



GALLERY WEEKEND KUALA LUMPUR

Pioneering culture-building networks

Guest editor - Shalini Ganendra

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**ABOUT THE
e-JOURNAL**

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal promotes multi disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

Editorial

Shalini Amerasinghe Ganendra – Guest Editor

BA, MA Hons (Cambridge.), LL.M.

Cultural Leader, Scholar and Founder of
Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur

BIOGRAPHY



Shalini Ganendra's impact on cultural development has been defined by over two decades of informed cultural engagement. Through programming, research, publication and an overarching commitment to transnational connection, she has furthered recognition of, inter alia, the distinct and longstanding creative practises of Sri Lanka and Malaysia.

Some notable projects include: Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur with its Luminary Programme featuring international and local creatives in dialogue and presentation, pioneering exhibitions of Sri Lankan modern and contemporary art in Kuala

Lumpur, London and New York, and research with publication on cultural practices.

Shalini is Sri Lankan born. She was educated in the US and UK, graduating secondary from Phillips Exeter Academy where she is a Harkness Fellow, after which she read law at University of Cambridge, Trinity Hall. She obtained an LL.M. from Columbia University Law School and is a qualified Barrister and New York Attorney. She has been awarded Visiting Fellowships by Oxford and Cambridge Universities to further cultural research.

FOREWORD

Culture celebrating difference. Culture complimenting commerce. Pioneering culture – The Story of Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur

Developing appreciation for and bringing greater accessibility to culture as a whole and visual art in particular, has been the foundation on which Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur (GWKL) has developed, over a meteoric five years, reflecting evolution and invention. Culture complimenting commerce. Culture celebrating difference. Culture as the creative. Starting out as a prayer, a dream, GWKL has steadily and organically grown, embracing free participation and access, presenting a dynamic platform of multi-disciplinary content. GWKL has been a mechanism through which Malaysia can reconnect with its own cultural landscape (both traditional and contemporary). The cultural marquee has introduced valuable local culture to global audiences; facilitated global exchange; and bridged cultures and disciplines to deliver engagement and project development. As such, GWKL has critically become about the culture of encounter.

The term ‘gallery weekend’ is somewhat of an anomaly for this marquee because the duration now spans two weeks. This longer period offers the opportunity for guests to participate in all offerings and for cultural stakeholders to derive more value through programme build-up. GWKL remains an immersive and intense cultural experience.

Our goal has been for the long-term development of cultural appreciation (local and global), coupled with the creation of a sustainable and appreciative cultural ecosystem through which audiences develop a greater appreciation for the creative. Such appreciation fostered through talks and viewings inevitably sprouts economic support. As a platform, GWKL complements art fairs and biennials, taking the best features from all such events, and presenting them over a shorter period of time with mainly free programming. Since 2016, GWKL has been supported by a wide array of cultural

stakeholders and endorsed by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Tourism, Arts & Culture. We have partnered with major local museums including the National Art Gallery and Islamic Art Museum Malaysia, in addition to including more than 30 select project spaces, galleries, collection venues and cultural spaces annually.

The GWKL Luminary Programme, consisting of public talks (panel and individual) presented by a diverse range of creative talent, has been the anchor feature of GWKL and has defined the gravitas of the marquee. Over these five years, we have hosted more than 30 Luminaries from over 12 countries, including curators, museum directors, auction experts, artists, journalists and collectors. Twenty-two luminaries, a major foundation participant, one moderator and one observer are represented in this publication.

Their form of contribution, whether through essay, interview or presentation format, provides a vibrant glimpse of the diversity of topics, experience and outlooks presented over the past five years– covering art practise, craft, curation, museology, markets, architecture, design, collecting and more. I thank each of these amazing personalities for their valuable insights; editorial assistant, Yung Lo, for adeptly ordering and coordinating these submissions; and Lindy Joubert, Director of the UNESCO Observatory, for quality endorsement of GWKL.

