

A dimly lit, industrial-style workspace. The room features a prominent brick wall with a weathered, aged appearance. In the foreground, a long wooden table is set up, with several black office chairs tucked under it. On the table, there are various items including a small container with pens and a bowl. In the background, a large whiteboard is visible, featuring a black and white polka-dot pattern. The ceiling is made of corrugated metal, and a single light fixture is visible in the upper right corner, casting a warm glow. The overall atmosphere is gritty and creative.

the third place

## in search of the third place

In a world where our lives are increasingly being shaped by "forces beyond us" (government, corporations, terrorists and so on), and where every aspect of life is slowly dehumanising us, it is important to create spaces where we can reconnect with the capacities of being human – to fully exercise our right to make choices, imagine and create.

During our time in the Twin Cities, we encountered many such spaces occupied by different groups of people. These spaces, over time, have come to reflect the philosophy and character of the inhabitants and their community-building work. They become places where encounters and interactions occur, helping to foster relationships amongst the users of the spaces. They are like containers that hold the memories (past), concerns (present) and aspirations (future) of the community around them.

Borrowing the term "The Third Place" used by photographer Wing Young Huie to describe his studio/gallery space along Chicago Avenue, I look back at some of these spaces that we have entered in Minnesota and draw inspiration from them while I search for a "third place" that we can construct in Singapore.

Han Xuemei





# AN URBAN LIVING ROOM

WING YOUNG HUIE PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO  
3730 CHICAGO AVE S, STUDIO B  
MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55407



# i m p r e s s i o n s

The usual expectation of a photography studio/gallery would be a relatively empty space, monochromatic-looking, with a few photographs hung on the walls, and a generally quiet and sombre atmosphere.

However, a *ping pong* table greets us once we step into the rectangular-shaped room. It immediately alters my relationship with the space. At once, I don't feel like I am entering an exhibition hall, but rather, I have arrived at someone's house – someone's living room to be precise.

A living room in a household generally is a space where the family interacts the most. Ideally, it is where we can have fun after school/work; it is where we have open discussions about issues that we are concerned about; it is where individuals feel supported and free. The *ping pong* table definitely adds to the element of fun, while a game of *ping pong* – which requires interaction with another person – ties in really well with the idea of a space that encourages connection and engagement.



\* photos: [www.wingyounghuie.com](http://www.wingyounghuie.com)

Besides having fun, Wing Young Huie's "urban living room" does not shy away from engaging in complex and difficult topics. Photographs from an ongoing exhibition about Chinese-ness line the walls. In these photos, you see Wing's exploration of Chinese identity, an issue that is very personal to him. According to Wing, it was an exploration of who he might have become had his parents never left China.

## THE THIRD PLACE

Ray Oldenburg (The Great Good Place, 1989) argues that third places are important for civil society, democracy, civic engagement, and establishing feelings of a sense of place.

Oldenburg calls one's "first place" the home and those that one lives with.

The "second place" is the workplace – where people may actually spend most of their time.

Third places, then, are "anchors" of community life and facilitate and foster broader, more creative interaction.

Oldenburg suggests these hallmarks of a true "third place":

- free or inexpensive;
- food and drink, while not essential, are important;
- highly accessible: proximate for many;
- involve regulars—those who habitually congregate;
- welcoming and comfortable;
- both new friends and old should be found there





## WING YOUNG HUIE

Wing uses photography as a societal mirror and window, seeking to reveal not only what is hidden, but also what is plainly visible and seldom noticed, providing a collective portrait of the them who are really us.

As an extension of his public art installations that create informal communal spaces, in spring 2011 Wing opened The Third Place Gallery.

Housed in a building that previously sat empty for 47 years, Wing has turned the space into an urban living room for guest artists, social conversation, karaoke, and ping pong.

\* photos & information: [www.wingyounghuie.com](http://www.wingyounghuie.com)



# WORKSHOP

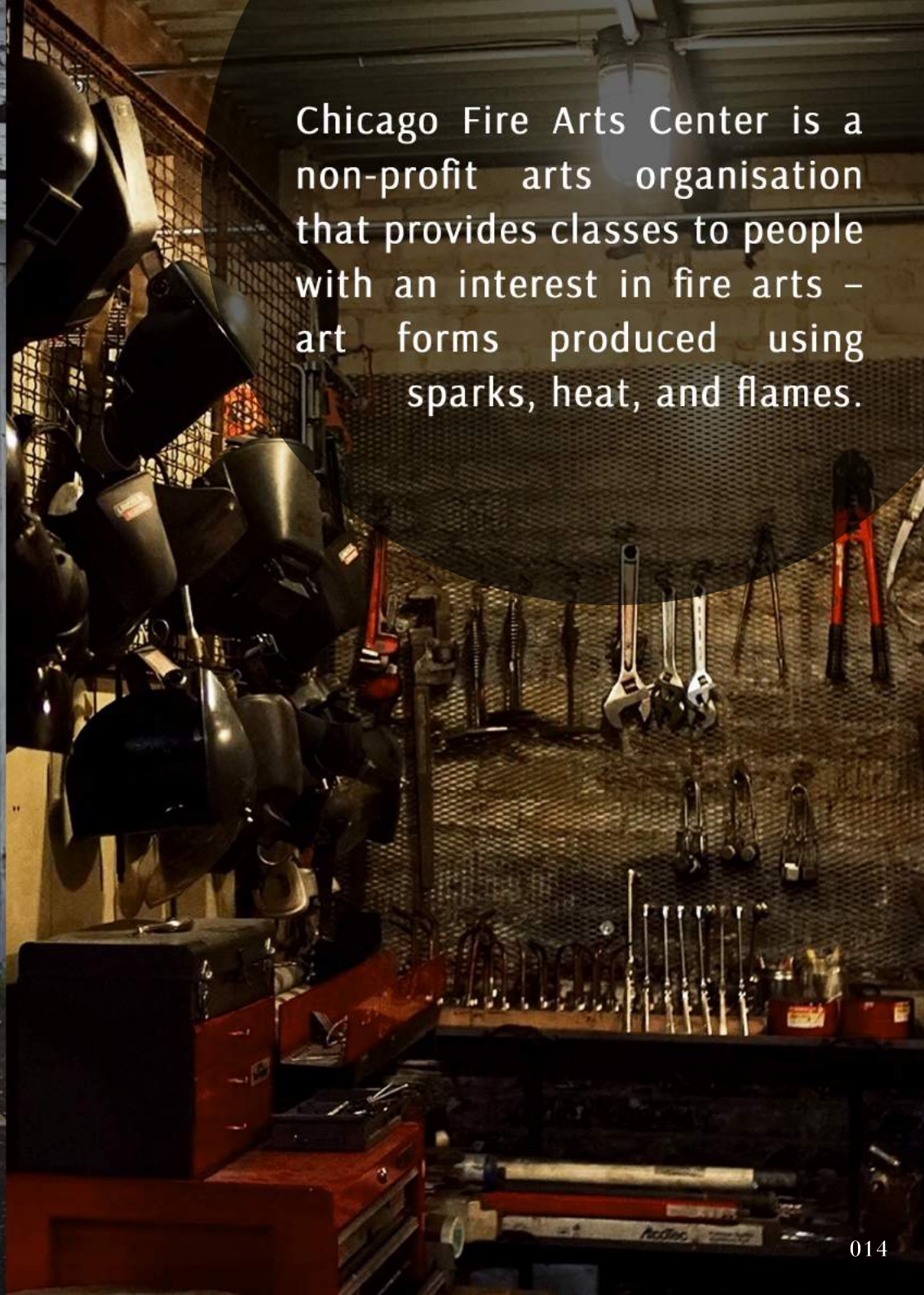
Being in a workshop generates a sense of groundedness in me. This is a place where we make things happen. In an age where our hands have become accustomed to the touch of screens, and we have turned into mostly passive receivers of information and consumers of goods, these workshop spaces remind me of the importance of getting involved, of being part of the creation or making of something.

