

MESSAGE FROM THE TEAM

Dear readers,

To cap off the series, we have an in-depth interview with Mrs Rosa Daniel, Deputy Secretary (Culture), Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth who is also concurrently the Chief Executive Officer, National Arts Council and Dean, Culture Academy, and Ms Chong Siak Ching, Chief Executive Officer, National Gallery Singapore and Head of the Visual Arts Cluster Singapore. The two culture leaders share their views on cultural diplomacy and the arts and culture sector. We have also picked two thought-provoking reads providing different perspectives on the theme, such as the rise of digital diplomacy and the increasing soft power of museums.

It has been a pleasure curating Culture Bytes over the past year. We would also like to announce that this is the last issue of Culture Bytes. As the Academy is committed to remaining fresh, useful and relevant to our clients, we are currently reviewing all our programmes and will be rolling out new initiatives and programmes over the next few months. So do watch out for more information coming your way soon!

In light of the COVID-19 situation, please continue to observe personal hygiene, keep a safe distance and avoid crowds. Do spend your free time taking virtual tours of museums and galleries, listening to more classical and calming music and learn more about your heritage as well as those of others. You will not only be culturally enriched but would have gained peace of mind, so that you too can contribute towards nurturing a caring, cohesive and confident nation during and after the COVID-19 period. Stay safe and healthy!

From all of us at Culture Academy Singapore

CULTURE VULTURE

A look at cultural diplomacy with Mrs Rosa Daniel and Ms Chong Siak Ching

In January this year, both of you were conferred the Order of Arts and Letters of France. What does this recognition mean to you?

Mrs Daniel: It was a great honour to be conferred this prestigious award and to join the illustrious list of past and present recipients. The award is a recognition of the hard work put in by many colleagues over the years and acknowledges the value that France places on the deep cultural ties that have been forged with Singapore. It was especially meaningful to have the conferment ceremony held at the National Gallery of Singapore which has hosted several successful collaborations with French counterparts. I was very happy to have my family and colleagues there to share the proud moment with me!

Ms Chong: It is a special honour, and it is with immense gratitude that I receive the award. And I do so on behalf of my colleagues in the Gallery and the visual arts sector, as what has been done by way of building strong ties and partnership between Singapore and France is the work of many, not just myself. As what we do in the arts is already so meaningful and impactful, to be conferred an award for such work is additional icing on the cake.

What are your thoughts on the role of arts and culture in advancing bilateral and multilateral relations? Do you think that cultural diplomacy is a new 21st century construct or old wine in a new bottle?

Mrs Daniel: Cultural diplomacy has existed through the centuries, as can be witnessed through the rich treasures exchanged between countries as gifts, which the current generation today enjoys in museums and heritage galleries all over the world. More than ever before, in the globalised world of the 21st century, the universal appeal of the arts and heritage strengthens economic and security relationships by bridging differences between people and fostering cross-cultural understanding.

In Singapore, we have always understood the power of the arts and culture in furthering international relationships. On a personal note, I have established a warm friendship with French Ambassador Marc Abensour and that has greatly facilitated our collaborations over the past few years. His support was instrumental in the successful conclusion of a new agreement between the French and Singapore Culture Ministries. It is a case in point about how culture and diplomacy can come together to pave the way for new possibilities in bilateral relations.

Ms Chong: Cultural diplomacy, understood as soft power, is of course not new. I would say that through the arts, efforts to grow Singapore's global mindshare are underpinned by a genuine intention to connect and build ties at the national level and the people-to-people level. As institutions which can foster empathy between communities, museums can also be seen as cultural diplomats with the ability to engender social transformation. I believe that this transformative power is the heart of the arts.

Mrs Daniel, under the standing 2009 agreement signed by the French and Singapore Foreign Ministries, Singapore saw exchanges such as Singapour en France – le Festival in 2015, and the annual Voilahi! France Singapore Festival. What can we expect to see with the latest agreement, in particular in focus areas such as technology, research, creative enterprise and capability development?

Mrs Daniel: The new agreement is the first time that both Culture Ministries have entered into a formal understanding. It cements the strong foundations and good work done under the standing 2009 agreement. Given the strong signal of commitment by both Culture Ministers, we hope to strengthen public and private support in deepening linkages between our respective institutions and artistic talents to co-curate exhibitions, present festivals and community programmes, as well as exchange knowledge and expertise.



Creative enterprises and technology are new areas which we are very open to participation from French companies and talents in our culture sector.

Ms Chong, National Gallery Singapore's collaborations with Centre Pompidou and Musée d'Orsay have gone a long way in spotlighting French and South-east Asian art in the host countries, with Latiff Mohidin: Pago Pago exhibition in Centre Pompidou in 2018 an impactful showcase of Asian modern art. Could you tell us more about Gallery's decision to go with Latiff Mohidin? What's in the pipeline for Gallery in terms of international collaborations?

Ms Chong: The Latiff Mohidin exhibition arose from "Reframing Modernism", an earlier exhibition we co-curated with Pompidou that included artists from the Euro-American canon alongside the most important artists from Southeast Asia like Latiff. Both institutions felt that Latiff's "Pago Pago" series in particular would resonate with their audience. For the Gallery, the bold choice of a Southeast Asian artist (rather than a Singapore one) for this exhibition reflects our commitment to the region—to promote art from our part of the world on international platforms.

The Gallery has also partnered with institutions from China, Malaysia, Germany, and the UK, amongst others. I can share that in May this year we are collaborating with the National Gallery of Australia on the first museum exhibition of Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso in Southeast Asia—keep a look out for that.

Having worked in the arts and culture sector for so many years, what are your wishes for the future of the sector? How do you see Singapore's role in the region?

Mrs Daniel: I hope to see Singapore arts and culture profiled more strongly on the international stage, as a source of pride for Singapore and a reference of artistic excellence for the rest of the world. Singapore has a valuable contribution to make in our knowledge of the region and Asia, both because of our geographical location and our multi-cultural heritage with deep Asian roots. We can enrich audience experiences and scholastic knowledge through the visual, performing and literary arts, as well as our preservation and celebration of both built and intangible heritage. My wish for the future is that my children and their children will have a deep understanding of where they came from through the arts and culture, so that they not only enrich their own lives but also do their part to pass on what they have received to sustain future generations.

Ms Chong: I hope that the sector will place even more emphasis on engaging our audiences, especially non-traditional museum-goers, as there is so much to learn and appreciate about the art of Singapore and the region. We are probably still scratching the surface of what is possible in terms of meaningful engagement with our audiences. Museum audiences are also increasingly complex and their expectations will continue to evolve, so I hope that we as a sector will continue to prioritise the impact we have across the various communities we serve.

Apart from continuing to promote Southeast Asian art globally, Singapore's role is to be a meeting point for the exchange of ideas and expertise, to share with our friends in the region and also to learn from them.



EDITOR'S PICKS

Cultural diplomacy: Efficacy and Future

Cultural diplomacy expert Federica Olivares sheds light on the role of culture in soft power, and how it can go beyond the enhancement of international relations to help states achieve their political and economic goals. In this interview, she also highlights the rise of digital diplomacy and how it is shaping cultural initiatives. Read this insightful interview [here](#).



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Museums Step Up on Soft Power

A new generation of museum diplomacy is increasingly decoupling from government agendas, as Dr Natalia Grincheva, author of *Global Trends in Museum Diplomacy* argues. Grincheva highlights the examples of the Hermitage International Network of Foundations, fully funded by private patrons and supported by civil society, and the K11 Art Mall chain, established by Chinese billionaire Adrian Cheng, as representative of this new museum diplomacy. Find out more in her essay [here](#).



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