



European Union
Delegation to Singapore

Opening address
By Iwona Piórko
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SEA AiR inaugural exhibition at NTU CCA Residencies Studios

Gillman Barracks

10th January 2023

Fellow Ambassadors,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

A very warm welcome to the inaugural **SEA AiR (Studio Residencies for Southeast Asian artists in the EU)** exhibition at Gillman Barracks.

You experience here the works of three artists in the first cycle of SEA AiR: **Hoo Fan Chon** (Malaysia – Residency at HIAP – Helsinki International Artist Programme, Finland), **Citra Sasmita** (Indonesia – Residency at WIELS, Brussels, Belgium), and **Vuth Lyno** (Cambodia – Residency at Villa Arson, Nice, France). They were selected from a pool of 24 candidates nominated by curators and artists.

WIELS, Villa Arson and HIAP are established European art institutions with a long history of running residency programmes. Each institution offered the artists a three-month residency and an opportunity to create new works, inspired by their experiences, engagements and interactions with the public in Europe. Unexpectedly, the residencies unfolded not only in the midst of a new surge of the COVID-19 pandemic but also during the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

This new artist residency programme launched jointly by the European Union Delegation to Singapore and the Nanyang Technological University's Centre for Contemporary Art (NTU CCA) celebrates people-to-people connectivity and diversity. We embarked on this pioneering

project in a milestone year as the EU and ASEAN commemorated the 45th anniversary of their dialogue relations in 2022. SEA AiR embodies this rich spirit of dialogue and exchange that are hallmarks of the relationship between our two regions.

We have in SEA AiR, a made-in-Singapore programme to drive the development of Southeast Asia's contemporary art and serve as a springboard for dialogue between European art institutions and Southeast Asian artists. Dedicated to artists who have not yet had a significant professional experience in Europe, SEA AiR pivots the creative and cultural exchange between the EU and Singapore and ASEAN enabling us to highlight a region that has historically been under-represented in most artist residency programmes in Europe.

Projects on this scale are possible thanks to the commitment of many people backing the vision for it. Allow me to thank in particular: Dean Joseph Liow, (*he is travelling*), Professor Tim White, Professor Ute Meta Bauer and exhibition curator Anna Lovecchio and the teams at both NTU and NTU CCA. We are very pleased to have with us today Michel Mouchiroud, Deputy Head of EU Foreign Policy Instruments Regional Team for Asia and Pacific, who has championed SEA AiR from the start. Our special thanks to our partner institutions in Europe for their commitment.

I wish all artists a successful exhibition here in Singapore - the thriving engine and beginning and end point of this inspiring project. Sparking conversations and discourse among the wider community, this show fittingly opens during Singapore Art Week. This gives an opportunity to art lovers from the region and beyond to immerse themselves in this cross-regional artistic project and experience for themselves how journeys and cultural exchanges shape art and art practices.

As I look ahead to what will certainly be another eventful year, standing here with you today I can't help but reflect on how art and artists are, as always, poised to offer hope, beauty and provoke new ways of looking at and thinking about the world. What I have seen and experienced proves again that art acts as a catalyst for dialogue, change and positivity, putting the focus firmly on **what we share rather than what separates us**.