Amidst an environment where decisions on the way we live are made by governments and corporations, the act of creating something – be it designing and making a tote bag or welding a piece of scrap metal into a pair of ear-rings) – is an extremely powerful way to start reclaiming some of the decision-making right that each of us should have.





Chicago Fire Arts Center is a non-profit arts organisation that provides classes to people with an interest in fire arts – art forms produced using sparks, heat, and flames.






A woman with brown hair tied back, wearing a black and white checkered button-down shirt, is standing in a bicycle shop. She is gesturing with her hands as if in conversation. The shop has a red wall in the background with several bicycles hanging from a rack. A string of warm white lights is visible at the top left. The overall atmosphere is bright and professional.

## FULL CYCLE

3515 CHICAGO AVENUE S.  
MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55407

Full Cycle is a nonprofit bicycle shop in south Minneapolis that offers a six-month, paid internship program for homeless youth. They employ, train and support homeless youth, teaching them bike repair and hands-on business skills including resume writing, interviewing skills, sales, customer service and overall professionalism. They also give away bicycles through their Free Bike Program to young people who can't afford one. The bicycle they choose to build or repair themselves is often the first bike they have owned, and their primary means of getting around.





Juxtaposition Arts' approach is to “combine art & design education and youth empowerment with a social-enterprise business model. Students begin with Visual Art Literacy Training (VALT) and then have opportunities to be employed while learning and teaching professional design, production and marketing skills in one of five social-enterprise studios that produce high-quality design products and services for sale to local and national customers.”

**JUXTAPOSITION ARTS**  
2007 EMERSON AVE. N  
MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55411





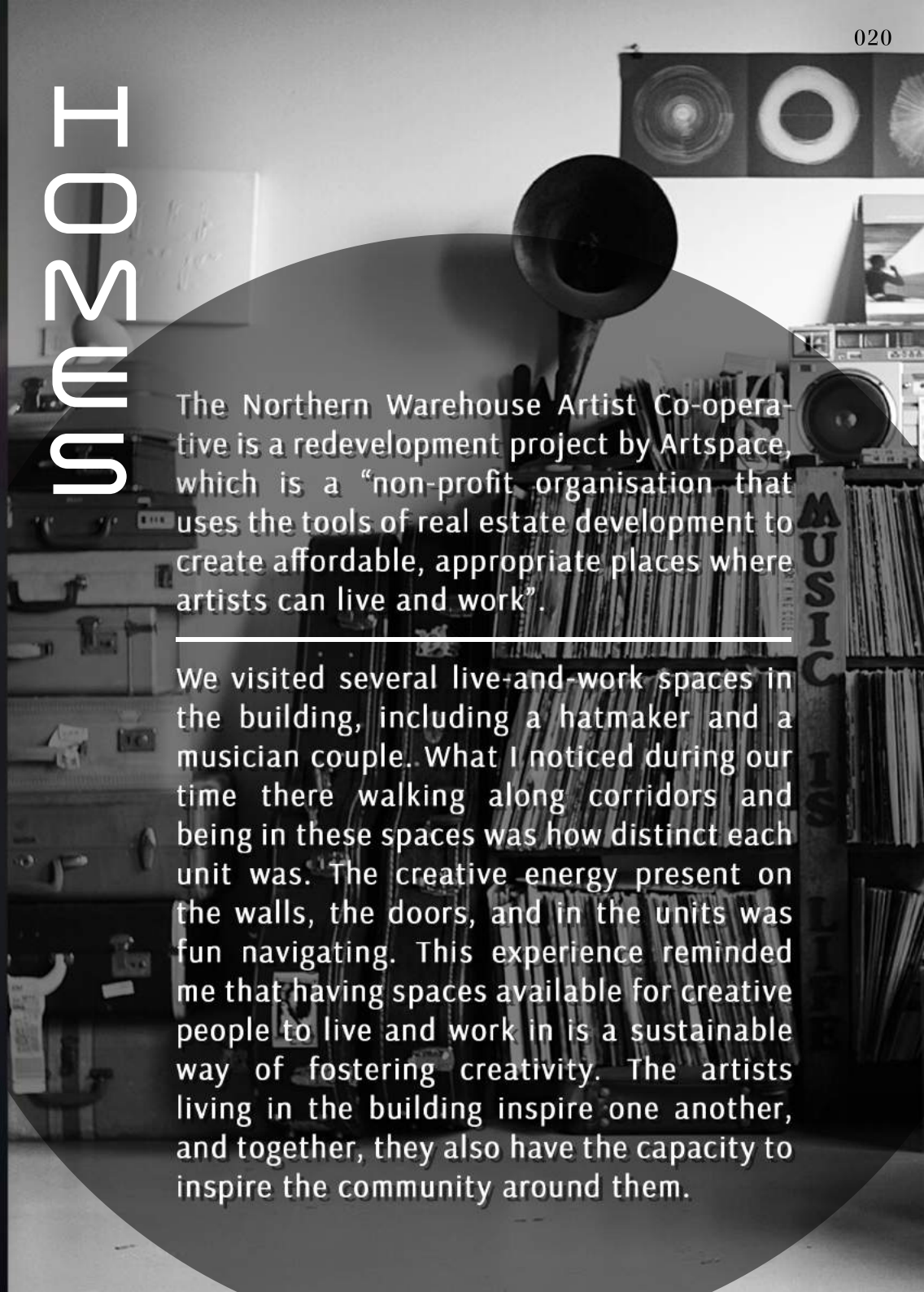
# MV-THMN

**NORTHERN WAREHOUSE  
ARTISTS' CO-OPERATIVE**  
308 PRINCE STREET, ST. PAUL  
MN, 55101

# FORUM

The Northern Warehouse Artist Co-operative is a redevelopment project by Artspace, which is a “non-profit organisation that uses the tools of real estate development to create affordable, appropriate places where artists can live and work”.

