

OPENING ADDRESS BY MR. BAEY YAM KENG, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND YOUTH, AT THE CULTURE ACADEMY'S "THE DIGITAL IN CULTURAL SPACES" AT 9.15AM, 7 DECEMBER 2016, AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Introduction

1. Good morning. I am happy to join you today at the Culture Academy's conference, *The Digital in Cultural Spaces*.

2. Since the Culture Academy's launch last year, it has partnered both local and international cultural institutions to support the development of culture professionals, enhance professional excellence and grow thought leadership. Today, we are privileged to have with us esteemed speakers from Singapore, Australia, Hong Kong, the Netherlands and the United States of America, all leaders in the field of culture and digital technology. Their wealth of experience presents a wonderful opportunity for us to exchange best practices and learn from one another.

3. It is undeniable that digital technology and social media have become an integral, and some may even say indispensable, part of our daily lives. We have seen an accelerated growth in the consumption of digital and social media worldwide. In Singapore, the internet penetration rate currently stands at 83 per cent, while social media use is at 69 per cent, both of which are almost twice the global average.¹

¹ We are Social's studies on digital usage around the world: <http://wearesocial.com/sg/special-reports/digital-2016>, <http://wearesocial.com/sg/blog/2016/09/digital-in-apac-2016>.

Technology has redefined the way we live, learn and communicate, and many industries have transformed their modus operandi to adapt.

4. The culture sector is no different. We have seen how digital technologies have enabled both the creation and spread of culture. At the same time, it is also important for us to understand the value that the digital world brings to culture, and how we can harness this in service of culture. Allow me to share three observations on the potential opportunities that the nexus between culture and the digital world can bring.

Opportunities for the Nexus between Culture and the Digital World

5. The first is on **accessibility** – how digitisation has broken down physical barriers and allowed unprecedented opportunities for people to experience culture. During my recent visit to Bali for the World Culture Forum, I had the opportunity to attend a symposium on Culture in the New Digital World and hear about how the Google Cultural Institute has made a wide range of cultural material accessible to everyone. There is the World Wonders project, which uses Google StreetView and three-dimensional renderings to allow people to virtually discover heritage sites such as Stonehenge and the Great Barrier Reef. Through the Google Art Project, users are able to explore high resolution artwork by Impressionists at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, France to the street art of São Paulo, Brazil. All these open a new world of opportunity and discovery, especially for those who may not have the opportunity to physically travel to these places.

6. Closer to home, the National Heritage Board has launched a new heritage portal in March this year called *Roots.sg*. The portal provides online access to our entire National Collection and allows for a more dynamic and immersive experience

of history and heritage. On *Roots.sg*, one can take a virtual tour of Singapore's mosaic playgrounds, access mobile resources to go on a heritage trail, or browse through the collection of our museums. Since its launch, *Roots.sg* has received 1.2 million views and positive feedback from users on how the portal is useful for learning, research and enables a better understanding of Singapore's cultural heritage.

7. Beyond the digitisation of museums and cultural sites, digital technologies have also transformed the way performing arts is made more accessible to people. In partnership with *Lianhe Zaobao*, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (SCO) recently presented the world's first digital Chinese orchestra concert on 26 November. With the purchase of an e-ticket – more affordably priced than an actual concert tickets – users could watch the concert in live stream and play it back any time within two weeks. These are just some of the many ways where the digital realm has helped to bring culture closer to people, and people closer to culture.

8. Secondly, the digitisation of content can support the building of **capabilities** and excellence for industry players in the areas of research, education and preservation. One such platform is the National Online Repository of the Arts (NORA), a database of digitised works by prominent Singaporean artists in the areas of literary, performing and visual arts. It allows poets, writers and artists to document their work for posterity, and for fellow professionals or younger artists to draw inspiration for their future work. NORA also contains representative works of Singapore's Cultural Medallion Award recipients, and documents their life and works, including writings, artworks and interview recordings. Such online repositories are rich resources that both Singaporean and overseas researchers can tap to delve deeper into Singapore's

arts and culture and this brings about more opportunities for the exchange of information and knowledge.

9. The third aspect of the opportunities that the nexus between culture and the digital world can bring is greater **engagement** through enhancing the visitor experience. We see this taking place in many museums and cultural institutions around the world, where technologies such as digital exhibition panels, mobile applications and customised audio guides are employed to bring about a more engaging experience, and deliver customised content to visitors. The Indian Heritage Centre for example, is one of the first museums in Singapore to use augmented reality in its permanent galleries. This helps to create a more immersive journey through the museum, and bring history and heritage to life.

10. Here at the National Museum of Singapore, the museum will be re-opening its Glass Rotunda after a two-year revamp. The Glass Rotunda is home to *Story of the Forest*, a digital art installation by internationally renowned Japanese digital art collective teamLab, which takes inspiration from a prized and iconic part of the National Collection – the William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings. The installation is probably the largest permanent installation by teamLab in the world, where illustrated animations from the collection interact with visitors as they make their way down the Glass Rotunda. This is just one example of how digital innovation can help to bring new life to a 19th century collection of flora and fauna drawings, and help visitors experience history in a compelling way.

11. I am also happy to announce that this weekend, the National Museum will be launching **Gallery10**, the Museum's new, dedicated digital gallery, the first of its kind in Singapore. In **Gallery10**, digital media will be used to create immersive and cross-disciplinary environments for visitors to explore and engage with the arts and heritage. The first work on show is *The Art of Rehearsal*, a video installation by artist Sarah Choo Jing. Created in partnership with the National Arts Council, this work showcases traditional dance forms in a dynamic and impactful environment, which perfectly encapsulates the idea of how digital technology can bridge and connect contemporary audiences with heritage and tradition. Both the Glass Rotunda and Gallery10 will be opened to the public this Saturday, so do come down with your family and friends to join in the festivities.

Conclusion

12. The possibilities for culture in a digital world are exciting. But we also recognise that the digital world should not be a replacement or substitute for tactile experiences and interactions with culture. Rather, digital technologies should serve as a bridge and source of inspiration for culture to be more engaging, inclusive and enjoyable for our audiences. This is an area that requires constant innovation and creativity. Hence, platforms such as this conference are very important.

13. Ultimately, whether we sit here today wearing the hat of an artist, policymaker or a culture professional, I believe that we all share a common vision for the nexus between culture and the digital world to bring about more inspiring and compelling experiences and to build more informed and engaged cultural audiences of the future.

On that note, I wish all of you a very fruitful and exciting two days of discussion and debate. Thank you.

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