



Singapore Art Week

# Whimsical works

Sweep the floor to create art and exchange items for Robot Coins at IT mall Sim Lim Square at this year's offbeat exhibits and installations



Akshita Nanda

Unique and intimate art experiences feature prominently in this year's Singapore Art Week (SAW) – the biggest visual arts celebration here.

Apart from mega light shows organised by National Gallery Singapore and big-ticket contemporary art fairs such as Art Stage Singapore and S.E.A. Focus, there will be a number of quirky exhibitions, including an interactive installation about household chores called Home(work), and one where artists create site-specific works at Sim Lim Square – better known for selling functional electronics than displaying art.

Running from Saturday to Jan 27, this is the seventh edition of Singapore Art Week, a joint initiative by the National Arts Council, Singapore Tourism Board and Singapore Economic Development Board. Last year's Art Week drew

590,000 viewers, according to the arts council.

Ms Linda de Mello, director, sector development (visual arts), National Arts Council, said: "We're very encouraged that the visual arts community continues to be excited by Singapore Art Week – over the past few years, we've increasingly seen more home-grown artists and groups keen to be part of SAW."

"Their ground-up initiatives uncover new presentation spaces and push creative boundaries in the intersections of art, culture, technology, design and heritage. These innovative ideas also reach out to those new to the arts, making the visual arts even more engaging for all."

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• For the full Singapore Art Week calendar, go to [www.artweek.sg](http://www.artweek.sg)

## Quirky take on chores

What is the value we assign to domestic labour and how creative can we get while doing household chores?

Artist collective Proxy puts a quirky spin on these questions through its interactive installation Home(work) at the National Design Centre for Singapore Art Week.

The four-member group – Melvin Wong, Charmaine Poh, Ong Lijie and Lim Cheng Jun – is creating a "showflat" in a space that is roughly 50 sq m. However, this small flat has certain quirks. The fridge door leads to another room, for example, and visitors can play with reimagined domestic tools. A light installation is also a kinetic sculpture and a broom has colour pencils in place of bristles.

Sweeping the floor is often seen as a menial chore, but sweeping the floor in Home(work) will create art.

"We mimic household chores in a fun way," says Proxy member Melvin Wong, 29, who, like his fellow artists, has been mopping floors and scrubbing bathrooms at home for more than a decade.

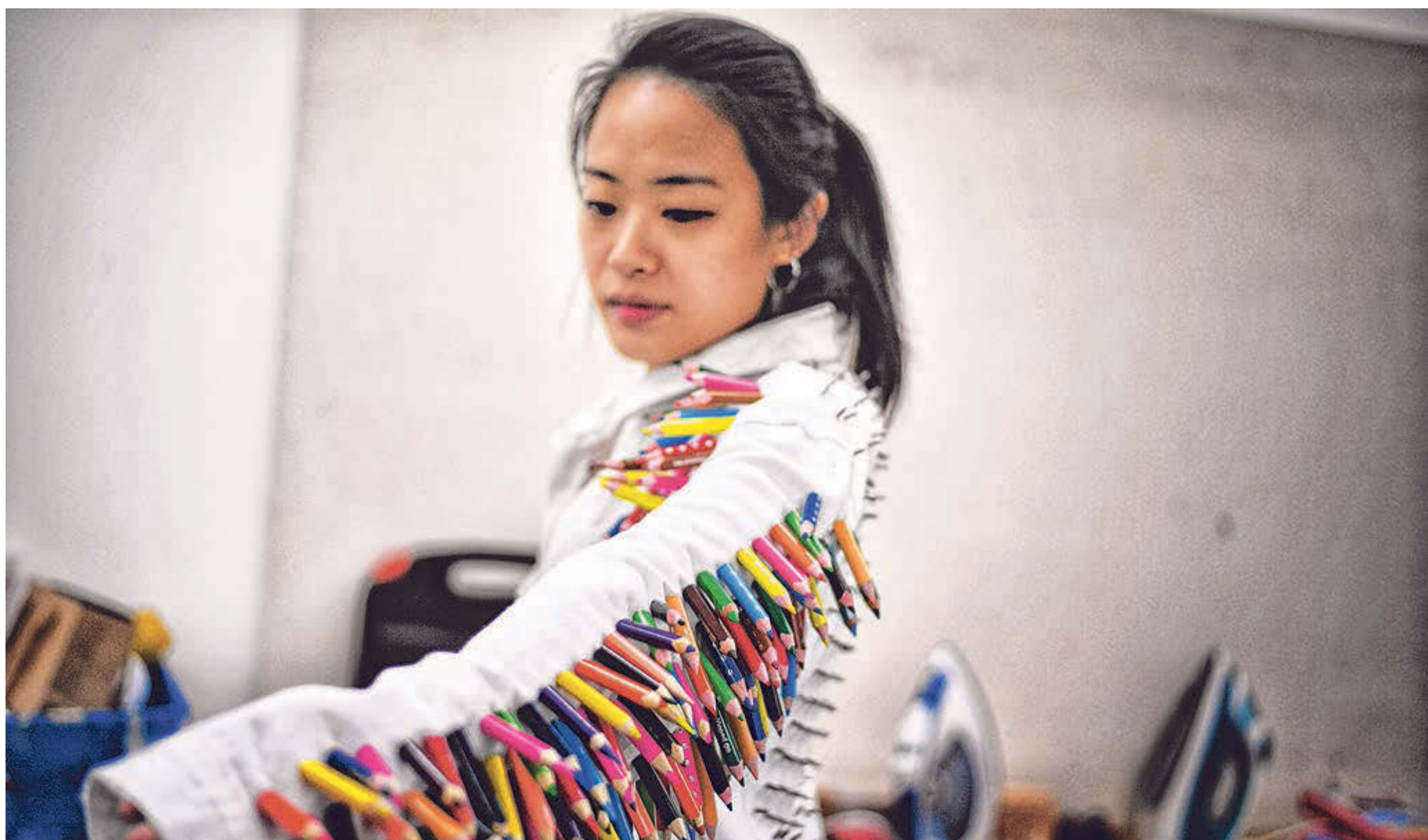
Ong, 25, says: "Why is it when somebody says: 'I'm a homemaker', we think: 'That's not a job and it's not creative'? We want to ask our viewers how do we value labour in the context of the household and domesticity."

