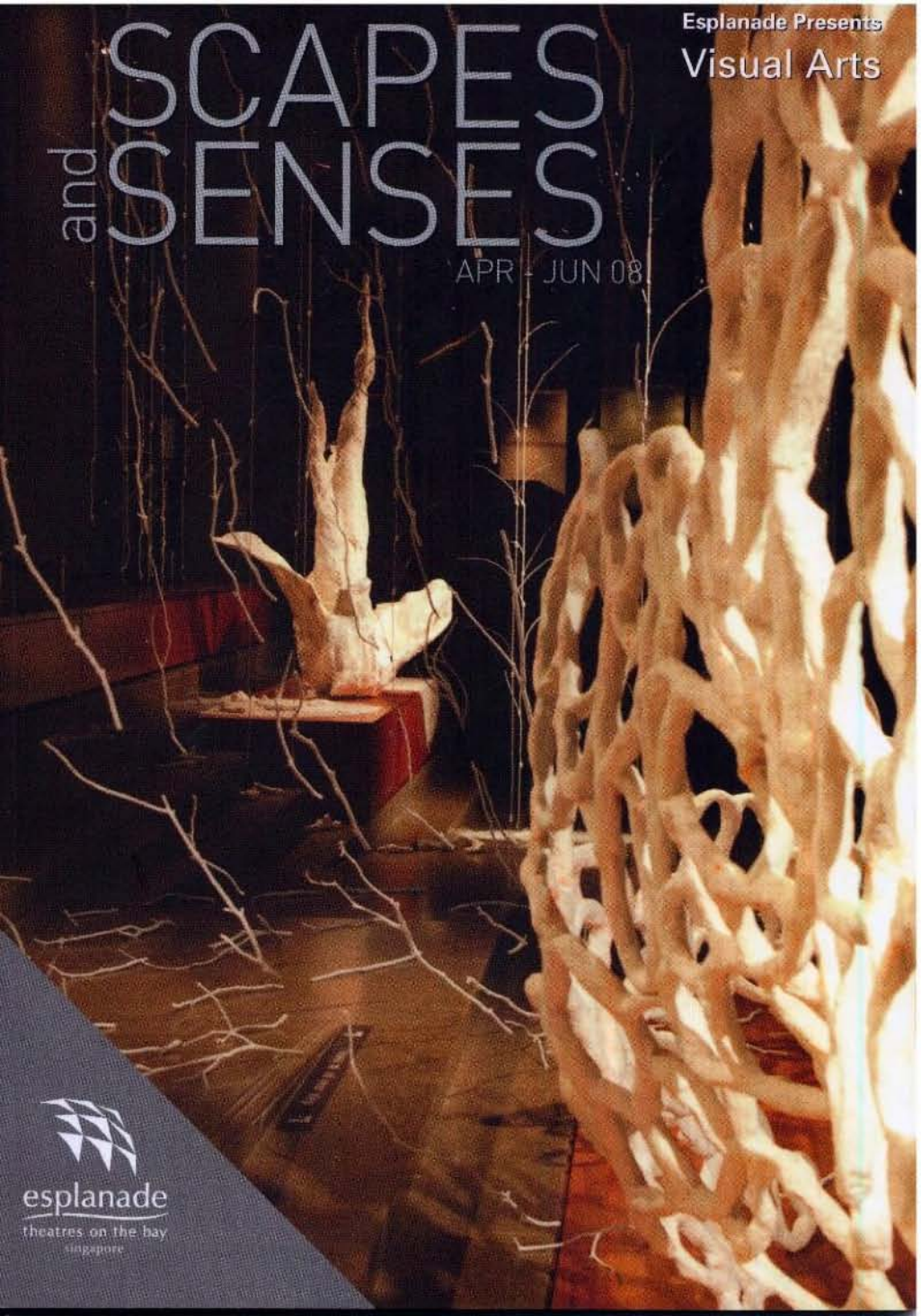


and SCAPES SENSES

APR - JUN 08

Esplanade Presents
Visual Arts



Another *Esplanade Presents* Programme

SCAPES AND SENSES

At Esplanade this quarter, artists display works that, though sometimes quiet on the visual side, are all the stronger for the physical and mental space they create around them. Using colour sparingly in some cases, they return to the essence of art and aesthetics in their rigorous study of form and composition. In contrast to the busy symphony of words, textures and hues that compete for attention all around the arts centre in the shape of announcements and advertising, these two and three dimensional works aim to produce sensations and nurture thought processes rather than force-feed information.

Many fine art practices today find themselves occupying the same visual terrain as popular culture. This is the natural result of both the universality of exposure to mass media forms, as well as the democratisation of art-making. At Esplanade, with visual art as with theatre, music and dance, we navigate the creative world both inclusively and selectively, the aim always to choose works that express something beyond their exterior packaging and that are capable of nourishing our public's soul, intellect and senses in diverse and engaging ways.



Benson Puah
Chief Executive Officer
The Esplanade Co. Ltd

FOREWORD

Western visual art in the 20th century, more than in any previous period, has been about creating effect and triggering reaction. Dadaism, Surrealism and in the last decades of the century, minimalist and conceptual art, have, over the years, fascinated the mind and challenged our understanding of beauty, altering the definition of art forever. Pop art, using both globally recognisable icons and accessible, indeed sometimes banal, ideas, is part of this 20th century sea-change and is now firmly implanted as a universal artistic language East and West. Yet in Asia, where artistic expression in various anonymous – and thus non-Western forms (ceramic, textile, metallurgical, stone and architectural art amongst others) is as old as Asian civilisation itself, many have forgotten the close and particularly Asian link between art, nature, hand and eye. This quarter's *Scapes and Senses* brings to public attention installations and two dimensional works of visual art that highlight the importance of the latter, as well as their close connection in the Asian, and especially Southeast Asian context.

