

An Interview with Ms Pooja Nansi

Festival Director, Singapore Writers' Festival



Pooja Nansi

Image Credit: Pooja Nansi

Culture Academy	Would you introduce yourself and what you do for our readers?
Pooja Nansi	Hi! Im Pooja Nansi and I am the current festival director of the Singapore Writers Festival. I am also a poet, writer and performer and an educator. I have taught

	literature and creative writing for 14 years now.
Culture Academy	In 2019, you included a new programme to Singapore Writers' Festivals, the Youth Fringe. From memes to zines and games, how could we better engage our youths through the literary arts?
Pooja Nansi	We can engage young people in the literary arts as well as other areas by simply listening to them and validating their passions and choices as they explore the world and form ideas about the kind of world they want to see for themselves in the future. So often, programmes or initiatives directed at youth have an agenda of what they would like young people to take away, but in my practice as a teacher and festival maker, I am interested first and foremost in listening. That's why we engage a group of youth curators to conceptualise programmes for their peers.
Culture Academy	In today's digital age, we are reading more and less at the same time; more of social media, short articles and tweets, and less of long form writing. Every day, we are at the mercy of echo chambers and social media algorithms. How do we better employ the literary arts to serve as a channel of learning, sharing, and listening about people different from ourselves?
Pooja Nansi	I think it is easy to blame social media for immersing yourself in an echo chamber. But most people do not want to step outside of their beliefs and comfort zones even when not subject to digital algorithms. We tend to pick books and movies that either affirm our world view or do not confront it. The key to empathy is to again, listen, engage and reserve judgement and what better safe space to practise those skills in than a book?
Culture Academy	In your opinion, how have the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic influenced Singaporeans' sense of national identity?
Pooja Nansi	I think it has revealed both our cracks and our kindness. Being socially distant has been difficult for many people's mental health and wellness, but it has also fuelled community initiatives to help the less privileged amongst us.
Culture Academy	Would you name a book that you feel, captures a keen sense of belonging to Singapore, and why that book is important to you?
Pooja Nansi	Alfian Sa'at's debut collection of poetry <i>One Fierce Hour</i> . To me this is a deeply Singaporean book written in youth that displays an alienation from but also deep longing for one's country. This is a tension anyone who has ever felt a sense of "outsiderism" can relate to. It asks us all to do better. And we only ask that from the places and people we love.