

MEDIA RELEASE

INTERDISCIPLINARY ARTIST ROBERT ZHAO AND CURATOR HAEJU KIM TO REPRESENT SINGAPORE AT THE 60TH INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION OF LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

This marks the 11th year Singapore is participating in the most prestigious international art exhibition in the visual arts arena.



Robert Zhao Renhui and Haeju Kim, 2023. Image courtesy of Robert Zhao.

Singapore, 14 July 2023 – Singapore Art Museum (SAM) is pleased to announce the appointment of Singaporean artist Robert Zhao Renhui and curator Haeju Kim as the artistic team for the Singapore Pavilion at the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia (Biennale Arte 2024), which will run from 20 April to 24 November 2024. Recognising the museum’s expertise as a leading contemporary art institution in Southeast Asia, SAM has been commissioned by the National Arts Council (NAC) to organise the Singapore Pavilion for this edition.

The selection process for the artist for the 11th Singapore Pavilion involved a Commissioning Panel composed of representatives from the arts community. The Panel assessed the course of the artist's research, practice and experiences through their careers, and also conducted artist studio visits as part of the selection process. SAM will work closely with the appointed artistic team to offer holistic support as they develop the presentation, allowing for the artwork to evolve through a process of collaboration and exchange.

Eugene Tan, Co-Chair of the Commissioning Panel and Director of SAM, says, "The strength and trajectory of Robert Zhao's artistic practice and research has convinced the Commissioning Panel of his ability to present a thought-provoking presentation that speaks to contemporary global issues. We are heartened that Haeju Kim, a Senior Curator at SAM, has been approached by Zhao to support his endeavour in Venice. Given Kim's extensive experience and expertise across disciplines and large-scale platforms, as well as the shared research synergies between Zhao and Kim, this holds potential for exploring possibilities of mutual co-existence, multi-species flourishing and more connected ways of being. As SAM continues to present resonant works that push artistic boundaries, the artistic team's pursuit of challenging exhibitionary norms puts them in good stead to best represent Singapore at the Biennale Arte 2024. These are considerations that informed our appointment of the artistic team, and we hope that the upcoming presentation will inspire deeper reflections within the arts community and beyond."

Low Eng Teong, Co-Chair of the Commissioning Panel and Chief Executive Officer of the NAC, adds, "This is Singapore's 11th presentation at the Biennale Arte. We are excited for this opportunity to present art that reflects our times, sparks conversations, and positions us on this international platform. As NAC continues to propel generations of artists on the international stage, we are excited to be working with SAM to champion our artistic talents and provide them with a platform to present and engage with international audiences. NAC looks forward to further establishing Singapore as a key arts and culture node for artistic practices, as we bring forth inclusivity, vibrancy and opportunities in the arts."

Robert Zhao Renhui is an interdisciplinary Singaporean artist who has exhibited globally in international biennales and institutions around the world and won accolades for his artistic practice. Zhao was featured in the 10th Busan Biennale (2020), 6th Singapore Biennale (2019),

9th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (2018), 11th Taipei Biennale (2018), 17th Jakarta Biennale (2017), and 20th Biennale of Sydney (2016). Most recently, he was invited to participate in the 14th Gwangju Biennale (2023), and held a solo exhibition at the ShanghART Shanghai in March 2023.

In his practice, Zhao explores the complex relationships between nature and culture. Working in installation, photography, video and sculpture, Zhao takes an interdisciplinary approach to constructing layered narratives of the natural world, with an interest in uncovering the experiences of the multifarious beings and objects that constitute the living world and enrich our collective existence. Over the past eight years, he has rooted the pressing global topic of the Anthropocene to our Singaporean environment, through the exploration of secondary forests and their potential as key sites of regeneration and regrowth. Zhao has presented different expressions of his research on secondary forests, most recently *The Forest Institute* (2022), a large-scale architectural art installation at Gillman Barracks, Singapore; *Untimely Meditations* (2022), a body of work that suggests alternative ways to look at history and nature through artefacts of the past and present; and an upcoming performance installation titled *Albizia* (2023), commissioned by the Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay. Providing a vision for life and regeneration for a more ecologically minded future, Zhao's presentation for the Singapore Pavilion will feature an immersive, interdisciplinary installation that builds on the complex and rich multiplicity of his ecological research through art.

Haeju Kim is a Senior Curator at SAM who focuses on contemporary art practices in Singapore, Southeast Asia and Asia. Previously the Deputy Director at Art Sonje Center, Kim holds deep experience in curating numerous contemporary art exhibitions and performance programmes across various disciplines. Her curatorial approach emphasises the consideration of the body, time and memory as key elements, while also engaging with topics including ecological perspectives, locality and its planetary connection, and questions of coexistence through her research.

She was most recently the Artistic Director for Busan Biennale 2022, which received much commendation for its intimate understanding and reflection of the city's local histories. Other exhibitions curated by Kim include two solo exhibitions by Shitamichi Motoyuki (*A ship went up that hill*, 2022) and Manon de Boer (*Down Time*, 2022) at Kunsthal Aarhus, Denmark, as well as

Moving/Image, a three-chapter exhibition and performance programme that was presented at Seoul Art Space Mullaee (2016), ARKO Art Center (2017) and Seoul Museum of Art (2020).