Proxy has also opened its showflat to works created by artists Yang Jie, Fiona Seow, Emma Chong, Joseph Chiang and Izzad Radzali Shah, all of whom used or reimagined household tools like sponges or cups.

Three performance artists, Ila, Ben Yap and Isabel Phua, will also use the space. Ila's interactive performances on Saturday and Jan 26 look at how maintaining a household is an art form, and Proxy is looking for volunteers to take part.

There are parallels between artists and housewives, the artists of Proxy say. Both have to be creative, but the fruits of their labour are often unappreciated.

"What is the value we assign to art?" asks Lim, 30, rhetorically.



Charmaine Poh of Proxy models a coat studded with colour pencils and nails designed by the collective for Home(work), an installation about domestic labour and creativity. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

## Sim Lim Square's artists

Heard of Robot Coins? Taiwanese artist Ko Tzu-an is planning to introduce this "currency" at Sim Lim Square. People will receive Robot Coins in exchange for any item they choose to hand over.

Ko, 33, hopes to get retailers at the IT mall to join in her art project and accept Robot Coins in exchange for their goods.

The only problem? "I think people will think this is another scam," she says, referring to Sim Lim Square's reputation as a hotbed for counterfeit goods – last August, the police raided four shops at the mall and seized about 6,000 counterfeit items.

Once known as the place to shop for electronics – as well as pirated video games – Sim Lim Square has seen its fortunes dwindle in recent years. An art residency during Singapore Art Week aims to get participants and artists to rethink their engagement with the mall and its role in high-tech Singapore.

The Sim Lim Square Art Residency was initiated by art collective Inter-Mission, co-founded by



Artist assistant Jovan Tng (far left) holds up an image of Singaporean artist Chong Weixin, who is participating virtually in the Sim Lim Square Art Residency by art collective Inter-Mission. Also taking part are (from left) Singaporean artist Johann Yamin, Taiwanese artist Ko Tzu-an and South Korean artist Eom Jeongwon. With them is Inter-Mission co-founder Ulrich Lau (right). ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

artists Ulrich Lau and Teow Yue Han, and lasts for about three weeks till Jan 27.

It has Ko occupy a shop unit on the sixth floor of the mall along with South Korean artist Eom Jeongwon and Singaporean artists Johann Yamin and Chong Weixin.

The studios are open daily to visitors and the artists will present an exhibition of works from Jan 22 to 27.

For part of the residency, Chong will be present virtually, since she is

working on another project in Europe.

She navigates the mall through video call, her assistant Jovan Tng serving as a body double and moving around in her stead.

Her project stems from her interest in the virtual avatars people have left online over the years. Start a teenage blog and 10 years later, the blog is still there, a record of your former self.

The mall exists in a time capsule for Chong, 31, who remembers visit-

ing it regularly as a student, shopping for thumbdrives or other electronics.

Eom, 28, is similarly interested in wearable electronics and will get visitors to wear camera mounts and walk around, taking footage of the area.

