



Singapore Art Museum shows

Ideas unfurl in messy, magical bloom

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Art to smell and cuddle

Two exhibitions at the Singapore Art Museum demystify contemporary art for the uninitiated

Review Art

SENSORIUM 360°

Singapore Art Museum/Till Oct 22

MEDIUM AT LARGE

Singapore Art Museum/Till April next year

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Arts Correspondent

I don't get it. What is contemporary art?

For the scorners and those haplessly bewildered by art of today, the Singapore Art Museum under its new director Susie Lingham has put on two exhibitions to win over the disbelieving without losing the enlightened.

Sensorium 360° and Medium At Large are grounded in the rudiments of making sense of art but do not descend into oversimplification.

Sensorium 360° reminds viewers there is more to art than meets the eye; its purposeful selection of 11 works insists on being known by more than just one's peepers.

Goldie Poblador's interactive installation, *There Is A Tree In The Heart Of Death*, invites one to smell songs, hear scents and compose a tune using the high, middle and low notes of perfume.

By playing on the phenomenon of synaesthesia, where a sensation triggers an experience in a different form, the work calls attention to how conceptual art need not be an abstract experience.

The sensual nature of Pinaree Sanpitak's installation, *noon-nom*, is similarly brought to the fore in this show. The work is a roomful of bosoms; bulbous soft sculptures, modelled after the female human breast, are packed snugly on the floor for visitors to cuddle.

It was previously exhibited with a cerebral bent at the museum's 2011 exhibition, *Negotiating Home, History And Nation*, as art that touches on gender discourse and the current aesthetic vocabulary of the region.

In *Sensorium 360°*, however, its sensuousness is given primacy. Fleshy pink walls replace the previous white cube display and the inner wall of the barrier, which holds back the round mounds, is now curved suggestively.

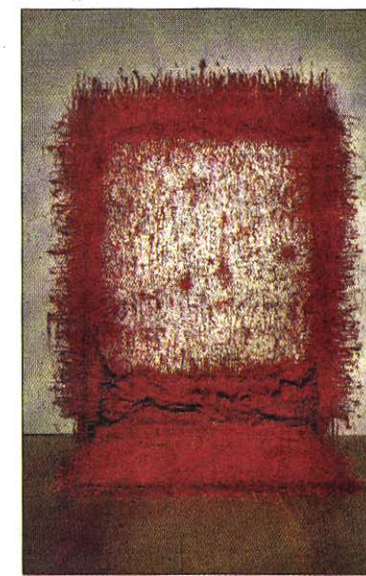
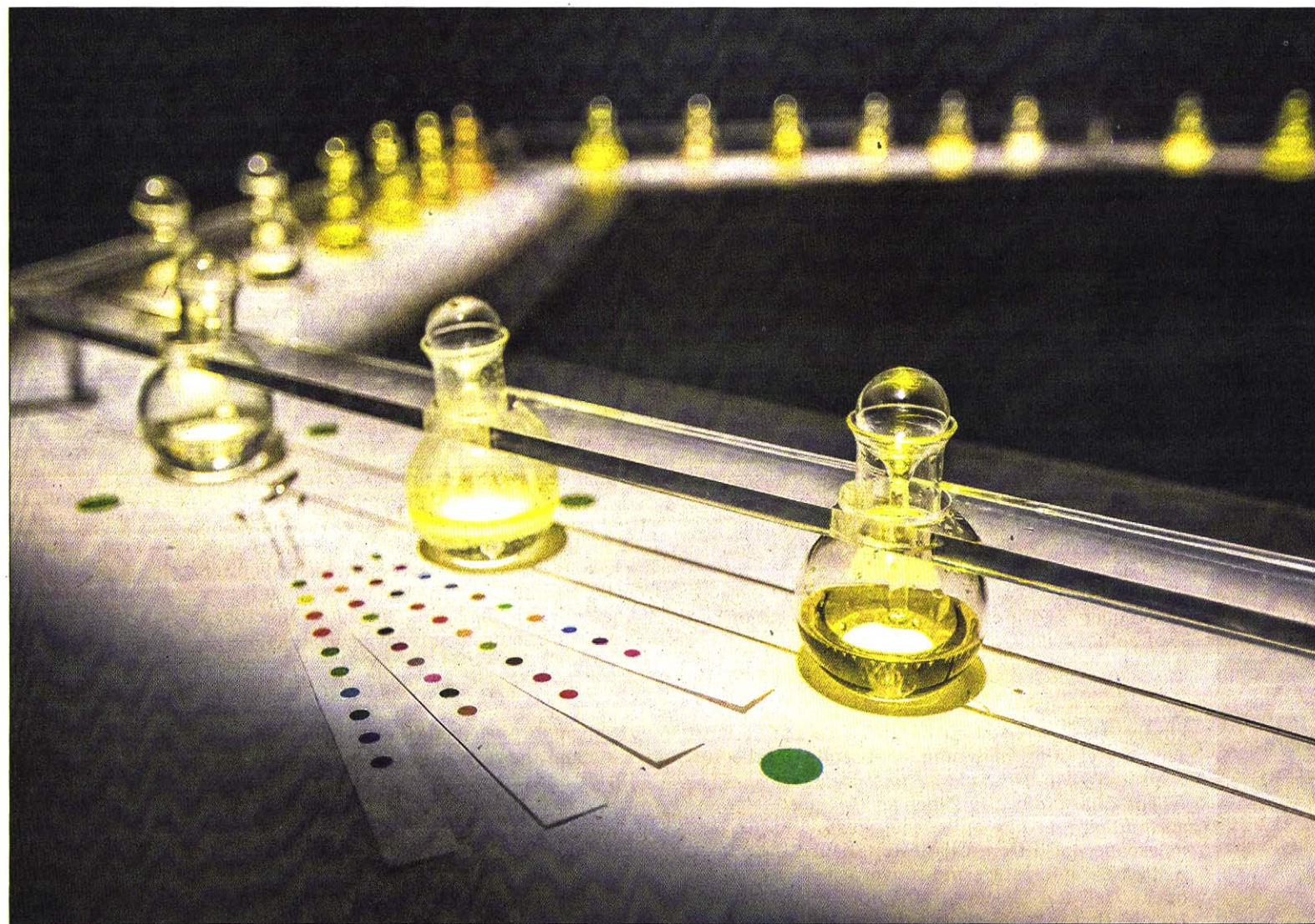
A number of other works in the exhibition have also been displayed recently, albeit outside of the museum.