We visited several live-and-work spaces in the building, including a hatmaker and a musician couple. What I noticed during our time there walking along corridors and being in these spaces was how distinct each unit was. The creative energy present on the walls, the doors, and in the units was fun navigating. This experience reminded me that having spaces available for creative people to live and work in is a sustainable way of fostering creativity. The artists living in the building inspire one another, and together, they also have the capacity to inspire the community around them.





# NORTHERN WAREHOUSE ARTISTS' CO-OP



Professional guitar repair.  
Fast, convenient, affordable.  
Available here, in this building.  
Call for appointment - 612-295-9120

ART HAPPENS HERE  
DOWNTOWN



**entrepreneur EXPO**  
ESSENTIALS FOR SMALL BUSINESS GROWTH  
Thursday, Sept. 22, 12:30-5 pm.  
Minneapolis Central Library  
300 Nicollet Mall

Register for this free event

- Learn from successful small business owners at the kickoff panel
- Connect with business development exhibitors and other entrepreneurs
- Develop skills in marketing, finance, operations and business for artists

www.hubb.org/events  
612-543-8037

**Free Produce!**

Open to all! Please bring your own bags and/or carts.

**Jackson Elementary School**  
437 Edmund Ave W  
St Paul, MN 55101

**Maxfield Elementary School**  
380 Victoria Street N St  
Paul, MN 55104

1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays  
July 20, Aug. 3 & 17,  
Sept 7 & 21, Oct. 5 & 19  
3pm

2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesdays  
Aug. 9, Sept. 18,  
Oct. 11  
4pm

**Sendero Flamenco**  
New Flamenco Classes  
Start Sept 12  
Register now!  
studio-sendero.com

Studios Sendero  
Linetown Underground Arts  
1011 Prairie Street  
St Paul, MN 55101  
612.203.6188 • senderoflamenco@gmail.com

**2016 FALL ART CRAWL DATES:**  
Friday, Oct. 14, 6-10  
Saturday, Oct. 15, 12-8  
Sunday, Oct. 16, 12-5

**WISCONSIN FOLK AND TRADITIONAL ARTISTS**  
SHOWCASE  
OCTOBER 14-15-16  
1000 University Ave. Room 100  
St Paul, MN 55102

**Men's Group**  
ASK A WOMAN (THERAPIST)

All of us women (therapists) will be a group for men in which you can ask the questions you have always wondered about in your relationships but have never been comfortable asking the therapists in your lives. Your questions, topics, and concerns are what we talk about.

This is not a support or therapy group, but an educational group for enrichment of your relationships. We will learn about relationships (communication, perception, conflict resolution, and much more!)

- Casual weekly group for 6 weeks
- Limit 8 participants per session
- \$20.00 per session, some insurance accepted (but low, too, to be sure)
- Wednesdays, 6:30 - 8 pm, (to be brought down)
- Register now with Traci Valente, LMFT  
Call or text 651-373-1886 or email traci@traci.com
- Dates: register for your preferred dates, but with the following:
  - 1) October 5<sup>th</sup>
  - 2) October 12<sup>th</sup>
  - 3) October 19<sup>th</sup>
  - 4) October 26<sup>th</sup>
  - 5) November 2<sup>nd</sup>
  - 6) November 9<sup>th</sup>

All activities will be held at  
Lynette Counseling Services  
1001 Hudson Road, Suite 140K (Century Office Park building)  
Minneapolis, MN 55425

**Natural Blessings**  
Offering made with love  
1000 University Ave. Room 100  
St Paul, MN 55102

**Parenting Workshop**  
Parenting and Grandparenting:  
Building a Lasting Bond  
390 Pioneer Square | 1401 N. Park, MN 55101  
Fundays Sept. 13th-14th 7-9pm  
& November

Do you need conversation tools for parenting which give you the power to keep your children respectful, stop the whining and begging, build self-control, maximize their self-confidence, show them love and keep their will intact in tact?

If you join in this workshop where I'll teach you simple tools to maximize the moments of resistance as well as high stakes situations. I'll also teach you how to deal your kids pushing your buttons! Receive homework!

Class space limited & seating is first-come first-served. Registration for parents is required. Sign up and receive a questionnaire tip to see what's new! \$150 per person, \$200 for partnered couple.

For more information visit:  
www.jessicagabfalk.com  
View this under "Workshops" "Workshops"  
Also text 612-781-3881  
Sign up TODAY!

**ART CRAWL REMINDERS**

Crawling registration is closed but LMFT registration will open until Sept. 28  
Bring \$20 for an active listing/25 for active listing with an image

If you are hosting an art crawl event (music, demonstration, etc.) you can get the special hour if you have registration. Deadline for listing events is August 31. The form is on the Saint Paul Art Crawl website.

Listing station will be available for the art crawl on the corner of Broadway and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street.

www.SANTPAULARTCRAWL.ORG

**5 YEARS Fergus Falls**  
**25 Years SAINT PAUL**

St Paul  
Fergus Falls

Springboard for the arts  
#ArtHappensHere

**The Paranormal Art Project**  
A series of art projects inspired by the paranormal

**Meditation is not passive, it is an act of resistance.**

Every Monday  
Linetown, St. Paul  
1011 Prairie Street #100  
The Northern Heights  
Open Monday  
5:30 to 8:30pm  
The 4th Generation  
6:30 to 10:30pm

Yoga is a healthy and all-around approach to fitness and well-being. It has been shown to improve strength and flexibility, reduce stress, and improve overall health. It is a great way to stay active and healthy. The 4th Generation is a healthy and all-around approach to fitness and well-being. It has been shown to improve strength and flexibility, reduce stress, and improve overall health. It is a great way to stay active and healthy.

**Minnesota Art Therapy Association**  
Call for artwork donate

Artwork donated to the Minnesota Art Therapy Association is a valuable resource for the organization. We are currently seeking artwork for our collection. If you are interested in donating, please contact us at 612-295-9120.

**ART THERAPY SELF-HELP**

ART THERAPY SELF-HELP

ART THERAPY SELF-HELP

**Men's Group Starting This Fall**  
Week nights 7:00-8:30 pm

ART THERAPY SELF-HELP

**LEATHER WORKS**  
Studio 246

Leather Belts cut to size, wallets, keyfobs, Hand Clutches, Travel kits, Passport covers, Dog leashes, Back packs & more. Stop on by!

