

MEDIA ALERT

NATIONAL GALLERY SINGAPORE'S HIGHLY ANTICIPATED SHOW OF THE YEAR TELLS OF CAPTIVATING STORIES FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA AND LATIN AMERICA



Singapore, 29 August 2023 – In November 2023, National Gallery Singapore will be unveiling its highly anticipated show, *Tropical: Stories from Southeast Asia and Latin America*. It is the world's first large-scale museum exhibition to take a comparative approach between artistic expressions from both regions, united by their struggles against colonialism.

Tropical spans the 20th century, tracing how artists from Southeast Asia and Latin America forged connections and nurtured solidarities, defiantly reclaiming their place within the story of art.

Over 200 paintings, sculptures, drawings, performances, and sensorial installations will be displayed through radical exhibition designs the Gallery developed in close collaboration with an acclaimed architecture firm. The exhibition features approximately 70 renowned artists from the two regions, some presented for the first time in Singapore. Artists include David Medalla, Diego Rivera, Emiria Sunassa, Frida Kahlo, Hélio Oiticica, Latiff Mohidin, Patrick Ng Kah Onn, Paul Gauguin, Tan Oe Pang and Tarsila do Amaral. More information on the artists can be found in the **Annex**.

Discover remarkable parallels between artists from these distant parts of the world, and join us in uncovering how art can become a vehicle for resistance and transformation.

More details to follow. Tickets on sale from September 2023 at <http://nationalgallery.sg/tropical>. Stay tuned to the website or follow our Facebook and Instagram accounts at @nationalgallerysingapore for updates.

Exhibition details

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Exhibition dates | 18 November 2023 to 24 March 2024 |
| Venue | National Gallery Singapore 1 St Andrew's Road, Singapore 178957 Singtel Special Exhibition Galleries and various locations around the Gallery |
| Tickets | Tickets on sale from September 2023 at www.nationalgallery.sg/tropical |

For further information, please contact:

Tate Anzur

Natalie Tan
+ 65 9173 6129
natalie.tan@tateanzur.com /
NGSTeam@tateanzur.com

National Gallery Singapore

Teo Zhi Xin
zhixin.teo@nationalgallery.sg

About National Gallery Singapore

National Gallery Singapore is a leading visual arts institution that oversees the world's largest public collection of Singapore and Southeast Asian modern art. Situated at the birthplace of modern Singapore, in the heart of the Civic District, the Gallery is housed in two national monuments - City Hall and former Supreme Court - that have been beautifully restored and transformed into this exciting 64,000 square metre venue. Reflecting Singapore's unique heritage and geographical location, the Gallery aims to be a progressive museum that creates dialogues between the art of Singapore, Southeast Asia and the world to foster and inspire a creative and inclusive society. This is reflected in our collaborative research, education, long-term and special exhibitions, and innovative programming. The Gallery also works with international museums such as Centre Pompidou, Musée d'Orsay, Tate Britain, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (MOMAT) and National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA), to jointly present Southeast Asian art in the global context, positioning Singapore as a key node in the global visual arts scene.

In 2020, the Gallery was the only museum in Southeast Asia that received a ranking in The Art Newspaper's annual global survey of attendance at art museums, taking 20th place. It was the first museum in Asia to receive the Children in Museums Award by the European Museum Academy and Hands On! International Association of Children in Museums in 2018. The Gallery also won the awards for "Best Theme Attraction" at TTG Travel Awards 2017, "Best Attraction Experience", "Breakthrough Contribution to Tourism" and "Best Customer Service (Attractions)" at the prestigious Singapore Tourism Awards in 2016 for its role in adding to the vibrancy of Singapore's tourism landscape.

Annex

| Artist | Short Biography |
|----------------|--|
| David Medalla | <p>David Medalla (1942–2020) was recognised as a child prodigy who worked across visual art, poetry and public intellectualism. Medalla constantly sought to build institutions as autonomous positions that would challenge the existing status quo surrounding the production and consumption of artistic narratives. These efforts culminated in events and gatherings like the London Biennale, Exploding Galaxy, Artists for Democracy, creating a confluence of performances and collectives, evocations, and activations of the folk. In 1964, he co-founded Signals Gallery which hosted an extensive range of perspectives that challenged conventional definitions of artistic production and presentation. Medalla aligned himself with the burgeoning avant-garde of the period, and actively sought out conversations with figures like Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, Harald Szeemann, Rasheed Araeen, and the critic Guy Brett who chronicled Medalla’s work extensively.</p> |
| Diego Rivera | <p>Diego Rivera (1886–1957) was a central figure in the state-sponsored project of muralism in the 1920s in Mexico, activating the walls and ceilings of public spaces, such as municipal and state buildings, educational institutions and religious spaces, with monumental paintings. These were visual manifestations of Mexico’s ambitions in the immediate aftermath of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) which saw an end to a 30-year dictatorship and the establishment of a Constitutional Republic. These murals presented narratives that foregrounded Mexico’s deep history of indigenous knowledge and culture. They also retold its fraught history as a triumphant struggle over its many aggressors and provided space to imagine a technological and industrial future of progress.</p> |
| Emiria Sunassa | <p>Emiria Sunassa (1894–1964) was born in North Sulawesi, an Indonesian island east of Borneo. Activist-artist Emiria Sunassa morphed through a diverse array of professions: nurse, administrator, animal hunter, businesswoman and poison maker before turning to painting. Emiria Sunassa was the solitary female member alongside her male and largely Javanese peers in PERSAGI (Persatuan Ahli-Ahli Gambar Indonesia, or Association of Indonesian Draughtsmen), a cultural society for artists that established itself against the dominance of pastoral or romanticised representation of Indonesia within paintings at the time. Sunassa continues to remain an enigmatic figure within the story of Southeast Asian art.</p> |