When GWKL launched in 2016, the Art Newspaper wrote “The next Berlin? Kuala Lumpur launches gallery weekend. Dealers and museums join forces to put the Malaysian capital on the art map.” In fact, GWKL has gone beyond being just another “gallery weekend”. Rather, the connectivity that the marquee offers has enriched many thus far with the promise of growing returns through increased awareness and appreciation. In 2020, the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic propelled us to innovate and deliver what turned out to be one of the most successful Luminary Features virtually, where everyone had a front-row seat. The high attendance was a testament to a growing realisation that culture can be the pivot to recovery. “GWKL continues to pioneer culture-building bridges and networks. It applauds creativity and provides a platform for dynamic discussions that continue long after the event itself closes. Likewise, this UNESCO Observatory ‘Arts in Asia’ publication extends this culture of connectivity for greater reach and duration. GWKL continues to pioneer culture. We hope you enjoy the read.

SYNERGIES & VIRTUAL SHOWCASES

Maybank Foundation's Pivot in 2020

AUTHOR

Shahril Azuar Jimin, CEO, Maybank Foundation

BIOGRAPHY

The Maybank Foundation was established in 2010 in conjunction with the Maybank Groups 50th anniversary. The Foundations directive and focus is to create a positive, long term impact in communities and enhance the quality of life for all, irrespective of race, gender or creed with an emphasis on the poor and marginalised, with programmes that bring tangible and sustainable results.

Figure 1: Khalil Ibrahim –
Batik Abstract
No. 2, Maybank Collection.



The Maybank Foundation now partners with local stakeholders and NGOs and contribute to all 6 sectors: Education, Community Empowerment, Arts and Culture, Environmental Diversity, Healthy Living and Disaster Relief. These programmes have been strategically designed that will be systematically tracked to provide evidence on the long-term results. Their focus remains to expand the impact across the regions where Maybank operates and bringing empowerment to and for both the present and

future generations.

Positively impacting communities by enhancing the quality of life for all, irrespective of race, gender, or creed, through investing in sustainable programmes regionally for long-term tangible benefits.

- Maybank Foundation

Synergies and Virtual Showcases; Maybank Foundation's Pivot in 2020

Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur (GWKL 2020) gave the Maybank Foundation a valuable opportunity to pivot into the virtual realm through the organisation and feature of two digital exhibitions that speak to the Foundation's focus and current passions. Like Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur, Maybank Foundation celebrates the creative and multi-discipline, by providing free access to programming and exhibitions, so we have been delighted to participate and be featured in GWKL.

Let me start by sharing some background on the Maybank itself and related Foundation Mission.

Balai Seni Maybank (Art Gallery Maybank, 'BSM') is one of the country's earliest corporate galleries, and part of Maybank, one of Malaysia's oldest banks. Established in the 1980s, Balai Seni Maybank played a pivotal role in contributing to the development of the local visual arts scene. Many of today's most respected artists have, one time or another, exhibited at the Balai Seni Maybank and thus it has assumed an important place in our country's art history.

Maybank's commitment to arts, culture and heritage has been sustained with a long history of support for local artists (including painters, photographers, graphics designers and writers). To date, Balai Seni Maybank has touched the lives of thousands showing artworks by more than 600 artists in our gallery since 1988. Since 2017, we have had 15 important exhibitions that continue to inspire and encourage young artists to pursue their dreams. Exhibitions are often held in conjunction with national cultural festivals to further promote the preservation and encourage the sustainability of the arts and culture in Malaysia, as well as celebrating Malaysia's unique, diverse, and vibrant national heritage.

Maybank Group has played significant national and international roles in promoting shared cultural, artistic, and historical heritages. With the revival of the gallery through Maybank Foundation's 'Balai Seni Art Series' Programme, one of the core programme under our Arts & Culture pillar, we have been able to position the gallery as an exciting platform to support and highlight works by artists, either emerging or established talents, in various forms of visual art.

We have engaged with creators, collectors, and community – and our recent notable three programmes are:

1. Maybank Women Eco-Weavers programme
2. MyTiger Values Art Competition & Exhibition
3. Sayang Menyayang: A Batik Fine Art Tribute to Merdeka and Malaysia.

