

25 must-see shows at Singapore Art Week 2025

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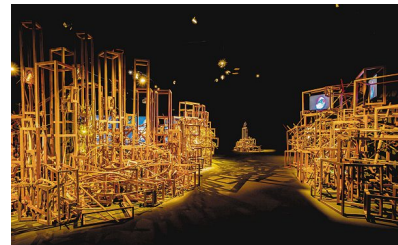
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EVENTS**
25 must-see
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Above: Robert Zhao's spectacular solo at the Singapore Art Museum. Far left: Khairulddin Wahab's traffic-stopping installation at Art SG, presented by Swiss bank UBS. Left: A highlight of Pierre Lorinet's collection, this particular fragment of Danh Vo's *We The People* depicts part of the drapery of the Statue of Liberty's robe. PHOTOS: SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM; ART OUTREACH SINGAPORE, ART SG

25 must-see shows at Singapore Art Week 2025

Your guide to the best events in the city's biggest annual art celebration, from standout solos to immersive experiences. BY HELMI YUSOF

Robert Zhao

At Singapore Art Museum and ShangArt Gallery

IF THERE'S a poster boy for Singapore Art Week (SAW) 2025, he's multidisciplinary artist Robert Zhao. The 42-year-old has cemented his status as one of Singapore's most important artists, representing the Republic at the 2024 Venice Biennale with a showcase that now returns home in much grander form. The recreated exhibition at the Singapore Art Museum is more than twice the scale of the Venice one, giving visitors a much deeper dive into Zhao's intricate explorations of nature, ecology and humanity's complex relationship with the environment.

And if that's not enough, ShangArt at Gillman Barracks is presenting a complementary solo exhibition of Zhao's latest photographic works. These pieces capture the quiet poetry of regeneration in unexpected places: sites of waste and destruction as astonishingly evolving into trappings of life. Some images are enigmatic – transcendent even – as they feature creatures inhabiting decayed landscapes or precious-looking gems made from fragments of human debris. Each photograph invites viewers to see beauty and resilience in the most unlikely corners.

The Pierre Lorinet Collection

At New Bahru

The annual showcase of artworks belonging to private collector Pierre Lorinet has become one of the most anticipated events at SAW. The Singapore-based French collector has amassed many notable works by the world's best artists, and each year, he displays a selection of about 20 in public. Back for the third year, the spotlight this time is on art that uses space not as a backdrop but as a narrative force, shaping how we think, feel and engage.

The works include Danh Vo's *We The People*, a 1:1 recreation of the Statue of Liberty which he meticulously divided into 250 copper pieces – one of which Lorinet

owns. By dismantling this symbol of freedom, Vo questions the singularity of liberty, framing it instead as a fragmented, ongoing struggle faced by many. There is also a fine work by Thomas Gates, who uses humble roofing material to pay homage to his father who was a roofer. The "tar painting" elevates working-class labour into art, while also interrogating racial and economic disparities in the United States.

Other stummers by Frank Stella, Christo, Richard Long, Liz Deschenes and Ugo Rondinone bend space through clever manipulations of scale, material and form. Edward Mitterand, the collection's adviser and curator, acknowledges the Western tilt of Lorinet's acquisitions. "But Pierre's many years of living in Singapore with his Asian wife have shifted our perspective. Expect future exhibitions to feature more Asian voices," he teases.

Yang Derong

At The Arts House Annex

The most visually dazzling and TikTok-baiting exhibition at SAW 2025 is Yang Derong's *DIGikat – Our Social Fabric*. Known for his maximalist flair, he reimagines traditional South-east Asian ikat weaving through a digital lens, blending vibrant projections with jacquard fabrics to craft a mesmerising tapestry of light and motion. Drawing from his fashion background, he crafts a large digital "loom" that weaves animated soundwaves derived from recorded conversations with about 30 individuals. The result is a dynamic "fabric" of light and sound, reflecting the diverse voices that constitute Singapore's social tapestry.

Enhancing this sensory experience, the Sats Experimental Centre on the second level of the building offers an exclusive dining experience inspired by *DIGikat*. Collaborations with private dining chef Patricia Chen of Sekel Kitchen and former Nouri head chef Russell Nathan present menus that draw inspiration from the installation, connecting tradition with innovation and

pushing culinary and artistic boundaries.

The Collection of Richard Koh

At The Private Museum

Established in 2005, Richard Koh Fine Art has become a cornerstone in the South-east Asian art scene, with galleries in Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Bangkok. The gallery is known for promoting Asian artists such as Natee Utarit, Yeoh Choo Kuan and Haffendi Anuar, who have risen from relative obscurity to become collectors' favourites.

In the exhibition at The Private Museum, Koh steps into the spotlight, not as a gallerist but as a passionate art collector. The showcase features over 50 works from his personal collection, reflecting his decades-long interactions with art and the artists he admires. Among the highlights is Thomas Housego's imposing sculpture *Walking Man*, which commands attention with its strange, sinewy presence. Also featured is a gorgeous abstract cityscape



A SEA Focus highlight is Natee Utarit's post-colonial paintings of an Asian woman destroying Western artworks. PHOTO: HELMI YUSOF, FT

painting by Liu Wei, fronted by Haffendi's colourful sculptures paying homage to kampung homes. The other artists include Gwon Osang, Su Xiaobai, Agus Suwage and Priyageetha Dia.