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| <p>Frida Kahlo</p> | <p>Frida Kahlo's (1907–1954) biography intertwines with the tumultuous social, artistic, and political turns that newly independent Mexico experienced in the early 20th century, as she was born just three years before the 1910 Mexican Revolution. Renowned for her communist sympathies and active involvement in left-wing political circles, Kahlo proudly embraced her socialist beliefs throughout her life. Her artworks vividly reflected her support for the working class and marginalised communities, often incorporating revolutionary themes and symbols. Kahlo was an avid collector of pre-Columbian and Mesoamerican pottery, sculptures, and textiles. These cultural objects served as a significant source of inspiration for her artwork and played a vital role in shaping her artistic style.</p> |
| <p>Hélio Oiticica</p> | <p>Hélio Oiticica (1937–1980) was a pioneering Brazilian artist and theorist who challenged ideas of painting and sculpture, art and lived experience. He is known for his innovative use of colour, participatory performances, as well as immersive and tactile installations that incorporate components like plants, sounds, music and live animals. Throughout his artistic practice, Oiticica has contributed to the development of conceptual art through his writings and exchanges with key figures in the Brazilian art scene, like Lygia Clark. Oiticica was an influential figure in the <i>Tropicália</i> movement in Brazil during the 1960s, a cultural and artistic movement that blended music, visual arts and poetry to challenge traditional norms and express political dissent.</p> |
| <p>Latiff Mohidin</p> | <p>Latiff Mohidin (b. 1941) is Malaysia's most cherished modernist painter and poet. From 1964 to 1968, he embarked on an extraordinary journey across Southeast Asia. During this pivotal period of decolonisation and rapid social transformation, he fostered connections and dialogues with prominent artists and writers of the time. Through this, he developed a mode of thinking and working that evokes the specificities of the region as an aesthetic which he referred to as "Pago Pago". This moment has found a significant place in Southeast Asian art. Latiff Mohidin remains active and continues to contribute to artistic, literary and discursive debates in Southeast Asia.</p> |
| <p>Patrick Ng Kah Onn</p> | <p>Patrick Ng Kah Onn (1932–1989) was a member of the Wednesday Art Group which was founded in Kuala Lumpur in 1952. Through his involvement with the group, Ng developed a consciousness towards the nascent formation of a Malayan cultural identity in the 1950s after three centuries of colonial rule. With a daring embrace of self-portraiture techniques from the Malay world such as batik, Ng traversed these burgeoning concerns to offer a profound insight into what could become a modern vision of cultural expression in soon-to-be Malaysia.</p> |

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| <p>Paul Gauguin</p> | <p>Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) cuts a controversial figure for his sojourn in Tahiti commencing in 1891. Claiming to seek spiritual enlightenment and purity in the Tahitian way by “going native,” Gauguin’s vision was structured by exoticist and erotic fantasies. These were driven by his desire to escape what he characterised as burgeoning constrictions on private life brought upon by heavy industrialisation in Europe. Gauguin’s influence eventually led to a revival of pastoralism, as artists in Europe and its colonies sought to reconnect with rural landscapes and portray idyllic scenes evoking harmony and tranquillity.</p> |
| <p>Tan Oe Pang</p> | <p>Tan Oe Pang (b. 1947) is lauded for his translation of Chinese ink aesthetics across styles and mediums. Trained under Classical ink artist Fan Chang Tien in Singapore, he quickly went on to develop his own artistic language in pursuit of new methods of art-making. A versatile artist, Tan’s practice ranges from calligraphy, figurative and abstract compositions in ink, to works on oil on canvas and aluminium. In 1985, Tan participated in the 18th International Biennial of Arts in São Paulo, Brazil, constituting an early foray of the ink medium at this important platform. Tan continues to experiment and drive debates on the place of ink aesthetics within contemporary artistic production.</p> |
| <p>Tarsila do Amaral</p> | <p>Tarsila do Amaral (1886–1973) is a central figure within the Brazilian modernist movement. In 1922, upon her return to São Paulo from Paris, she gathered with four artists (<i>Grupo dos Cinco</i> [Group of Five]) and organised the <i>Semana de Arte Moderna</i> (Modern Art Week). It was a watershed in Brazilian art history with the artists advocating for a vocabulary of making that was not simply derived from European academic traditions. Instead, they sought to establish a new vision of artistic production that synthesised nascent Brazilian sensibilities and subjects with adaptations of global artistic movements. Do Amaral was one of the key figures behind the <i>Manifesto Antropófago</i> (Anthropophagite Manifesto, or the Cannibalist Manifesto) written by the poet Oswald de Andrade in 1928. The manifesto proposes a radical approach to Brazilian culture, calling on its people to devour its colonial inheritance, among a plenitude of other cultural sources.</p> |