

The arts 'help evolve our soul'

MOE will support the arts, assures Ong Ye Kung at Nafa's 80th anniversary celebrations

Derek Wong

The value of the arts cannot be measured in terms of economic gain, but is important to Singapore's holistic development.

This was the picture Mr Ong Ye Kung, Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) painted of the local arts scene yesterday, in a speech at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts' (Nafa) 80th anniversary celebrations.

"The arts help Singapore, as a nation, evolve our soul," he said, adding that the Ministry of Education (MOE) will provide support for the arts.

Mr Ong, the event's guest of honour, officially opened the school's Campus 1 Tower Block and unveiled a sculpture by Nafa alumna Han Sai Por.

The new \$40 million block is the first expansion of its grounds since the institution moved to Bencoolen Street in 2004. Nafa was founded in a two-storey Geylang shophouse in 1938 by Mr Lim Hak Tai, with its first batch made up of 14 students.

Located above Bencoolen MRT station, the 7,700 sq m, 12-storey building adds 20 per cent more space to the school. Nafa will take up eight storeys. Before the addition, 2,400 students crammed into grounds meant for 2,200 students. The current 2,700 students have had more space since the new block opened last July.

Year 3 theatre student Rino Junior John, 20, said: "There are now more available studios to practise in and it's really convenient."



A sculpture titled *Seed*, by Nafa alumna Han Sai Por, was unveiled yesterday by Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) Ong Ye Kung, who also officially opened the arts academy's Campus 1 Tower Block.
ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

Student Nur Diyanah Anani, 20, said: "Now I can carry out my music practice in quieter environments."

Yesterday marked the start of a series of activities to celebrate the academy's 80 years. An arts festival and opera production are among other events lined up.

Alumnus Khairuddin Hori, 44, a

curatorial director, said: "It is amazing that an arts school has lasted 80 years as Singapore does not have much of an arts history. The school can't do this by itself but only with the support of the community."

Nafa board chairman Low Sin Leng said the school has grown from strength to strength and con-

tinues to "aim to inspire learning and growth through the arts and become a leading arts institution in Asia".

The academy has nurtured 13 winners of the Cultural Medallion - Singapore's highest arts accolade.

wderek@sph.com.sg