

Cultural accessibility is also about making a special effort to reach out to the under-privileged in our communities. Through ArtReach and Heritage Cares, the National Arts Council and National Heritage Board are exploring innovative ways to ensure that all Singaporeans have the opportunity to enjoy the arts and celebrate our heritage.

### **Our SG Heritage Plan**

Earlier this year, we introduced Our SG Heritage Plan, a national masterplan to safeguard and celebrate our shared multi-cultural heritage. Close to 34,000 people visited the travelling exhibition and website on the draft Plan and many contributed their views, helping us to shape the vision and refine our strategies. They told us that they value our multi-

racial and multi-cultural society, our ability to celebrate and enjoy each other's culture, food and festivals and our unique Singaporean lifestyle such as our hawker centre culture, our parks and libraries, where Singapore from all walks of life gather and create shared memories.

### **Partnerships between stakeholders (Singapore and France)**

Given the complexities involved in embracing digitalisation, renewing regional networks and forging inclusive identities, I believe that the Government, cultural institutions, artists and stakeholders will need to work closely together if we are to advance these strategies for cultural innovation.

At the same time we must remain open to the world and to international partnerships. Singapore and France have shared warm cultural relations over several decades, with both our peoples benefitting from joint collaborations over the years.

### **Conclusion**

I am confident that our continued partnership with France will enable both countries to deepen old friendships and develop new ideas. Over the next two days, I hope the Malraux Seminar will help us explore more deeply how cultural innovation can bridge and include, rather than divide and exclude—creating enduring value for societies in a dynamic global environment.