Johann, 25, meanwhile, is inspired by the pirated videogames he bought over the years, some from Sim Lim Square. Visitors can play games from the 1990s and early Noughties on old computers

he brought from his home. He is also creating a video installation based on footage from the games.

He says he often spent weekends in the mall as a child, shopping with his father.

"I'm quite excited by this residency because I'm interested in getting to know Sim Lim Square beyond a transactional relationship," he adds.

VIEW IT / HOME(WORK)

WHERE: National Design Centre, 111 Middle Road

WHEN: Saturday to Jan 27, 9am to 9pm daily

ADMISSION: Free

INFO: [www.facebook.com/home-workbyproxy](http://www.facebook.com/home-workbyproxy)

VIEW IT / SIM LIM SQUARE ART RESIDENCY

WHERE: 06-53/31 Sim Lim Square, 1 Rochor Canal Road

WHEN: Until Jan 27, studios open noon to 6pm daily, exhibition launches on Jan 22

ADMISSION: Free

INFO: There will be a guided tour on Saturday. Go to [www.instagram.com/intermission.art](http://www.instagram.com/intermission.art) and [www.inter-mission.art](http://www.inter-mission.art)



Liza Markus created a sculpture inspired by the tug-of-war she feels regarding her Christian faith and how it was introduced to Indonesia by colonial powers, as well as her curiosity over the Catholic confessional. ST PHOTOS: ARIFFIN JAMAR, KHALID BABA



Nicole Phua's work is inspired by funeral rites and beliefs about death and rebirth.

**VIEW IT / ORTHODOX:  
A TWO-PART EXHIBITION**

**WHERE:** Your Mother Gallery, 91 Hindoo Road  
**WHEN:** Saturday to Feb 2, noon to 8pm daily (exhibition opens on Saturday, 7pm)  
**WHERE:** Coda Culture, 05-05 Golden Mile Complex, 5001 Beach Road  
**WHEN:** Sunday to Feb 3, noon to 8.30pm daily (exhibition opens on Sunday, 7pm)  
**ADMISSION:** Free  
**INFO:** therightbelief.weebly.com

Exploring faiths

Talking about religion is often taboo, but two 20something artists want to spark honest conversations with their work.

Singaporean artist Nicole Phua and Indonesian artist Liza Markus are co-founders of The Right Belief, a platform for young artists to explore their faiths and traditions through art.

Their first project is Orthodox, a showcase of faith-inspired performance art, installation pieces, paintings, videos and sculpture done by Markus, Phua and 10 friends, many of whom are fellow graduates from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Art.

The exhibition is spread out over two galleries, Coda Culture and Your Mother Gallery, and opens during Singapore Art Week.

The other artists featured are Ahdini Izzatika, Faris Heizer, Farizi Noorfauzi, Jackson Kang, Kim Hyesu, Kuat Zhi Hooi, Moktarrullah Abdullah, Oneal Parbo, Phua Shi Ying and Yunita Rebekah.

Nicole Phua's work is a 45-minute performance inspired by funeral rites and beliefs about death and rebirth. The performance will take place when the exhibition opens at Coda Culture on Sunday. After that, the items used will remain in the exhibition.

Phua comes from a mixed-faith family, which means that sometimes, tough conversations are needed about funeral rites, for example. Her father is Catholic, with some Buddhist beliefs, and would insist on a Catholic funeral, while her mother, a free-thinker, would prefer cremation and for the ashes to be scattered at sea. "I'm split and confused," says the 21-year-old.

Markus has created a sculpture inspired by the tug-of-war she feels regarding her Christian faith and how it was introduced to Indonesia by colonial powers, as well as her curiosity over the confessional – she is not Catholic, but attended a Catholic school.

Figures made of soil and soap sit within a mirrored circle, evoking the notion of ritual purity.

"It's a self-mockery of how I feel," says the 23-year-old.

They gave their artist friends carte blanche to create any work based on their personal belief. The results range from a video recording of friends discussing death and marriage to an installation depicting what the creator thinks heaven might look like.

Both Phua and Markus emphasise that the works are based on each individual's faith and are not meant to hurt anyone's feelings.

"It presents a conversation that's hush-hush sometimes, but it shouldn't be hurtful," says Markus. "I've realised there are so many people just like me, convoluted in their feelings of faithfulness – or unfaithfulness."



Sebastian Chun with his installation Sticks on the Asian Civilisations Museum lawn. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

Listen, smell, relax

When was the last time you sat under a tree? Artists Kaylene Tan and Ben Slater have worked with writers, musicians and landscape designers to transform Esplanade Park into a place that invites passers-by to stop, sit and listen to stories and songs that can be streamed on mobile devices by scanning QR codes placed around the park.

