

SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY MARC ABENSOUR

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I am delighted to open the Singapore - France Malraux Seminar, a highly anticipated event in our joint cultural agenda. Announced last year during the State visit of our former President to Singapore, it is one of the highlights of the Singapore-France Year of Innovation. It gives us the opportunity to share our best practices and innovative approaches in the fields of arts, culture and heritage and to deepen our strategic partnership.

Over the past ten years, our cultural cooperation has greatly intensified and expanded, in particular since the signing of our cultural agreement in 2009, which has allowed many ambitious projects to take place in France and in Singapore.

In 2015, we celebrated 50 years of diplomatic relationships and “Singapore in France, the Festival”, showcased the diversity of the Singaporean art scene. It was followed by a wide range of initiatives, with an average of seventy to a hundred events involving French artists in Singapore each year.

Institutions, museums and festivals in both our countries have taken advantage of this dynamic to establish partnerships and to collaborate on numerous projects. They co-produced exhibitions and performances, supported artists’ production and mobility, and developed professional networks.

Many prestigious exhibitions continue to be presented: yesterday was the last day of *Colours of Impressionism, masterpieces from the Musée d'Orsay* at the National Gallery Singapore. At the same time, its first exhibition abroad is currently on view at Musée National d'Art Moderne-Centre Pompidou. Next month, the Asian Civilisations Museum will open *Angkor, Exploring Cambodia's Sacred City*, an exhibition organised with the musée Guimet. The National Museum of Singapore recently launched new programmes exploring digital innovations and creations, with the participation of many French artists and professionals. These are just some examples that illustrate the close ties between our institutions and the scope and quality of our cultural cooperation.

The Embassy of France-Institut français Singapore continues to develop its collaborations with major festivals in Singapore (Singapore International Festival of Arts, Singapore Writers Festival, Night Festival, i Light Marina Bay), to support coproductions in theatre and dance and to invite professionals to develop their networks in France.

If we are able to engage in such sustained partnerships, it is because we share a common view of the role of arts and culture in our society. We agree that the arts and culture contribute to placemaking and to solidifying our social fabric.

Today, as we are preparing to celebrate the 10th anniversary of our bilateral agreement, we have a unique opportunity

to develop our joint ambition and to set our goals. We will start by sharing our best practices in the dissemination of culture, valuation and preservation of heritage and contemporary creation.

Innovation in the field of arts and culture certainly means better preserving, presenting and spreading knowledge, artworks and collections. It also entails creating a memorable and appealing experience for all visitors and spectators. In museums, cultural institutions and festivals, professionals are constantly imagining new ways to integrate the latest technologies, including digital ones, into their strategy. Because they have the ability to bring publics from various origins together, and need to embrace everyone, they generate useful friction and debate.

During these three days, our institutions will share some insights and initiatives devised to enhance the understanding and appreciation for the arts in various contexts. We will observe how the arts have used digital possibilities to their advantage and how innovation is investing and transforming the cultural field in France and in Singapore.

I hope we can also start formulating goals for the next coming years. French museums and art centres are exporting their collections and expertise all over the world, as the recently opened Louvre Abu Dhabi or the future Centre Pompidou in Shanghai demonstrate.

Singapore continues to build its reputation as a forward-thinking regional platform for cultural exchange. It also offers a

unique combination of strong public and institutional support to the arts, and great potential for private partnerships. The arts and culture are an essential element of our bilateral relation and hold a special place in the life of our citizens. In France, the economic weight of culture has risen again since 2016, with 44.5 billion euros in added value. This is to say that economic growth cannot be separated from cultural innovation and creativity.

I believe that we can continue building meaningful and mutually beneficial collaborations if we stay tuned with each other's cultural strategies and innovations. Therefore, I would like to suggest that we establish a regular schedule of meetings in order to allow our exchanges to flourish into ambitious projects. Let's draw together a road map that will guide our efforts to support our cultural industries in both countries.

I would like to thank the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and its Agencies, for their continuous support and the high quality of our dialogue, the Culture Academy, for its dedication in the planning and organisation of this event. Thanks also to the National Gallery Singapore and the National Museum of Singapore for generously hosting these bilateral meetings. And finally, I want to thank our distinguished guests and speakers from both countries. I am sure the conversations will be highly enriching and will pave the way for renewed and creative partnerships.

Thank you very much.