**Find Your Park: Wild & Scenic Pathways & Hikes**  
St. Paul  
Fergus Falls

**WOMEN'S GROUP**  
Starting This Fall  
Week Night 7:00-8:30 pm

**MEMO**

7/25/2014  
The new Personnel Management Address is:  
8813 County Road B Suite 4012  
St. Paul, MN 55111

**PERSONNEL PLAN ASSESSMENT REVIEW**  
ATTENDANCE/MENTORSHIP

PERSONNEL PLAN ASSESSMENT REVIEW

**PRODUCT**

PRODUCT



# THE RIVER OF LIFE

The river features very strongly in the history, arts and culture of the Twin Cities. It was the first place that we visited when we arrived in Minneapolis.

From the stories that we have heard along the way, it appears that people living in Minnesota place a lot of importance on the river and the land.

This deep connection to nature is fundamental to being human.







## IMAGINING A THIRD PLACE IN SINGAPORE

In Singapore, where ownership of land and space is largely in the hands of the government, can we imagine a “third place”? The idea of a “third” option is a very enticing one – that there is not only one or two, black or white, but possibly a third way, an area of grey that can be explored.



# AN ATTEMPT TO SUGGEST 3 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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## ENGAGE PUBLIC IN IMPORTANT SOCIAL ISSUES

A primary role of this space is to be a safe and open platform for facilitated conversations about relevant social issues to take place. A community/society grows from the quantity and quality of conversations that we have about difficult topics. We learn to deal with differences (in opinions, in values etc.) by talking and more importantly by listening to other voices.

## FACILITATE CREATIVITY

The primary commitment of engaging the public should be done via creative ways. As much as the issues are challenging and sombre, this space should always try to navigate these issues creatively. It can be an important platform for facilitating creativity, which involves (i) observation, (ii) questioning (why's and why not's), (iii) playing with possibilities and (iv) evaluation of outcomes.

## ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION

This space should inspire participation from the public/users of the space. Whatever happens in the space should not be dictated solely by the artist. There should be an equal stake for the public to want to get involved.

### PARTICIPATORY ARTWORKS

A space for theatre performances or other forms of artworks that necessitates audience/viewer response.

### WORKSHOP

A space for hands-on creation and learning.

### PLAY AREA

A simple and fun activity or game that encourages interaction/team work.

## POSSIBLE FEATURES


### LIVE-AND-WORK SPACES

Spaces for creative people – including artists, artisans, creative entrepreneurs etc. – to live and work in.

### NATURE

A way to integrate the energy of nature into the work that we do.





There are many questions to be addressed in the imagination of such a place:

Who should own it?

Who can the stakeholders be?

What roles can they play?

What principles should this place adhere to?

How will this place be meaningful to its inhabitants?

This is but a start to my search of a possible third place that we can create in Singapore, subject to further research and deeper understanding of what is needed in our society, and open to accept feedback, suggestions and criticisms.



**HAN XUEMEI**

RESIDENT ARTIST

DRAMA BOX

[xuemei@dramabox.org](mailto:xuemei@dramabox.org)



## *Being Less Than One*

### *Alecia Neo*

After traveling half way across the earth to Minneapolis in the United States, I found myself in a fertile land of upheavals, which has reinvented itself over decades. The moment we landed, artist and director of the Center for the Study of Art & Community<sup>1</sup>, William Cleveland, made it a point not to sugar-coat Minnesota's story. He candidly shared that the Dakota and Ojibwe<sup>2</sup> lived in Minnesota years before the Europeans first arrived in 1600s and eventually the region attracted more European-American settlers, whom began to compete with them for resources<sup>3</sup>. Eventually, the United States troops established control over the region<sup>4</sup> after major battles and began developing the area, and introducing more settlers, resulting in the expulsion and cultural erasure of the Dakota people<sup>5</sup>. At the same time, we also learned more about Minnesota's progressive stance, currently offering refuge to almost half a million immigrants, largely from Somalia, Ethiopia, Laos, India and Mexico, gaining the state its reputation as the "Sanctuary Cities", in spite of current political challenges.<sup>6</sup> After the Korean War, many anglo parents in Minnesota also adopted Korean orphans, resulting in many interracial families and complicated identities that don't quite fit into neat boxes. Every city has its story, and the rich diversity and at times painful history of the region has undoubtedly provided stimuli for artistic and creative expression, and the exchange of alternative and important perspectives on society.

As a young artist, I found myself asking how can art possibly play a part in reshaping our world today. In a time where differences are politicised and made dangerous, in what ways can we generate possibilities and imagine creative responses and solutions to complex realities? This trip to the twin cities has not provided any easy answers, but has instead offered us some glimpses into what it might take to "recreate imbalance"<sup>7</sup> in society, to necessarily shed light on fresh or hidden narratives on uncomfortable and inconvenient realities.

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<sup>1</sup> Center for the Study of Art and Community is Washington based association of creative leaders working to connect art and communities. Read more: <http://www.artandcommunity.com/>

<sup>2</sup> Teresa Peterson and Walter LaBatte Jr., 2014, "The Land, Water, and Language of Minnesota's First People", <http://www.mnopedia.org/land-water-and-language-minnesota-s-first-people>

<sup>3</sup> Mark Steil and Tim Post, 2002, Minnesota's Uncivil War - "Let them eat grass", [http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/200209/23\\_steilm\\_1862-m/part2.shtml](http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/200209/23_steilm_1862-m/part2.shtml)

<sup>4</sup> Mark Steil and Tim Post, 2002, Minnesota's Uncivil War - "Broken promises lead to war", [http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/200209/23\\_steilm\\_1862-m/part3.shtml](http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/200209/23_steilm_1862-m/part3.shtml)

<sup>5</sup> Mark Steil and Tim Post, 2002, Minnesota's Uncivil War - "Execution and expulsion", [http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/200209/23\\_steilm\\_1862-m/part5.shtml](http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/200209/23_steilm_1862-m/part5.shtml)

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Zurcher, 2017, "Trump starts a 'sanctuary city' war with liberal America", <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38738423>

<sup>7</sup> John Malpede, 2002, "Recreating Imbalance", <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0102/malpede/en/print>



## *Home Street Home*

During our visit, I was intrigued by the work of the zAmya Theater troupe, which is a program run by St. Stephen's Human Services, where homeless and housed individuals collaborate on original theatre productions. Their goal is “breathing humanity back into the word ‘homeless’”. We watched their recent production *Home Street Home: Minneapolis* at the beautiful Guthrie Theatre, written with Josef Evans and directed by Maren Ward. In Minnesota, over 10, 000 people are affected by homelessness every night.<sup>8</sup> The creative work of zAmya Theater troupe uses humour, music, and intimate and provocative narratives from the streets to its best ability, turning the issue on its head. zAmya Theatre draws much inspiration from the ambitious and important work of another theatre company with an ironic name, the Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD), which sees its work as theatre by and for the people of Skid Row, a neighbourhood with one of the largest population of people experiencing homelessness in the United States. Over the course of thirty years, the LAPD has used art as a channel to evoke change in society:

“We create change by telling the story of the community in a way that supports the initiatives of community residents. We want the narrative of the neighbourhood to be in the hands of neighbourhood people. We work to generate this narrative and to supplant narratives that perpetuate stereotypes used to keep the neighbourhood people down or to justify displacing the community. We want to create recognition of the community and its values.”