The Biennale Arte 2024, named “Foreigners Everywhere”, is curated by Adriano Pedrosa. Since 2015, the Singapore Pavilion has been located within the Arsenale and has featured artists such as Shubigi Rao (2022), Song-Ming Ang (2019), Zai Kuning (2017) and Charles Lim (2015). In 2009, Ming Wong’s representation of Singapore received a Special Mention at the 53rd Biennale Arte.

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About the Singapore Pavilion in Venice

The Singapore Pavilion is a 250 sqm space in a complex of buildings called the Sale d’Armi, which is centrally located and easily accessible within the Arsenale, a key site in Venice. The Sale d’Armi complex is a cluster of four 16th century barracks built with brick and stone, each

with a wooden roof. It lies opposite the intersection between the long Corderie and Artiglierie buildings, where the main central square of the Arsenale is situated.

About the Singapore Art Museum

Singapore Art Museum opened in 1996 as the first art museum in Singapore located in the cultural district of Singapore. Known as SAM, the museum presents contemporary art from a Southeast Asian perspective for artists, art lovers and the art curious in multiple venues across the island, including a new venue in the historic port area of Tanjong Pagar.

The museum is building one of the world's most important public collections of Southeast Asian contemporary art, with the aim of connecting the art and the artists to the public and future generations through exhibitions and programmes. SAM is working towards a humane and sustainable future by committing to responsible practices within its processes.

To find out more, visit www.singaporeartmuseum.sg

About National Arts Council, Singapore

The National Arts Council champions the arts in Singapore. By nurturing creative excellence and supporting broad audience engagement, our diverse and distinctive arts inspire our people, connect communities and profile Singapore internationally. We preserve our rich, cultural traditions as we cultivate accomplished artists and vibrant companies for the future. Our support for the arts is comprehensive – from grants and partnerships to industry facilitation and arts housing. The Council welcomes greater private and corporate giving to and through the arts so that together we can make the arts an integral part of everyone's lives. For more information on the Council's mission and plans, please visit www.nac.gov.sg.

Annex A: About the Artistic Team

Robert Zhao Renhui, Artist



Robert Zhao Renhui (born 1983, Singapore) is an interdisciplinary artist who explores the complex and co-mingled relationships between nature and culture. Working in installation, photography, video and sculpture, Zhao is interested in the multifarious beings and objects that constitute the living world, and whose experiences and knowledge enrich our collective existence.

Zhao held solo exhibitions *The Forest Institute* (2022) at Gillman Barracks, Singapore and *Monuments in the Forest* at Shanghart Gallery (2023) in Shanghai. His latest work is a performance installation titled *Albizia* (2023), commissioned by the Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay. He has also been featured in 10th Busan Biennale (2020), 6th Singapore Biennale (2019), 9th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (2018), 11th Taipei Biennale (2018), 17th Jakarta Biennale (2017), and 20th Biennale of Sydney (2016).

He received the prestigious National Arts Council Young Artist Award (2010), Singapore's highest award for young arts practitioners aged 35 and below, He was also a finalist of the Hugo Boss Asia Art Award (2017).

Haeju Kim, Curator



Haeju Kim (born 1980, South Korea) is a Senior Curator at Singapore Art Museum (SAM), and her research focuses on contemporary art practices in Singapore, Southeast Asia and Asia. Her curatorial approach emphasises the consideration of the body, time and memory as key elements. Haeju's interest in performance and her previous collaborations with performance artists and performing arts institutions have shaped her view of exhibition curating as the creation of a shared space for bodily and temporal experiences.

Prior to joining SAM, Kim was the Artistic Director of the Busan Biennale 2022. She was also the Deputy Director at Art Sonje Center, where she oversaw the exhibitions, programmes as well as the operation of the South Korean museum. She is currently pursuing research and curatorial work that is focused on diverse topics such as migration and language, questions of coexistence, ecological perspectives, and the interplay between locality and its planetary connection, among others.

Major exhibitions curated by Kim include *We, on the Rising Wave* at the Busan Biennale 2022, and solo exhibitions by Shitamichi Motoyuki (*A ship went up that hill*, 2022) and Manon de Boer (*Down Time*, 2022) at Kunsthal Aarhus, Denmark. She also curated *Moving/Image*, a three-chapter exhibition and performance programme that was presented at Seoul Art Space Mullaee (2016), ARKO Art Center (2017) and Seoul Museum of Art (2020).

Annex B: The Commissioning Panel

Co-Chairs

- Mr Low Eng Teong, Chief Executive Officer, National Arts Council, Singapore
- Mr Eugene Tan, Director, Singapore Art Museum

Members

- Ms Mae Anderson, Chairperson, Art Outreach Singapore
- Mr Patrick Flores, Deputy Director, Curatorial and Exhibitions, National Gallery Singapore
- Ms Honor Harger, Vice President, ArtScience Museum and Attractions, Marina Bay Sands
- Mr Ho Tzu Nyen, Artist (Represented Singapore at the 54th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia in 2011)
- Mr Low Sze Wee, Chief Executive Officer, Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre
- Mr David Teh, Associate Professor, National University of Singapore