

life

D BEYOND CLICHES
Depicting the
Asian-American
experience
D3

When you cease to dream you cease to live.

—Malcolm Forbes

Live more.
Bark less. 



Curator
Khairuddin Hori
of Chan + Hori
Contemporary
with gallery
director Lisa
Polten at the
Alma Matter
exhibition
at Gillman
Barracks.
ST PHOTOS:
SYAMIL SAPARI

Turning a corner

Gillman Barracks, set up six years ago to be the focal point of Singapore's arts landscape, gets up to 700 visitors a day, but galleries want more support with place-making and publicity



Akshita Nanda
Arts Correspondent

When Australian gallery Sullivan + Strumpf opened a branch in Gillman Barracks two years ago, people were surprised that the gallery owners chose Singapore over bustling Hong Kong.

It entered barely a year after six galleries out of 17 decided not to renew their leases at the visual arts cluster, citing poor sales and low footfall. Since then, the enclave seems to have turned a corner, with all the vacancies filled, though tenants say that there is still room for improvement, chief of which is the need for a centralised curatorial and management body.

Co-owners Joanna Strumpf and Ursula Sullivan wanted a foothold in Asia and Hong Kong was "logistically difficult", says Ms Strumpf.

"We'd been coming to Gillman Barracks whenever we were in Singapore and we were really im-

pressed by the quality of the exhibitions. There's nothing like this in Australia. Nothing even comes close to it. In Sydney, there're maybe four galleries grouped together and that's the largest concentration."

The Australian gallery is one of 11 gallery tenants in Gillman Barracks that tell The Straits Times they are after for the long haul.

A12th, Yeo Workshop, is rebranding as the Singapore Arts Club to programme more events introducing young collectors to visual arts. A13th, Arndt, has exited the gallery business and is now an artist management agency.

Filling up the rest of the spaces at the barracks are six cafes and restaurants; craft gallery Supermama; non-profit art education outfit Art Outreach; and Playeum, a playground and centre for creativity.

Six of the current galleries have been on board since September 2012, when the 6ha former military barracks off Alexandra Road was jointly developed by the Economic Development Board Singapore (EDB), JTC Corporation and National Arts Council (NAC) at a cost of \$10 million. The oldest tenants include Sundaram Tagore Gallery, Ota Fine Arts, Mizuma Gallery, Pearl Lam Galleries, Fost Gallery and ShangART Singapore.

Footfall at the barracks is not brisk – between 500 and 700 on average daily, going up to 9,000 during special arts programmes, such as sundown event Art After Dark in January.

Those who come are often existing clients or those curious enough about art to be potential buyers, say gallery owners. Accessibility is an issue, say some, and to reach out to larger numbers, these gallery

owners want a gallery bus that could promote the arts enclave and ferry visitors to and from the central area.

"Gillman Barracks gives us exposure, but most of our business is still solicited" through art fairs and similar events, says Ms Aniela Rahardja, co-founder of Singapore gallery Element Art Space. It was invited to the barracks in 2012, but she preferred its then-location at Raffles Hotel, citing poor infrastructure at the start. She moved into Gillman Barracks less than two years ago, when the hotel closed for renovation.

Teething woes at the start included few food options, a lack of covered walkways and even dirty toilets, according to Mr David Teh of Future Perfect. His gallery did not renew its lease after 2015 because of poor footfall and these infrastructure issues.

He was invited by NAC to do a pop-up exhibition for Art After Dark in January. Nine new video works were presented from local artist Charles Lim's ongoing series, Sea State, about Singapore and the oceans. All nine sold.

Mr Teh remains open to future pop-up shows at the art enclave, but says he would not move back full-time "even if I was given a space for free".

He says Gillman Barracks' biggest flaw is the absence of a site management team that understands the needs of galleries and can respond quickly. For example, wiring had to be repaired during the January exhibition, but the contractor sent by the landlords put unsightly piping on the wall.

