

**SPEECH BY MS YEOH CHEE YAN, PERMANENT SECRETARY OF THE
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND YOUTH AT THE OFFICIAL
OPENING OF THE CULTURE ACADEMY ON 6TH OCTOBER 2015 AT THE
NATIONAL GALLERY OF SINGAPORE AUDITORIUM**

Your Excellencies

Our Distinguished Speaker, Dr Neil MacGregor

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Good afternoon.

A warm welcome to the launch of the Culture Academy.

Why A Culture Academy?

2 All of us here are, in some way, personally invested in Singapore's cultural scene. And I think you would agree that these are exciting times for our arts and heritage institutions.

3 We are now counting down the weeks before the opening of our new National Gallery, which will bring Singapore and Southeast Asian art to the world. We hope that it will be a source of inspiration to Singaporeans, reflecting our multi-cultural soul and our place at the cross-roads of this fascinating region.

4 We continue to transform our pinnacle institutions. We recently revamped the Singapore History Galleries of the National Museum of Singapore and next month we will re-launch the Asian Civilisations Museum with a new wing and a beautiful new entrance from the Singapore River. With the refurbished Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall, the Arts House and the Esplanade forecourt, there are exciting new possibilities for programming which will add vibrancy to the Civic District.

5 There is a myriad of festivals, exhibitions and performances for us to choose from. The 8th edition of the recently concluded Night Festival delighted some 600,000 Singaporeans. And I was very proud to see that the second edition of the Singapore International Festival of Arts this year had a number of excellent new Singapore commissions. The 18th edition of the Singapore Writers Festival opens later this month to an ever growing audience. And come December, our Prime Minister will launch the Jubilee Walk, a trail which connects many of our beloved arts and heritage monuments.

6 Our national institutions make a strong contribution to Singapore's vibrant cultural calendar because we continue to invest in the building blocks of infrastructure and quality programming.

7 But we should not forget that it is really the people behind our institutions which make them strong. Our Boards are invaluable in providing vision and strategic direction. But critical to the success of our arts and heritage institutions are a very special group of people: namely, our cultural policy officers, arts administrators and museum professionals. MCCY believes that we must invest more in their professional development because at the end of the day, it is their capacity which ultimately determines the extent to which we can build up our institutions, captivate audiences and be effective facilitators of the wider arts and heritage scene in Singapore.

8 I think we are already doing a fairly good job in professional development. Let me cite two examples. The first is Mr Khairuddin Hori, a former curator at Singapore Art Museum (SAM) and National Heritage Board (NHB) who has joined the Palais de Tokyo – one of the foremost centres of contemporary art in Europe. The second is

Mr Tan Boon Hui – former Director of SAM and currently Assistant Chief Executive of NHB – who will soon take the helm of the Asia Society Museum in New York, having been chosen for the post from over a hundred other candidates.

9 Their success illustrates that we have groomed top talent here in our institutions, and that they have valuable perspectives and capabilities to offer both to Singapore and to the world. Both Boon Hui and Khairuddin are especially talented individuals, no doubt, but they also acquired their knowledge and skills through the rich learning experiences and informal mentorships available to them at NHB. I look forward to their return at some point – as their experience and their networks will be invaluable to our ecosystem.

10 But beyond this informal transmission of tacit knowledge, skills and networks – there is much more that we can do systematically to nurture the next generation of leaders in our cultural institutions.

11 This is why we are setting up the Culture Academy. Luckily, we are not starting from scratch. We are building on the excellent foundations laid by the NHB Academy, which was set up in 2010 as a centre of excellence in museum training, scholarship and research. Some of you will remember that the NHB Academy was the brainchild of Professor Tommy Koh, who was Chairman of NHB at the time. It has done good work over the years in training and providing networking opportunities for our museum professionals.

12 But with the growth of new institutions outside NHB, including the National Gallery, SAM, the NAC, its companies and over 50 private and public museums, we need to expand its mandate. The NHB Academy has thus been entrusted to transform and take on this expanded role.

13 As the refreshed Culture Academy, it will be tasked to groom leaders and develop strong administrators and museum professionals across both the arts and heritage sectors. It will develop competency frameworks and draw on the expertise of local tertiary institutions as well as international partners like the Smithsonian Institution, the Australian National University and the Reinwardt Academy in Amsterdam, to offer joint courses on skills and capability development.

14 We aim first and foremost to meet the needs of our own cultural professionals so that they will be well positioned to bring our institutions to international levels of excellence. For instance, we want to train more officers in preservation, conservation, collections planning and development, exhibition design and digital engagement.

15 I would also like to see us facilitate an active programme of inter-agency secondments or attachments, and professional exchanges both in Singapore as well as with partner institutions abroad.

16 The Academy will also be a platform for research and thought leadership, with a focus on Southeast Asian history, art and culture. Here the relationships we build with key institutions and partners around the world will be tremendously important to stimulate the exchange of ideas. That is why we are really very privileged that Dr Neil Macgregor is here today, as the inaugural speaker of the new Cultural Academy's Distinguished Speaker Series.

17 In closing, may I say that the Culture Academy is designed to build capability and capacity across the MCCY family of cultural agencies and institutions; we hope to grow a culture of deep expertise and the habit of collaboration and international exchange; and we hope that the Academy will help make Singapore a place where

cultural leaders meet, exchange ideas and in so doing grow a deeper understanding of our own culture and that of Southeast Asia.

18 I wish the Culture Academy every success.

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