Though the park is known for national monuments such as the Cenotaph, commemorating sol-

diers who died in the two world wars, the creators of Under The Five Trees invited collaborators to create songs and stories based on personal memories or oral history.

"Memories on a human scale are what we are interested in," says Tan.

Landscape designers have sown flowers in the grass or sculpted grassy mounds for people to mount.

Tan says: "We wanted to create very intimate experiences for the audience in a public space, to invite listeners to lose themselves in the song, story, natural environment."

Under The Five Trees is one of several artworks commissioned for the annual Light To Night Festival spearheaded by the National

Gallery Singapore.

The Singapore Art Week edition of the festival, which runs from Friday to Jan 27, invites viewers to discover art through intimate encounters using different senses.

Apart from Art Skins On Monuments, the popular light projections on buildings in the Civic District, the Gallery has created a Sensorial Trail within.

Visitors can enter its public spaces, touch the walls and release scents put there by Norway-born researcher and artist Sissel Tolaas in her work eau d'you Who Am I; or explore connections between music and visuals through Andy Chia's Voices Of Time, where visitors can create music that triggers visuals on the wall.

Next door, on the lawn of the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singaporean artist and designer Sebastian Chun has created Sticks, an installation of roughly 500 bamboo poles hammered into a tepee-like shape. Lounge chairs are placed around and within the structure.

Chun, 54, was inspired by his memories of playing the pick-up sticks strategy game as a child, as well as seeing many buildings in the area constructed by workers moving across bamboo scaffolding.

By day, viewers can seek refuge from the heat within the shade cast by the installation. At night, coloured lights give Sticks a different look.

Chun hopes to see visitors chatting, relaxing and maybe even sharing a picnic inside his work.

"The idea is that it doesn't have to be 'high art'. Art should be accessible to everyone," he says.



Kaylene Tan and Ben Slater on a mound which is part of their audio installation, Under The Five Trees, at Esplanade Park. ST PHOTO: TIMOTHY DAVID

Other highlights

**BUY**

**Art Stage Singapore**

**What:** The ninth edition of a major contemporary art fair with galleries, exhibitions from private collectors and talks by artists and curators.

**Where:** Level B2 Marina Bay Sands Expo & Convention Centre, 10 Bayfront Avenue

**When:** Jan 25 and 26, noon to 8pm; Jan 27, 11am to 6pm

**Admission:** \$50 (three-day pass), \$30 (one-day pass), from www.artstage.com/singapore/site/home

**S.E.A. Focus: A Spotlight On South-east Asia**

**What:** A home-grown boutique art fair with a regional focus.

**Where:** Gillman Barracks, Pavilion, Carpark B, Blocks 7 & 9, Lock Road

**When:** Jan 24, 3 to 7pm; Jan 25; 3 to 10pm; Jan 26 and 27, 11am to 7pm

**Admission:** \$20 (four-day pass), \$15 (one-day pass), from seafocus2019.peatix.com

**WALK**

**Artwalk Little India**

**What:** Wall murals, exhibitions and performances have been curated around Little India in a multidisciplinary art project that transforms the precinct. Artwalk is presented by the Singapore Tourism Board and Lasalle College of the Arts, with the support of the Little India Shopkeepers and Heritage Association.

**When:** Friday to Feb 2, at your own pace and time

**Admission/info:** Download brochure and maps from artwalklittleindia.sg. Free guided tours are conducted by Monster Day Tours on Fridays, 6.30pm, and Saturdays at 4 and 6.30pm. Go to artwalklittleindia2019.peatix.com to register

**VIEW**

**Art Skins On Monuments: The Odyssey**

**What:** The biggest facade light show in Singapore, with multimedia projected onto the walls of the National Gallery Singapore, The Arts House, Asian Civilisations Museum and Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall. Part of the Light To Night Festival.

**Where:** Civic District, around Empress Place  
**When:** Friday to Jan 28, 8pm to midnight. Visuals are on loop  
**Admission:** Free

**VIEW IT / UNDER THE FIVE TREES**

**WHERE:** Esplanade Park, along Connaught Drive

**WHEN:** Friday to April 30, all day

**ADMISSION:** Free

**Info:** Scan QR codes at the park using the Gallery Explorer App or your QR code scanner

**STICKS**

**WHERE:** ACM Green, in front of Asian Civilisations Museum, 1 Empress Place

**WHEN:** Friday to Feb 24, 10am to 7pm daily (until 9pm on Fridays)

**ADMISSION:** Free

**SENSORIAL TRAIL**

**WHERE:** National Gallery Singapore, various locations

**WHEN:** Friday to March 31; Gallery open from 10am to 7pm daily, except Fridays (open until 9 pm), Jan 25 and 26 and Feb 1 and 2 (10am to midnight)

**ADMISSION:** Free