Both zAmya Theater troupe and LAPD have chosen to immerse themselves in areas of homelessness, working as both initiators, provocateurs and bridges within the community, where they consciously draw upon the very resources, creativity and culture from the area and the people who live in it. Together with residents, both theatre companies sow ideas for meaningful and urgent projects, which explore and expose the mechanics of displacement in a time of economic and political instability and vast income inequality. These ideas are regularly and vigorously worked through with the residents as core collaborators via research, dialogue, writing, performance and rehearsals. What is most important in their work is the people-centred approach which focuses our attention at imbalanced power relations and the policies and systemic conditions which produce and perpetuate poverty and homelessness. Hence, the work produced by these theatre companies are both symbolic and concrete, simultaneously unraveling hidden narratives, while creating opportunities and pathways for real change to happen. The perception of a passive audience is also challenged, as audiences coming to see their productions are regarded as players who are participating and implicated directly. This reframing of the audience’s role offers the audience the purpose of problem solving. YOU could be the solution your community seeks.

Recently, the potency of LAPD’s work has also revealed itself when a developer of a mixed-income housing unit close to Skid Row was given a liquor license. With

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<sup>8</sup> St. Stephen's Human Services is a non-profit organisation which helps numerous people secure housing and other forms of support. Read more: <https://ststephensmpls.org/programs/zamya/now-playing>



LAPD's continuous efforts in educating the public about the neighbourhood's role as the "Biggest Recovery Community Anywhere"<sup>9</sup>, the city showed up to make their collective knowledge and desires known, demonstrating how important it was to the community that the streets stayed alcohol free, resulting in the liquor license being revoked. Currently, new situations have emerged with other issues being contested, and LAPD finds itself returning to engage with situations important to the communities in Skid Row.

Another theatre group we visited, Pangea World Theatre, hosted us with open arms and reminded us with a simple gesture during first introductions in a circle, inviting us to share not only our names and what we do, but also our preferred gender pronouns. Pangea proudly states that they "value leadership in participating immigrant, indigenous, and People of Colour communities", stressing that they "function on shared power principles."<sup>10</sup> What could this mean for a city like Singapore, where meritocracy and neoliberalism are built into its DNA? There are many lessons that can be drawn from the work of zAmya Theatre and LAPD. But one thing is for sure; Equity is taken very seriously. Both artists, artist groups and institutions take it upon themselves to question deeply their choices and values, and how they operate.

### ***Full Cycle***

This sense of an expanded practice, where artists and art groups alternate between an autonomous studio practice to working collaboratively on the ground with people and everyday life, can be observed at a number of different art spaces which have adopted innovative models to sustain their work. Artists are seen mediating their own practice, through creative means and a critical language that deconstructs and reinterprets the desires and aesthetic expectations of other agents for contemporary art, community-based art or any particular definition of art.

We visited Pillbury House & Theatre, which is essentially a whole package deal for community-based creative practices. Run by artists, who take on all kinds of roles within the settlement house including administration, it offers not only high quality performances in their very own theatre, they confront diverse and complicated social injustice through toddler and youth art and education programmes, wellness outreach and clinic and wide ranging community services which help build the community build close relationships with one another. They also house services run by artists, such as Breaking Ice, which offers bespoke professional theatre experience created for organizations and businesses that need help with difficult interpersonal and structural

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<sup>9</sup> "Biggest Recovery Community Anywhere" was yearlong project by LAPD which focused on Skid Row. Read more: <https://www.lapovertydept.org/projects/biggest-recovery-community-anywhere-2/>

<sup>10</sup> Community-based Lake Street Arts' Values and working agreements by Pangea World theatre, August 2015



problems<sup>11</sup>, as well as Full Cycle<sup>12</sup>, a nonprofit bicycle shop which trains and employs homeless youth while upholding sustainable environmental practices.



*Image above: Visiting Full Cycle's premises*

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<sup>11</sup> Paul De Cordova, "Breaking Ice helps work through the hard stuff", <http://pillsburyhouseandtheatre.org/breaking-ice-helps-work-through-the-hard-stuff/>

<sup>12</sup> Full Cycle's website, <https://fullcyclebikeshop.org/>



Another independent art space, Juxtaposition Arts<sup>13</sup>, is also run by an artist couple, who have strategically considered the impact of their presence in the neighbourhood of North Minneapolis. Since their establishment in 1995, Juxtaposition Arts has consciously expanded its physical space in the neighbourhood to gain a larger cultural foothold, acutely aware of the neighbourhood's vulnerability to gentrification. Youth-centred and youth-led, the art space brings together art and design, youth empowerment and social-entrepreneurship to harness the creative potential of their members and location. Their far-reaching artist networks bring presently prominent names in contemporary art such as artist Rick Lowe, who is well known for his process-driven experiment, Project Row Houses<sup>14</sup>, back to Juxtaposition as mentoring artists. Youths who go through their programs often lead innovations and seek to contribute back to society, as such artists Brandon Brown and Chris Lutter-Gardella, who have signed agreements with Juxtaposition in partnership with the Trust for Public Land to build a public bicycle carousel in public spaces in North Minneapolis, which we had pleasure of activating during our visit.<sup>15</sup>

These place-based practices can be seen as strategic, aiming for long-term, sustained structural impact. Apart from independent art spaces, institutions like the Walker Art Museum have also done remarkably well in terms of consistently programming compelling exhibitions and discussions that remain relevant to the city. We were in the city in time to catch the international, multigenerational group exhibition, "Less Than One", which featured 16 artists central to the museum's collection. The artists include Kara Walker, Sigmar Polke, Lutz Bacher, Dieter Roth, Jasper Johns, Ericka Beckman, Trisha Brown, and Adrian Piper amongst others. Kara Walker's striking black paper silhouette cut-outs which filled the gallery walls from top to bottom with its dark, highly charged narrative particularly moved me. The large scale installation depict violence, sexuality and oppression deeply entrenched in America's history, echoing the re-enactment of power struggles also experienced through LAPD's theatre work.