A version of Eugene Soh's *The Overview Installation*, for example, was shown last year at the OCBC Arts Space. Visitors walk around wearing video goggles that stream closed-circuit TV feeds of the room, which distort their usual point of view.

The playful work is equal parts about how people see themselves in this age of technology and the act of looking at art.

In *Sensorium 360°*, Soh's installation gains focus; visitors now don the goggles to navigate a mini maze.

By reviving these works, the museum provides artists an opportunity to refine their creations. For regulars at art shows here, it is a chance to witness contemporary art in the making.



Artist Jane Lee's *Status* (above).

View it

SENSORIUM 360° MEDIUM AT LARGE

Where: Singapore Art Museum, 71 Bras Basah Road

When: Till Oct 22 (*Sensorium 360°*), till April next year (*Medium At Large*), 10am to 7pm (Saturday to Thursday), 10am to 9pm (Friday)

Admission: Free for Singapore citizens and permanent residents, \$10 (adult), \$5 (student and senior citizen aged 60 and above)

Either way, they challenge viewers to reconsider the primacy of sight in art appreciation and remind audiences the experience of contemporary art, even its most high-browed creations, is catholic.

The museum's decision to feature mostly works that are interactive, however, neglects a swath of contemporary art that is not overtly sensorial and the show nearly misses on an opportunity to address how the act of looking is a complex function marrying cognition, perception and sensation.

This, though, is made up for in some part by the inclusion of two works that do not require viewer interaction.