Koh says that his personal acquisitions are driven by emotional resonance rather than investment potential. "I buy only works that trigger a certain memory or emotion in me, that I wish to recapture. Some are happy memories, others are traumatic." This deeply personal approach results in a collection that is surprisingly coherent, with artworks echoing each other in tone and meaning.

Fyerool Darma

At Yeo Workshop

It's never easy trying to understand Fyerool Darma's practice, but it can reward those who try. His latest solo at Yeo Workshop delves into the enigmatic realm where pre-existing stock photos intersect with imagery generated by artificial intelligence (AI), prompting viewers to question the essence, value and trajectory of the image in contemporary art.

In this presentation, Fyerool seamlessly integrates salvaged industrial materials with both commercially available and algorithmically generated visuals, blurring the boundaries between the organic and the artificial. These images are further complicated by the incorporation of sonar vibrations that evoke cycles of decay and regeneration.

As the art world grapples with the implications of AI, Fyerool's work poses a provocative question: What if artists appropriate AI-generated images and present them as legitimate artworks within a gallery setting? Must we redraw the conventional boundaries of authorship, as we reconsider the relationship between human creativity and AI?

OHI Open House

At 7 Adam Park

This particularly transportive edition of OHI Open House is one of its best yet. Looking at the history of colonisation in Singapore, the ticketed and guided tour takes place in and around the black-and-white colonial banglows built about 100 years ago in Adam Park, an area named after Frank Adam (c.1855–1925), who was once the managing director of The Straits Trading Company.

As a former site of cash crop plantations, Adam Park bears the historical imprint of slavery, exploitation and struggle. So its many participating artists – which include South-east Asia's most acclaimed such as Mir Jai Inn, Maryanto and Ho Tzu Nyen – are showcasing works that respond to the lingering echoes of colonialism and its entanglement with power, labour and the land.

One compelling work is by Ezzam Rahman, who interrogates the mythology surrounding Stamford Raffles, widely idealised as the founding father of Singapore. The work challenges the narrative of Raf-

fles as a benevolent figure, exposing the complexities and contradictions of colonial rule. Another memorable work by Chong Kim Chiew honours the 500,000 people placed in internment camps during the Malayan Emergency.

Disobedient Bodies: Reclaiming Her

At Sundaram Tagore Gallery

This all-women showcase curated by Loredana Pazzini-Paracciani is a knockout. Not only does it feature art by South-east women across generations and mediums, it also seeks out some outstanding artists who are, arguably, not seen and appreciated enough in the commercial gallery space.

The exhibition centres on women's bodies: how they are seen, how they are shaped by societal expectations, and how they can be reclaimed. Spanning painting, photography, sculpture and video installation, the works celebrate acts of defiance against patriarchal and conservative structures, each striving towards liberation and autonomy.

Highlights include Pannaphan Yodmanee's gorgeous mixed-media piece celebrating motherhood, and Soe Yu Nwe's biomorphic ceramic sculpture capturing the fluid and evolving nature of identity. One notable omission from the public display, however, is Singapore artist Charmaine Poh's poetic short film *What's so soft in the world rushes and runs over what's hardest in the world*. A standout at the 2024 Venice Biennale, where it captivated audiences of all ages, the film has been classified R21 by the Singapore government. As a result, it will be available only through private screenings in February.

SEA Focus

At Tanjong Pagar Distripark

Curated by the ever-busy John Tung – who's involved in half a dozen projects across SAW – this edition of the boutique art fair is unexpectedly playful and experimental. To showcase works by emerging and established South-east Asian artists from several galleries, he carves up the gallery space into several "islands", each corridor and corner presenting its own microcosm of ideas and themes.

Some of the whimsical, laughter-inducing works include Natee Utarit's series of comic book-like paintings featuring a bespectacled Asian woman destroying important works of Western art. There's also Adam Phong's wacky sculptures made out of chicken bones, and Ariana Chavarano's video of cockroaches crawling inside a plastic desk-globe titled *Karmic Debt Trap* – it even comes with its own "cockroach scent".

Taken together, the show is a celebration of the rich and evolving South-east Asian art scene that doesn't take itself too seriously.

Art SG

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At Marina Bay Sands

Now in its third year, the flagship fair Art SG has become the most important international art fair in South-east Asia. Presented by Swiss bank UBS, this year's edition draws more than 105 galleries from 30 countries. They include major galleries such as Gagosian, Lehmann Maupin, White Cube, Thaddaeus Ropac and Kaikai Kiki showcasing top-flight artists such as Carol Bove, Robert Rauschenberg, Takashi Murakami, Theaster Gates, Lee Bul, Damien Hirst, Mandy El Sayegh, Albert Oehlen, David Salle, Lee Kang So and McArthur Binion.

