

## An Interview with Ms Tamares Goh & Ms Ye Shufang

*National Gallery Singapore, Deputy Director (Audience Engagement), & Deputy Director (Learning)*



Name of Interviewee: Tamares Goh  
Image Credit: Tamares Goh



Name of Interviewee: Ye Shufang  
Image Credit: Ye Shufang

<b>Culture Academy</b>	Hi Shufang and Tamares, would you introduce yourselves and what you do for our readers?
Tamares Goh	Hi, I am Tamares and I look after the Audience Engagement portfolio at National Gallery Singapore. My team and I look into catering to an array of audiences via various touchpoints, programmes and encounters with art at the Gallery, online as well as at off-site locations. We also organise <i>Light to Night Festival</i> , <i>Painting with Light</i> , <i>Children's Biennale</i> and our regular programmes at the Gallery all year round which respond to the exhibitions and the artworks at the Gallery. Also, our range of Community and Access programmes and initiatives strive to engage the underserved communities.
<b>Ye Shufang</b>	Hi, I am Shufang, an artist and educator. At National Gallery Singapore, I head the Learning team and the Keppel Centre for Art Education, a dynamic space with immersive experiences that encourage imagination, creativity and self-led exploration. The Centre also provides a lively line-up of programmes for youth, children, and families all year round.
<b>Culture Academy</b>	What does audience engagement mean to you, and how have your ideas about audience engagement changed since the COVID-19 pandemic?

Tamares Goh	Audience engagement is about finding opportunities where we can facilitate art encounters for the audiences, however long or short. It has pivoted to cater to the demand for more digital experiences in the past 20 months or so, but physical experiences cannot be replaced. We have hence developed many programmes that combine the physical and digital experiences, which allows us to not only enrich the experience in each realm but also enable our visitors to engage with art wherever they may be, in and outside of the museum walls.
Ye Shufang	I believe in the transformative power of art. Each time we encounter an artwork, we may connect and respond differently; over time, we will discover that there are many ways of looking, thinking and being with art. Audience engagement for me, is to empower audiences to 'be with art' in their own way, in their own time.
Culture Academy	COVID-19 also accelerated digitalisation across the culture sector. For NGS, how did pre-existing programmes, such as museum-based learning and the Children's Biennale, adapt to meet the demands of the phygital environment?
Tamares Goh	<p>I would like to refer to a recent programme which took place at the Gallery. It was a performance by La Tristesse called 为什么要走出黑暗 (WALK DARKNESS WALK), which had 50 performers across two sessions. While some may prefer experiencing a dance or a theatre-piece live, prevailing safe management measures meant we had to also conduct a live-streaming of these sessions. We had almost 800 people tune in to the livestream, and they commented that they were able to view the performance via different angles, and even more up-close because of the use of multiple cameras, which could not be feasible if they had attended in person. So, with the new demands of the digital, there could be ways of having different experiences.</p> <p>This year, the Children's Biennale was first launched as a digital experience, prior to the physical one. Audiences are able to experience the digital offerings and respond to the various activities, and when they visit the exhibition which opens on 6<sup>th</sup> November, they will have the chance to experience the physical art experiences, which are distinct yet complementary. I feel heartened that the artists and other stakeholders are fully on board to make the extent of this hybridity possible, so that the themes of the exhibition are enhanced further.</p>
Ye Shufang	<p>Museum-based learning approaches encourage imaginative play, open-ended discussions and multiple perspectives.</p> <p>With our current changing physical circumstances, young learners may miss the opportunity to visit a museum to experience original artworks face-to-face, engage in imaginative play and discussions, and interact with their peers. In response to this, we developed GalleryKids!, a microsite for children, families and</p>

	<p>schools, with the immediate objective of providing creative learning experiences to young learners.</p> <p>At <a href="https://nationalgallery.sg/gallerykids/">nationalgallery.sg/gallerykids/</a> you will find an exciting range of creative content such as art tutorials, story sessions and more. In ‘Stories in Art’ for example, our storytellers share stories inspired by art and encourage children and families to respond together with singing, counting and simple dance movements. In ‘DIY with Artists’, artists introduce simple art activities using materials found at home. They provide step-by-step demonstrations for children and families to follow, using recycled materials like aluminium foil and string.</p> <p>These contents encourage families to participate in creative activities together and foster family bonding time at home.</p>
<p><b>Culture Academy</b></p>	<p>What are some challenges and unexpected opportunities that have risen from this experience?</p>
<p>Tamara Goh</p>	<p>The digital landscape is becoming saturated. While there are superb programmes, in order to look through all the offerings, and also to find time to engage with the many products could be challenging. However, the sudden pivot is also an enabler – there are many new ways to think about audience engagement, and you can see artists and developers getting innovative and creative through digital channels. That said, audiences have begun to appreciate physical experiences even more; artists and art administrators are leveraging on this shift to reimagine and redesign physical experiences, whilst including new possibilities brought about by the digital.</p>
<p>Ye Shufang</p>	<p>In 2020, even as schools re-opened, there were advisories not to resume outside-school activities. We had to shift our plans quickly for over 20,000 students who had pre-registered to visit the Gallery.</p> <p>In place of on-site tours, we started offering online tours with live discussions. These online tours are conducted with education facilitators hosting live discussions at the Gallery while students remained in their classrooms. We were able to ensure continuity in museum-based learning for students. For schools who were less ready for online tours, we developed ‘E-Learning Videos’ and a special video series ‘Meet with Artists’ where we asked artists to share something unusual or little-known about their practice.</p> <p>This year, over 50% of school bookings are for online tours. This presents a great opportunity for museum-learning experiences to expand beyond the museum’s walls.</p>

<b>Culture Academy</b>	This year's Children's Biennale went global through collaborations with the Groninger Museum and Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. What were some challenges in curating content digitally across three museums? Have this new mode of collaboration sparked off new opportunities for NGS and Singapore's artists?
Tamare Goh	In general, we had to think about how to engage via the digital realm to ensure the experiences are still immersive and exciting. Being able to surface conversations internationally via the digital platforms and to find solidarity within the context of the pandemic with other museum practitioners is valuable.
<b>Ye Shufang</b>	Keppel Centre for Art Education received the Children in Museums Award 2018, by the Hands On! International Association of Children in Museums. Since then, we have been part of an international community that advocates for children learning in museums. It is inspiring to learn that museums around the world, are exploring different ways across physical and digital platforms, to help children learn about complex issues like immigration, inequality, gender, etc.
<b>Culture Academy</b>	As artists yourselves, what advice would you give to fellow practitioners?
Tamare Goh	Listen (to yourself, to others, to the environment) and practise, practise, practise.
<b>Ye Shufang</b>	I do love what the late Ursula K. Le Guin said: "It is above all by the imagination that we achieve perception, and compassion, and hope."
<b>Culture Academy</b>	Looking forward, what are NGS' strategies to engage children in the post-pandemic world?
Tamare Goh	The role of play is pivotal to the development of the individual, whether it comes to mental or physical developments. One key aspect to consider is how can we allow playing to happen – to simply explore and experiment, and to know that making mistakes is part and parcel of the process of play, and what learning and questions may be generated out of this process.
<b>Ye Shufang</b>	Another strategy is to cultivate families, students, and youths to embrace art as part of their lives. Through both online and outreach efforts, we bring museum learning experiences into communities and schools. One of our core motivations is to create opportunities for artists and children to interact, and to encourage children to be children – to be curious, to create and play.