Ms Lilian Wu, director of ShangART Singapore, says her Beijing gallery subsidises the business here. What keeps her on board is the support of NAC and EDB, which, since 2016, have subsidised a South-east Asia residency programme for her roster of Chinese artists. In the last two months, the gallery here exhibited the installations, videos and photographs of father-son duo Hu Jieming and Hu Weiwei from China, based on their travels in the region.

She would like more collaboration among the galleries in Gillman Barracks. "In China, we would all open our shows together," she says.

Other gallerists also feel the need for "a strong institution at the core" to unite the barracks, as curator Khairuddin Hori of Chan + Hori Contemporary puts it.

MORE FOCUS, MORE TALK
continued on D2



Ms Joanna Strumpf of Sullivan + Strumpf says the Australian gallery is committed to being in Gillman Barracks for the long haul.

On view at Gillman Barracks

From wearable art to striking blue paintings of domestic fights, galleries at the art enclave exhibit a variety of work this month for art-lovers and the curious



A COMMON THREAD: ARCHIVING A PRACTICE

What: Current and past work from Singapore-based artist Grace Tan, who creates installations and wearable art (above) from materials such as plastic ties, paper and string.
Where: Fost Gallery, 1 Lock Road, 01-02
When: Until July 1; Tuesdays to Saturdays, 11am to 7pm; Sundays, 11am to 6pm. By appointment on Mondays and public holidays
Info: www.fostgallery.com



When I Asked About Love You Quote Me A Sonnet (2017-2018) by Ezzam Rahman. PHOTO: EZZAM RAHMAN AND CHAN + HORI CONTEMPORARY

ALMA MATTER

What: This exhibition showcasing works by graduates from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts is held in conjunction with its 80th-anniversary celebrations. Look out for the skin sculptures of award-winning artist Ezzam Rahman.
Where: Chan + Hori Contemporary, 6 Lock Road, 02-09
When: Until June 17; Tuesdays to Sundays, 11am to 7pm. Closed on Mondays and public holidays
Info: www.chanhori.com

GROUP SHOW

What: A group show of artists from around the world, including the stunning photographs of Canada's Edward Burtynsky, who captures human impact on nature.
Where: Sundaram Tagore Gallery, 5 Lock Road, 01-05
When: Until Friday, 11am to 7pm daily
Info: www.sundaramtagore.com

EX DE MEDICI: SMITHEREENS

What: Striking watercolours by Australian artist ex de Medici, who chooses to depict violence and surveillance in a gentle medium.
Where: Sullivan + Strumpf, 5 Lock Road, 01-06
When: Till June 24; Tuesdays to Saturdays, 11am to 7pm; Sundays, 11am to 6pm or by appointment
Info: sullivanstrumpf.com



GIANNI PIACENTINO WORKS

What: A retrospective of the sculptures and mixed-media works of Italian artist Gianni Piacentino, including metallic, minimalist "vehicles" (above) and pop art aircraft.
Where: Partners & Mucciaccia, 6 Lock Road, 02-10
When: Until June 24; Tuesdays to Fridays, noon to 7pm; Saturdays, 11am to 7pm; Sundays, 11am to 6pm. Closed on Mondays and public holidays
Info: www.partnersandmucciaccia.net

GEOPOLITICAL GROUNDS

What: Five artists from the Asia-Pacific respond to issues of the day. Singaporean artist Koh Chaik Hong photographs urban development, Japanese artist Nobuaki Takekawa depicts his country's tense relationship with the United States military in Okinawa.
Where: Ota Fine Arts, 7 Lock Road, 02-13
When: Saturday to July 28; Tuesdays to Saturdays, 11am to 7pm; Sundays, 11am to 6pm. Closed on Mondays and public holidays
Info: www.otafinearts.com



LYNN HERSHMAN: ALTER EGO

What: In the 1970s, American artist Lynn Hershman transformed herself into a blonde alter ego, Roberta Breitmore, to explore notions of identity. This exhibition features prints (above) from that period.
Where: ShangHART Singapore, 9 Lock Road, 02-22
When: Until Aug 16; Wednesdays to Sundays, 11am to 7pm. Closed on public holidays
Info: www.shanghartsingapore.com

Australian artist ex de Medici (above) and her watercolour works depicting violence and surveillance, which are on show at Sullivan + Strumpf gallery. PHOTOS: SYAMIL SAPARI, FOST GALLERY, PARTNERS & MUCCIACCIA, LYNN HERSHMAN AND SHANGHART SINGAPORE

• Admission to all galleries is free.