There are also public works by Asian artists such as Khairulddin Wahab, Shavonne Wong and Miya Ando, as well as a film programme in collaboration with Bangkok Kunsthalle. Admittedly, the fair has shrunk from its impressive slate of 164 galleries in the first year (2023), to 115 in the second year (2024) – in part because of the weak luxury market. But there are still many exceptional works to admire – and purchase.

Magnus Renfrew, co-founder of Art SG, sees a "consistent growth of Singapore's art scene... (with) growing numbers of new buyers, bolstering an existing and dedicated collector base". He adds: "Singapore's unique location and rapidly widening market continues to render the city an important focus for international and local collectors alike."

Light To Night

At National Gallery Singapore

When the city gets dark, the best thing to do is to head to the Light To Night festival. This year's programme is especially compelling, with a group of veteran Singaporean artists headlining some of the segments for the first time – bringing an unexpected artistic maturity to an event once associated with younger artists.

The venerable sculptor Han Sai Por, who's 81, is transforming the Padang (the large field in front of the gallery) into a playground of large inflatable sculptures resembling tropical palms. For an artist renowned for her graceful stone sculptures, these quirky inflatables represent a delightful departure from her usual medium, lending humour to her ongoing exploration of nature and environment.

Meanwhile, the project mapping on the facade of the gallery – which always draws huge crowds with picnic mats – will feature the artworks of Chng Seok Tin, Goh Beng Kwan and Jaafar Latiff, three of Singapore's most important modern artists. Chng's deeply expressive prints, Goh's masterful collages and Jaafar's abstract batik motifs come alive in a spectacular interplay of light and colour, bridging the past and present in a captivating visual spectacle.

Gutai and Alternate Reality

At Whitestone Gallery

If you're visiting SEA Focus and the Singapore Art Museum, don't miss Whitestone Gallery's double exhibition on the fifth floor of the same building. One half of the massive 20,000 square feet gallery is devoted to Gutai, an important Japanese avant-garde art movement that emerged in 1954, founded by artists Jiro Yoshihara and Shozo Shimamoto in Osaka.

You'll find works not just by the two mentioned artists, but also other important Gutai artists such as Atsuko Tanaka, Takesada Matsutani and Tsuyoshi Maekawa. Gutai made a lasting impact on contemporary art, influencing movements such as performance art, happenings and installation art for decades after.

Meanwhile, the other half of the space is exhibiting a show titled Alternate Reality, which explores how our perception of the world is distorted by technology. There are several strong works, including those by Singapore artists Debbie Ding, Anthony Chin, Chen Sai Hua Kuan and Ong Kian Peng, as well as Indonesia's Maharani Mancanagara and Thailand's Imhabai Sivathamasp. Though the second exhibition is ticketed at \$55, it's more than worth the price of admission.

Kim Lim

At National Gallery Singapore

There are several ongoing exhibitions at National Gallery Singapore. But the most memorable is Kim Lim's *The Space Between*, a major retrospective of the late Singapore-born, UK-based sculptor's works. Though the show opened in September 2024, the museum is set to premiere a new documentary directed by her son Alex Turnbull during SAW. The film explores her personal life and artistic practice, and includes materials that only the estate has access to.

Lim made important contributions to 20th-century minimalism, but they have been long overlooked by the art world because she was Asian and a woman. This exhibition goes some way in reclaiming her rightful place in history, as well as a film programme.

Here are 13 more shows to catch:

The Utopia Of Rules at 72-13



Mohammed Sultan Road: Curators Kathleen Ditzig and Hera Chan assemble some of the most exciting artists in the region, including Ho Rui An and Heman Chong, to interrogate bureaucracy.

Affective Architecture: Excellent video works addressing history, ecology and technology by four

Asian artists.

Pratchaya Phintong at Singapore Art Museum: Cool conceptual minimalist art spanning two decades of his practice.

Singarpur Remixed at Art Outreach Singapore (Gillman Barracks): Goofy, large-scale collages by one of Singapore's best street

photographers, Aik Beng Chia.

Ames Yavuz: A solid selection of paintings by some of the gallery's best artists, including Tom Polo and Alvin Ong.

Jean-Michel Basquiat at Marina Bay Sands: An immersive exhibition featuring original prints and

cutting-edge technology.

Second Sex at The Culture Story: Fine selection of women artists' works from the collection of Chong Hui Seng and his daughter King.

Lai Yu Tong at dbispace: Experimental works blending music and visual art.

Amazonia at National Museum of Singapore: A mesmerising showcase of Sebastiao Salgado's photographs of the Amazon.

Phenomenology Of Light And Rhythms Of The Earth at Objectifs: A sensory shifting installation exploring urban spaces by Zen Teh and SaeKi Yee.

Fragments of an Unknown Space at Deck: Five accomplished photographers respond to the history of 116, Prinsep Street, where Deck once stood.

Allival Urban Arts Festival at Allival Arts Centre: Street art, dance and youth culture come together under one roof.

Artwalk @ Wessex at Wessex Estate: Artists living in the beautiful Wessex Estate open their doors once a year to show what they're making in their studios.

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Jaafar Latiff's batik art adorns the facade of National Gallery Singapore at the Light To Night festival. PHOTO: NATIONAL GALLERY SINGAPORE