

Singapore's experience in establishing an arts council in Asian region.

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The National Arts Council (NAC) was set up in 1991 following the recommendations of an Advisory Council, which was set up by the government to review the state of the arts in Singapore. As a Statutory Board absorbing the former Arts Division of the Ministry of Culture, the Singapore Cultural Foundation, the Festival of Arts Secretariat and the National Theatre Trust; we saw merits in coordinating efforts to spearhead the development of the arts in Singapore. We have identified five key thrusts in working towards our mission to make Singapore a vibrant arts hub in the region - widening the audience base, nurturing local artists and arts groups, developing programmes to enliven the arts scene, developing arts infrastructure and facilities, and also promoting Singapore arts abroad.

A new chapter for Singapore arts scene has since begun with the Renaissance City Report released in April this year. The report articulates a vision of Singapore as a world-class city supported by a vibrant cultural scene and outlines strategies to take Singapore to that level. Ten years after the Advisory Council's report, with what we see to be the enhanced role of culture and the arts in the future development of our nation, it is now our challenge to build upon our earlier efforts to develop the arts in Singapore.

In a society marked by the rich experiences and histories of its multi-racial, multi-religious population, the Arts in Singapore are no less diverse. The cosmopolitan feel of the city with the meeting of cultures from the East and West contributes to the cultural voice of its artists. It is this unique voice which we actively seek to share with the rest of the world through the pursuit of bilateral and multilateral exchanges such as the signing of cultural agreements with other countries and relevant institutions.

In positioning ourselves as a global centre of exchange, we also like to believe that the uniqueness of our shared experiences in our part of the world situates us strategically as a "Gateway to Asia". Many factors point to the city's suitability and fulfillment of this important role in Asia: strategic location, political stability, state-of-the-art infrastructure, government backing and a policy in favour of the arts.

Actively engaging our ASEAN neighbours in cultural exchanges is one of the roles we play to enhance the strong cultural traditional heritage in this region and foster better understanding of the cultures and traditions among ASEAN members.

This, we accomplish through the ASEAN Committee on Culture & Information which promotes ASEAN platforms of exchange, where we are the implementing body.

Singapore's global outlook has set the pace for a vibrant, artistic Asian international hub very much plugged into the international network of talents and ideas. But the push of globalisation, with the concomitant forces of the new economy and its cyber technologies, has given our experiences with the arts new relevance in this "global village". Let me explain.

Besides revolutionising the way we communicate, the technologies of the new economy can also help us to forge closer ties culturally through the arts. The Internet empowers people to overcome barriers of space and time by speeding up the

contacts between businesses. Similarly, artists and audiences can now be connected across the globe through the Internet. Different cultures can come together to collaborate and share information in ways that benefit the arts as a whole. Our experiences in setting up an International Arts Council e-Club is a case in point. It has enabled us to interact globally across a network with such ease that we are amazed at the speed at which things have come together. While we are still learning and intend to fine-tune our system, we want to help in whatever way we can to foster closer ties with the arts councils and arts funding bodies in the global community. The arts as a whole stands to benefit from a network that encourages cooperation through a sharing of knowledge and experience.

Using such new technologies in communication taps on the scope and reach that they offer. Its multi-media environment makes the exchange of information in different forms easy. It is a great resource to promote understanding across cultures. We believe that while Asia and the West are different and distinct, we have common hopes and aims. These can all be aided by drawing people closer in understanding through the arts.

Well, not even an electronic handshake can replace a real one. I am glad to be here to meet many of the people in our e-Club face to face. Nothing beats the personal touch.