The title of the exhibition was taken from Nobel Prize-winning poet and author Joseph Brodsky's collection of essays, "Less Than One", which reflects upon human existence and ethics, and artistic expression as protection from loss of individuality. In Brodsky's world, a person is always "less than one" both artistically and politically.<sup>16</sup>

Brodsky's words are a poignant reminder of the series of recent police shootings of Philando Castile, in Falcon Heights, Minnesota which was live-streamed by the

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<sup>13</sup> Juxtaposition Arts's website, <http://juxtapositionarts.org/>

<sup>14</sup> Project Row Houses website, <http://projectrowhouses.org/>

<sup>15</sup> Annabelle Marcovici, 2016, "Reinventing the wheel with Brandon Brown's pedal-powered economy", <http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/onyx-cycles-brandon-brown/>

<sup>16</sup> Walker Art Center, 2016, Press Release, "The International Group Exhibition Less Than One to Present Major Recent Acquisitions Alongside Signature Works from the Walker Art Center Collection in April 2016", <http://www.walkerart.org/press/browse/press-releases/2016/the-international-group-exhibition-less-than>



victim's girlfriend<sup>17</sup>, soon followed by another of a young man Jamo Clark, in St. Paul, Minneapolis, which led to an outpouring of anger at unquestioned police authority and a sit-down strike at the Fourth Precinct MPD station. At Juxtaposition Arts, we observe momentos and art works left at the art space's door, from the public dedicated to the men who have lost their lives to gun and police violence. Joining the Black Lives Matter movement, local artists in Minneapolis have responded to the issue through a wide variety of means, often tactical, temporary and inventive, offering swift, critical and compelling alternative perspectives to mainstream media.<sup>18</sup> These perspectives are crucial as they help to shift public debate and create non-judgemental, open-ended platforms for the public come together, listen and participate.



*Images above: Artworks and writing left for Juxtaposition Arts in the aftermath of police shootings in Minneapolis.*

As Singapore prepares to address the challenges ahead amidst global instability, how will we choose to respond? In societies where the anxiety of failing to stay ahead of rising competition is etched so deeply in the city's skin, one is immersed in a permanent state of low-level panic.

<sup>17</sup> Frederick Melo, 2016, "Woman live-streams aftermath of boyfriend's fatal shooting by police in Falcon Heights", <http://www.twincities.com/2016/07/06/officer-involved-shooting-investigated-in-falcon-heights/>

<sup>18</sup> Paul Schmelzer, 2015, "The Art of Black Lives Matter Minneapolis", <http://hyperallergic.com/263941/the-art-of-black-lives-matter-minneapolis/>



On the last day of our visit, charismatic dancer and educator, Liz Lerman, who created the Critical Response Process<sup>19</sup>, sheds a ray of light on the art of engagement and giving feedback during her workshop. She says, “When we neutralise the questions, we realise the true intentions of our questions.” Perhaps, this is but one way to enter.

To live.

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<sup>19</sup> Liz Lerman, Critical Response Process (CRP), <http://www.lizlerman.com/crpLL.html>



## **Arts-based Community Development in Singapore : A Call for a Creative Community Centre**

Ngiam Su-Lin, Co-Founder & Director, ArtsWok Collaborative

This article is the articulation of a call for the creation of a creative, generative and transformational space in Singapore that places culture at the centre, and that is open to the public, sited in community/a neighbourhood and is accessible, inclusive, participatory, collaborative and inspirational.

This creative community centre that aims to work through arts and culture to meet individual, and community needs through the provision of programmes, human services, skills and training, and placemaking does not yet exist, even though it contains great potential for positive and significant outcomes for community development and sustainability.

Having worked for close to 20 years at the intersection of arts and culture, education and community fields in various configurations, I have come to recognize the unique power and benefits of creative processes, especially when it involves groups of people working, and co-creating together. The arts especially, provides the medium and form for these creative processes as these practices have unique theories/lenses, principles and methodologies for understanding the world, problem-solving, communication, relationship building, healing and creating new meaning, possibilities, as well as community. Participants experiencing these processes and practices will have a curiosity about the world and people, as they suspend judgment to encounter the new and unfamiliar, practice deep listening, offer creative solutions, learn to live with failure, be adaptive, and be able to create connections between people and ideas such that new cultures of value can emerge.

While there have been arts-based projects that take place in, and with communities occurring here for a significant amount of time with positive outcomes, they are usually not longer term, and sited within a community space/neighbourhood with its diverse population, culture and environment. In other words, it is challenging to reap the longer term benefits of sustained participation in creative processes in community/neighbourhoods here, and one is hard-pressed to think of any examples where the arts played a pivotal role in the successful transformation of a neighbourhood or that contributed to its increased liveability, the well-being of its residents, and social and cultural capital. This is despite there being examples overseas of the positive and impactful role the arts and creative processes play in community building and revitalization, health, development and sustainability.



## Arts-based Community Development

*Arts-based community development can be understood as arts-centered activity that contributes to the sustained advancement of human dignity, health or productivity within a community.*

(Centre for the Study of Art and Community)

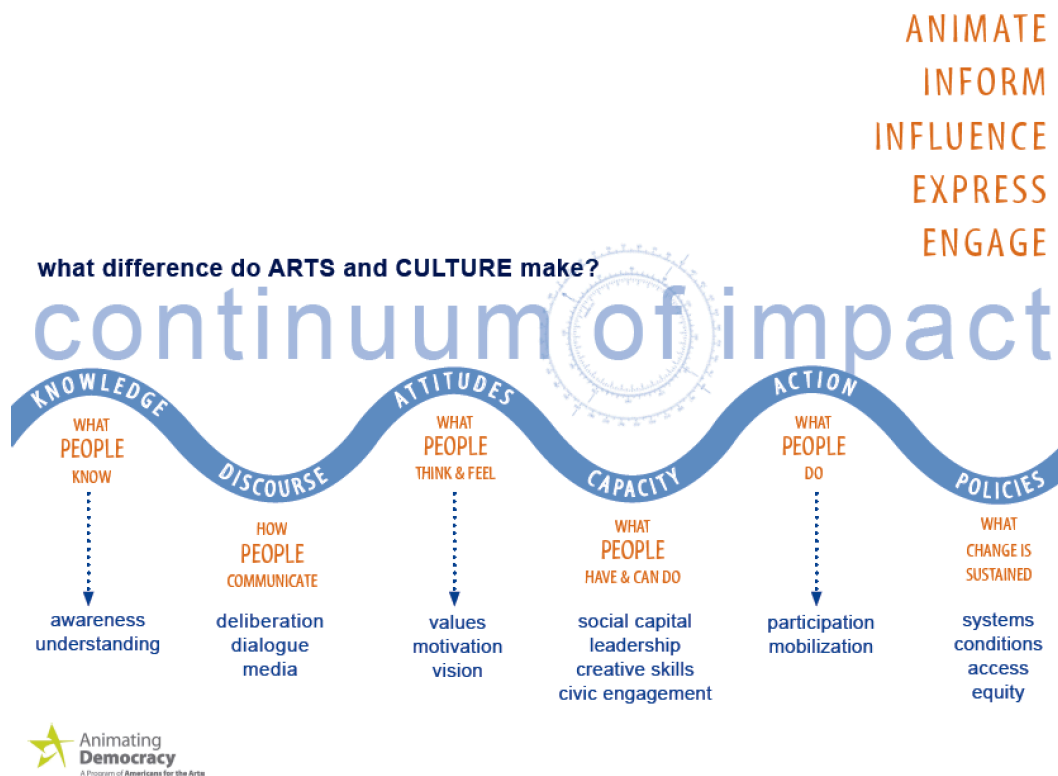
The field of arts-based community development is what ArtsWok Collaborative hopes can take root here and flourish. This sees artists and creatives being directly involved in community development work in neighbourhoods, and collaborating with other community-based players such as social service and health agencies, community development councils, town councils, community centres and resident committees, schools, hospitals and so on.