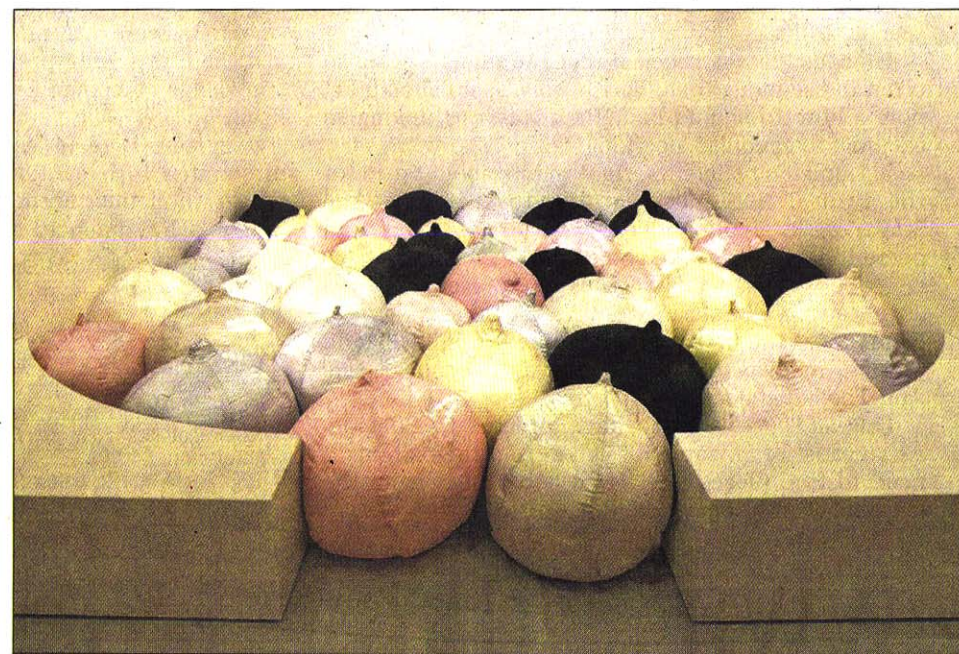
Lavender Chang's *Unconsciousness: Consciousness*, comprising long-exposure photographs of subjects sleeping in the nude, highlights the sense of passing time in a single frame, which is at once in plain view yet paradoxical.

Similarly, the sense of danger, pain and of transcending the corporeal in Melati Suryodarmo's performance-installation, *Ale Lino*, is perceived in abstract.

In the performance, of which a recording is shown in the gallery, Suryodarmo presses a 4m pole against her solar plexus, a vulnerable area in the abdomen where a bundle of nerves is found.

Just as there are many ways to apprehend contemporary art through sensorial encounters, one can also get closer to its message and essence by considering its methods and materials.

Medium At Large features 32 works whose formal qualities offer answers about what makes art, art, but also raise a few questions on the subject to keep things interesting.



Pinaree Sanpitak's *noon-nom* installation (above), with bulbous soft sculptures, and Goldie Poblador's interactive installation, *There Is A Tree In The Heart Of Death* (top), where one can create a tune using the high, middle and low notes of perfume. PHOTOS: SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

The pieces span various mediums and genres including drawing, painting, photography, video, sound and performance. A disappointing omission from the fray is Web-based art.

The featured works, though, are seldom of a single medium and it is by highlighting such polygamous unions among mediums in contemporary art that the show gains nuance.

Chen Sai Hua Kuan's video, *Space Drawing 5*, explores the limits of drawing

by releasing a taut rope through a construction site so it sketches rapid lines in space and shades with the dust it stirs in its wake.

Jane Lee's *Status*, on the other hand, is a statuesque seduction of painting, sculpture and installation in red. Measuring about 4m by 5m by 1.5m, skeins of paint intertwine to form both canvas and medium on the wall while a portion of the textured layer scrunches at the bottom in deep folds, extending out onto the floor.

Then there is Ho Tzu Nyen's *The Cloud Of Unknowing*, which belongs to the medium of the spectacle.

The genre blending and bending work straddles video and installation while drawing inspiration from literature – a philosopher's thesis on the aesthetics and symbolism of clouds – and tableaux from iconic paintings of the East and West. These myriad influences condense to conjure a realm where eight enigmatic characters encounter a cloud or cloud-like figure indoors.

Ho's collage of history and cultures, which ends with an actual cloud of smoke billowing through the gallery, goes against narrative and logic. But its defiance opens up a space of imagination and rumination for the viewer – art, no doubt.

Indeed, this exhibition sizzles because its simple conceit, considering the various mediums of contemporary art, spotlights the subject's richness and encourages diverse ways of thinking about art and individual works.

The Singapore Art Museum has, in recent years, centred its shows on the aesthetic language and conceptual tendencies of contemporary art in the region but its latest exhibitions mark a departure in the way this is being presented.

No longer do ideas branch out in a strictly linear fashion across the galleries. Instead, they are entwined and unfurl as a bloom, not always tidy but seldom lacking clarity.

The result: a display of art as something that "does" – it moves, speaks, confounds, questions. It makes you see the world with eyes you never knew you had.

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