

Asian comic art on display

Singapore Comic Festival showcases 400 pieces of works by more than 90 artists



BOOK IT / SINGAPORE COMIC FESTIVAL

WHERE: Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Campus 1, Wing B, 02-08, 80 Bencoolen Street
WHEN: Today and Sunday, 10am to 5pm. See website for talk timings
ADMISSION: Exhibition is free; ComixJam participation fee is \$25. To register, go to www.comicfest.sg/comixjam
 24-hrs/
INFO: www.comicfest.sg

Staff from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts putting up artworks for the Singapore Comic Festival.
 ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

Olivia Ho

A new comic festival in Singapore aims to not just shine a light on local comic history, but also to help position Singapore as a hub for comics in the region.

Four hundred pieces of comic art by more than 90 artists from across Asia will go on display at the two-day Singapore Comic Festival, which opens today at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa).

Organiser Travis Low says that comic events in Singapore are “like a jigsaw puzzle – it’s never a complete scene”.

Younger generations of comic creators and lovers are likely to be unfamiliar with local artists from the 1980s and 1990s, says the 45-year-old, a comic artist for 20 years who founded character and comic licensing company Funic.

One of the festival’s highlights is an exhibition of original artwork by the late Kwan Shan Mei, Singapore’s grand old dame of book illustration, whose drawings brought to life popular children’s books such as Jessie Wee’s *The Adventures Of Mooty* series.

“Her work is just too awesome,” says Mr Low. “Three generations of Singaporeans know her work through children’s books or textbooks, just that we may not know it is by her.”

The festival also exhibits work by artists from countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and China.

“Not many of us know what comics from elsewhere in the region look like,” says Mr Low.

He adds that the festival’s focus on regional, independent comics sets it apart from other comic-themed events in Singapore, such as the blockbuster Singapore Toy Game and Comic Convention, which celebrates a broad spectrum of pop culture from all over the world.

The festival will host workshops and talks by comic artists such as Hong Kong’s Jack Fung, author of *The Three Swordsmen*; Malaysia’s KS, who is behind Web comic *Silent Horror*; and Singaporean Evangeline Neo, or *Evacomics*.

Also on the cards is a talent search for young comic creators, who can be mentored by artists from around the region and primed to enter the South-east Asian market.

Mr Low hopes to achieve this through ComixJam 24Hrs, in which 30 young artists try to create a comic within 24 hours, simulating the tight deadlines professionals have to face.

Given the upcoming bicentennial celebrations of the founding of Singapore, participants are to draw inspiration from lesser-known happenings in Singapore’s early history.

The 10 winners chosen from the competition will receive a year-long mentorship from an established comic artist in the region and their works will be published in a compilation early next year.

Aspiring artists such as Lolita Cheong, 18, hope the 24-hour deadline will get their creative juices flowing.

“Comics are the hardest art for me because you have to do both layout and illustration,” says the Nafa illustration design with animation student. “I hope the deadline forces me to create more.”

Her coursemate Ashna Shiji Anshad, 20, adds: “I hope to make more friends through the competition and learn more drawing styles.”

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