A diagram developed by William Cleveland from the Center for the Study of Art and Community demonstrating the ecosystem available in arts-based community development shows the extent of the work and collaborations that can occur, and impact that can happen, concisely organized into four main forces or motivations: Build and Improve, Educate and Inform, Nurture and Heal, Inspire and Mobilize.



**The Arts-Based Community Development Ecosystem (William Cleveland)**

Additionally, a diagram from Animating Democracy demonstrates along a continuum of impact, the difference, and benefits working with arts and culture makes in communities:



**The Continuum of Impact (Animating Democracy)**

These outcomes enable animated and energised communities that can thrive and be sustainable. They are civic-minded and action-oriented, being able to identify and solve problems together, and collaborating with entities and organisations in the area of community development which can impact policy-making on a national level, especially given the size of Singapore.

### **Pillsbury House and Theatre in Minneapolis**

The importance, and deeply felt need to have a creative community centre in Singapore was concretised during a study and exchange trip in September 2016 to Pillsbury House and Theatre (PH+T) in the Twin Cities. As my co-director mentioned to one of the Artistic Directors of PH+T when we visited, "she has arrived in mecca", commenting on my excitement and enthusiasm levels in the space. I was finally visiting a place I had heard and read about, first introduced to us by William Cleveland, and then read about in a comprehensive and insightful report on the Centre, *Arts Integration as Pathway to Unity in the Community* by Nancy Fushan.

Originally a 19<sup>th</sup> century Settlement House for new immigrants that then went on to house a social services agency and a non-profit theatre company, it was in 2008



that both these organisations decided to unify their operations to become a 21<sup>st</sup> century Centre for Creativity and Community, Pillsbury House and Theatre. It was a significant achievement that the management of Pillsbury United Communities decided to hand over the leadership of its largest facility to two Co-Artistic Directors, Faye Price and Noel Raymond, to integrate and oversee all aspects of the Centre, both human services and the theatre. They “embraced the notion that cultural programming was an essential complement to social services in assisting individuals to build their capacity for civic engagement by enhancing self-expression and creativity” (Fushan, 2013).

*It's the creative practice that drives what we're doing and helping to spread creativity throughout the community in all that means. If that means the traditional social services that we've historically held and continue to hold, then we are a community center. But there's also creativity in that. The Center for Creativity and Community embraces both parts of what we do.*

(Price and Raymond in Fushan, 2013)

The Artistic Directors had a larger vision to have high-quality arts underlie all of the Center's services to increase the individual and community creativity needed to tackle serious socio-economic challenges and revitalize the neighbourhood they are situated in, which is the most diverse in Minnesota. In actuality, the Centre serves four neighbourhoods surrounding them, and a population of about 29,000 residents. The organisation's work inspires the community to find the meaningful choices, changes and connections in their own lives because “the best way to build positive change in our communities is to help people connect, build meaningful relationships with each other, and learn how to fulfill their dreams, their way” (PH+T brochure).

The 3 major goals of Pillsbury House and Theatre are:

1. Comprehensive and authentic arts-integration throughout the organization
2. To employ the artistic/creative process in organizational learning, nonprofit management, and innovation
3. To become a leader in the neighbourhood's cultural community development

They offer programmes and services in these core areas:

- Educational Services
- Youth and Family
- Health and Nutrition
- Employment and Training
- Emergency Services
- Arts

PH+T have a total of 30 full-time and part-time staff, and on average reach 24,000 people a year, of whom about 14,000 are involved in programmes and performances by the theatre, and the remaining 10,000 utilise the other services and programmes. On staff and part of PH+T's approach is to have a Community Liaison person, Mike Hoyt whom we met, and knows the neighbourhood quite intimately, having lived there for 13 years. Mike reaches out to the residents, and looks to increase for residents their access to resources – creativity and the arts, community engagement etc., to build attachment to the community, and to the place, and to develop their sense of agency. He also works with engaging artists in the neighbourhoods to do work in, and with their neighbours and community, and these artworks can be seen on the streets, in a programme called Arts on Chicago (the name of the street). Another initiative, Artist Club Block has 28 artists working within the four neighbourhoods where they are leaders of their blocks who are then provided with resources by PH+T to engage their neighbours creatively.

This visit to Ph+T has left a deep impact on me, also contributed in part by my travelling companions consisting of my co-director and four other artists from different disciplines. Their responses to the space affirm the possibilities of such a Centre in Singapore, and our collective energies can hopefully contribute towards transforming a dream into reality.

### **The Ripeness of a Creative Community Centre in Singapore**

The theme of ripeness resonated with the Singaporean delegation to the Twin Cities as a lot of the successful work, organisations and environments we witnessed there were the fruit of many years' work, of recognizing and maximising opportunities, and ongoing creative efforts to keep developing and sustaining an entire ecosystem and field of arts-based community development.

There is a coalescing ripeness in Singapore too for the possibility of a Creative Community Centre. Since the third installment of the Renaissance City Plan (2008), a clear articulation of the community's perceived role in relationship to the arts "has been transformed from that of a relatively passive audience to that of a more participatory nature as a "creator" by partnering artists and heritage professionals in "producing unique community arts that reflect community identity and heritage, address community issues, as well as enhance community bonding"" (Lee and Sim, 2016). There was also a call "for arts programs to be specific to the interests of groups such as the low-income families, elderly, youth, people with special needs and at-risk individuals" (ibid).