Maybank Women Eco-Weavers programme

Through the Maybank Women Eco-Weavers programme, we sustainably promote traditional textiles whilst creating economic independence and financial inclusion of women weavers across the ASEAN region. Though the Maybank Women Eco-Weavers programme is essentially an economic empowerment programme, we have discovered that the strong cultural and artistic element in the region’s weaving heritage can speak to larger issues and make greater connections.

Figure 2: Maybank Eco weavers Programme – Entwine 2019, Maybank Collection.



The artistic and cultural aspects of the programme were highlighted in an exhibition entitled ‘*Entwine: Maybank Women Eco-Weavers Meet Southeast Asian Artists*’. The exhibition was a meeting of traditional craft with contemporary art showcasing artworks by six Southeast Asian contemporary artists who were inspired by weavers in various countries through short residencies. This seminal exhibition was held at the National Museum of Singapore in 2019.

MyTiger Values Art Competition & Exhibition

Global Tiger Day is an annual celebration to raise awareness for tiger conservation, held annually on 29 July. It was created in 2010 at the Saint Petersburg Tiger Summit, with the goal being the protection of the natural tiger habitats and to raise public awareness and support tiger conservation issues. The Summit was in response to the shocking news that 97% of all wild tigers had disappeared in the last century, with only around 3,900 left in the wild at that time. The tiger, is also, of course, Maybank's signia and brand.

In its third year, Maybank Foundation's "*MyTIGER Values Art Competition & Exhibition*", showcased a fusion of fresh ideas on what Tiger Values (Teamwork, Integrity, Growth, Excellence & Efficiency, Relationship building) entails and how they inspire Malaysia's young aspiring artists. The 2020 competition saw entries from 316 art students from 68 Malaysian universities, submit for categories: Sequential Art, Illustration Art and Photo Imaging Art. Out of 430 artworks submitted for the Art Competition, our art exhibition featured works of 119 finalists, showing particularly refreshing perspectives. We were able to create a digital virtual gallery with state-of-the-art technology to feature and share the show with all who visited and continue to visit the website link. Celebrating greater accessibility! (See: <https://maybankfoundation.com/mbfvr/#media=1>)

Figure 3: Maybank, Gallery expanse, My TIGER Exhibition, Maybank Collection.



Sayang Menyayang: A Batik Fine Art Tribute to Merdeka and Malaysia

Figure 4: Maybank Ismail Mat Husin –Nelayan Tarik Perahu, Maybank Collection.



For GWKL 2020 Maybank Foundation presented ‘*Sayang-Menyayang: A Batik Fine Art Tribute to Merdeka and Malaysia*’ celebrating Independence. As a celebration of the diversity, the creativity of the arts and multicultural identity, this virtual exhibition gave feature to the longstanding, traditional craft-batik, some of the artwork is from Maybank’s Collection. The exhibition featured 57 Batik artworks from Malaysian established (many deceased) artists such as Khalil Ibrahim and Ismail Mat Hussein, well-versed in various mediums and subject matters, usually highlighting local scenes. The virtual art exhibition provided an immersive artistic experience to the viewers and showcased the true Malaysian heritage through the lenses of its multicultural national heritage. (See <http://www.maybankfoundation.com/mbfvr/2020-11/#media=1>)

2020 was a challenging year, which made Maybank Foundation’s social mission to support and acknowledge the distinctive and creative efforts of the art community in Malaysia, even more critical. We have now developed a dual approach, of planning for the physical and virtual presentation, and celebrating the virtual for extended reach and moment.

Over the 30 years of supporting the Malaysian arts community through collecting, the Maybank Foundation has collected over 600 works. We see the act of collecting as a cultural contribution to our community, which has coincidentally but fortuitously led to the reality of a very valuable collection that represents the creative history of our country. We are delighted to be able to share this creativity.

Shahril Azuar Jimin,
CEO, Maybank Foundation