VIRTUAL SANCTUARY

What: A solo showcase of Chinese artist Shen Zhenglin, who reinterprets classic Greek sculptures in vibrant paintings.
Where: Mizuma Gallery, 22 Lock Road, 01-34
When: Until June 24; Tuesdays to Saturdays, 11am to 7pm; Sundays, 11am to 6pm. Closed on Mondays and public holidays
Info: www.mizuma.sg

LINGERING MANIFESTATIONS

What: A group exhibition of artists from the Asia-Pacific. Features Mirror, the 2013 work by award-winning Singaporean film-maker Boo Junfeng inspired by Bukit Brown Cemetery.
Where: Pearl Lam Galleries, 9 Lock Road, 03-22
When: Until July 1; Tuesdays to Saturdays, 11am to 7pm; Sundays, noon to 6pm. Closed on Mondays and public holidays
Info: www.pearllam.com

BEDROOMS

What: Australian artist Lucas Grogan explores love, fights and the intensity of domestic life in vibrant blue paintings.
Where: Yavuz Gallery, 9 Lock Road, 02-23
When: Until June 17; Tuesdays to Saturdays, 11am to 7pm; Sundays, 11am to 5pm. By appointment only on Mondays and public holidays
Info: yavuzgallery.com

PROCESS

What: A showcase of four Singaporean artists – Liu Ling, Justin Lim, Tracy Tan and Alessia Levonicka Candra – who work in mixed-media or photography.
Where: Element Art Space, 22 Lock Road, 01-35
When: Until June 24; Tuesdays to Saturdays, 11am to 7pm; Sundays, 11am to 6pm. Closed on Mondays and public holidays
Info: www.elementartspace.com



More focus, more talk

FROM DI

He says the arts enclave needs an overarching curatorial vision and direction. "It feels disorganised. We need museums or a strong art centre where everyone converges and there is dialogue going on."

He says the question stakeholders should ask is: "What is it about Gillman Barracks that would make people come here?"
 With support from NAC, he has curated Disini, an ongoing visual arts festival that included a pink pineapple-shaped structure pop up in the centre of the barracks and buildings revitalised by murals painted by Malaysia's Orkibal and Argentinian-Spanish artist Felipe Pantone. The public art, as well as programmes and talks, continue on-site until Sept 30.

"When you come to Gillman Barracks, you should see art outside. It's worth it to create a buzz."

In this aspect, NAC has invited STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery to curate a showcase of art from 30 galleries at Gillman for Singapore Art Week in January next year. Long-term tenants say such place-making efforts help. Mizuma Gallery's gallery manager Theresia Irma says the buzz created by NAC has brought in more visitors. She noted many younger visitors during Art After Dark this year, who were drawn to a collaboration between Indonesian artist collective indiguerillas and fashion designers.

At the end of this month, Mizuma Gallery will open a shop space in its gallery for art and design collaborations priced for younger pockets. Products include jewellery and silk jackets (priced at about \$200) designed by regional artists.

Ms Audrey Yeo of Yeo Workshop is looking to cultivate more collectors through events that mix lifestyle and arts, such as a whisky bar at her gallery space. "You can't open a gallery and expect people to come. The gallery will have to look for what brings in people."

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BOOK IT / ART DAY OUT! AT GILLMAN BARRACKS – THE SCHOOL HOLIDAYS EDITION

WHAT: Tenants at Gillman Barracks offer art activities for families with children
WHERE: Gillman Barracks, various locations
WHEN: June 25, 27 to 7pm
ADMISSION: Free
INFO: www.gillmanbarracks.com