This relationship between arts and culture, and community was further sealed and deepened with the Arts and Culture Strategic Review initiated in 2010, "where one of the strategic thrusts was articulated as "bringing arts and culture to everyone, everywhere, every day." To cultivate a bustling cultural scene, the Review found it necessary to permeate arts and culture throughout all levels of Singapore society" (ibid). Furthermore, engagement became a strategic direction with



recommendations of the setting up of community galleries in neighbourhoods, housing community-based professional arts and culture groups in schools, etc.

A Creative Community Centre can fit well with the directions articulated above, and push the envelope slightly further, working hand-in-hand with community development.

There has been a lot more interest in models of community development post 9-11 and with the diversity, and increasing number of migrants and foreign nationals in Singapore. This is coupled with other changes in the social fabric of the nation such as the widening income gap, increased numbers of seniors, the rise of social media and use of technologies replacing human interactions and so forth.

A recent chapter by Dr. Maliki Osman (Mayor for the South East district) in the publication, *50 Years of Social Issues in Singapore* (2015) highlights the importance of continuing community building and development efforts for Singapore's ongoing success:

*As Singapore progresses to be one of the world's most sustainable and liveable cities, the process is more than providing modern physical infrastructures, ensuring economic development and promoting environmental conservation. It is people and communities that make cities come alive. There are critical social and community challenges that go beyond physical infrastructure development. These challenges relate to questions on how to build the soul of the city, the emotional resonance of the people with the physical, emotional and social spaces, and the ability to anticipate and respond to social issues faced by the people. Answers to these questions are likely to be found in building communities where mutual support and self-help provide social connectedness and a sense of belonging. Community building is even more crucial for Singapore in the next few decades given the increasing cultural diversity associated with the changing population demographics. There is a need to build and strengthen local communities to deepen the sense of emotional connection to make the everyday life meaningful and purposeful. At the most microlevels, these local communities refer to the neighbourhoods. Finally, there is a need to ensure that Singaporeans feel, at both the individual and community levels, that their needs are understood and met. To effectively meet these community needs as felt by the people, a better understanding of the role of the community and the nature of various community development efforts is needed.*

It is a long quote but puts across the key issues and why they are important as well as what needs to be done going forward.

Community development initiatives in neighbourhoods or housing estates in Singapore are largely led by government-linked bodies such as the People's Association, Community Development Councils, Housing Development Board etc.

While government policies and the efforts of these organisations have contributed towards community building and development to a certain extent, there is room for other players, with different approaches to contribute towards the building of thriving communities. In recent years, the government has called for more partnerships with those from the people and private sectors to work together to tackle societal issues and challenges, and contribute towards building resilient communities.

A cultural approach, working through arts and creative processes would be a refreshing and meaningful way to engage communities, encourage participation, build relationships between people and with their environment, as well as ownership as to the well-being and sustainability of that community. A creative community centre in a neighbourhood would contribute towards facilitating a strong community identity, bonds, shared values across diversity, a willingness to work together to solve problems, and community integration over time.

These outcomes will emerge as people are involved, experiencing, organising, co-creating through activities, programmes, initiatives and services that tap on their personal and collective narratives, cultural backgrounds and experiences, interests, skills and abilities, emotional depths, spirituality and imagination. The arts and creative processes and practices are able to accommodate this wealth of complexity within individuals, interacting with other individuals to form ways of being, and doing in community and society.

This can take place in a Creative Community Centre through:

- Arts and creative programmes, from workshops to performances, installations, screenings etc. that are form-based or issue-based, for community/public
- Having artists' studios/work spaces that are open to working with communities, including design fields, maker space etc.
- Placemaking work in the neighbourhood, also working with artists and creatives residing in the community and equipping them with resources to take on leadership roles
- VWOs offering services (eldercare, early childhood, end-of-life, counseling etc.) that are willing to collaborate with artists and creatives in designing and delivering programmes
- Training lab for practitioners from different fields interested in communitybased arts and creative work
- Classes/sessions for community/public on personal development, community building and development, civic education, organising, diversity education etc.



- Tenants/social enterprises e.g. café, bookstore, etc. which offer opportunities for employment to the local community and also serve as venues for activities and programmes

There can be different ways to design and programme this centre. No doubt its location would be key in terms of its spatial relationship to the rest of the neighbourhood. It would also need to be fairly sizeable to accommodate the various facets of programmes and services it seeks to offer, co-locating different sectors together in a space with the aim of fostering collaboration and new, innovative practices. Sufficient space is also required for residents, different communities and public to come in to interact formally and informally, be engaged and also to just enjoy the environment, stimulation and connectedness that comes from being in a creative and community space. As land is scarce in Singapore, it may make more sense for the creative community centre to occupy an existing building, with adjustments made to the design of the structure and space, such as a disused school.

Most importantly however, an understanding of the centrality of culture, and the creative process and expression needs to be at the core of this centre. This means the leadership and management will need to embody this belief, and like PH+T, infuse the centre with practices and approaches in all areas with methodologies that keep to the integrity of the core beliefs. As such, arts and creative practitioners who also have experience in community work and organisational management are best suited for this role.

Looking at existing models of community centres in Singapore, this centre would be unique as arts and creative practices go beyond being just an aspect of what it offers, and would feature different types of programmes and services that meet a diversity of needs across community groups vs. a centre serving a particular group e.g. persons with special needs/disabilities. It would also go beyond being a centre purely for those who need forms of assistance but would instead be an inclusive space where one could be present for a myriad of reasons – for pleasure, enrichment, discussion, art-making, a meal, health check, socializing, physiotherapy, counseling, meditate, study, social assistance, learning new skills, employment and so on.

Finally, the boundaries between the centre and its surrounding neighbourhood should be porous, with the community having a sense of ownership over the space, and there is a form of continuity in the relationships and some of the programmes and activities in, and around the centre and neighbourhood.

## **Conclusion**

It is hoped this article can spark interest, and partnerships to materialise a Creative Community Centre on our little red dot. It would require a leap of faith, bold

dreaming, creative imagining and lots of collaboration between people, public and private sectors to ensure its success and sustainability.

The Centre and its promised outcomes can intersect different sectors – culture, arts, community, social, health, housing, environment, employment, education. It presents an opportunity to integrate, and innovate approaches to community development in Singapore, and our sustainability as a society.

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*This idea for the Creative Community Centre is a work-in-progress and we are in the midst of sharing this with various stakeholders for feedback and inputs. Please write to us at [sulin@artswok.org](mailto:sulin@artswok.org) if you'd like to share your thoughts with us.*



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