Installation works by Japanese native and Australia-based Naomi Ota, and Cambodian Sopheap Pich, worked respectively in fibre and rattan, both offer local materials associated with traditional hand-craft culture. In their pared down, studied form, the two evoke an intemporal aesthetic poetry related to senses of touch. Without screaming colour or conceptual gimmick, the Concourse-installed works succeeded in seducing through their elliptical allusion to ancient community-enshrined traditions, the pairing of beauty and the utilitarian, their close relationship with the land through their choice of material, and finally the pure, sensual pleasure of their form.

At Jendela this quarter two Singaporean painters also opted to revitalise ties with more established expressive forms. Quek Kiat Sing, working with Chinese ink on paper, with *Within Four Rooms*, created an intimate, personal account of her living space-as landscape, translated as a metaphor for all our daily lives today. Jeremy Sharma, favouring paint on canvas, for his part produced an expressionistic series of large-scale paintings depicting heroes and protectors in their conventional and more surprising forms.

Video art, always a sought-after feature of Esplanade's quarterly visual manifestation, was presented by six young Singapore-based film-makers, the majority hailing from the well-regarded Orita-Sinclair School of Art & Design. Neng Mohamed screened *Catch*, a sensorially-alert collage of images that shows how even trivial

FOREWORD

events can influence our inner world. Two very different films, *Mirage* and *Cyclic Life*, were put on by Jitra Nawasavat. The first, a formal essay, the second offering a more philosophical view of life where the physical and inner aspects of self are compared and contrasted. Robert Lochrie's *Blender*, more socially oriented, explored convention and individualism with a series of stylised figurative images; and finally Che Lee Yeang, Lim Li-Yen and Foo Tze Ching teamed up to create *Legend*, a fantastical narrative in animated form.

The underground Tunnel space linking Esplanade with Singapore's mass rapid transport system and subterranean shopping malls is doubtless the art centre's most problematic for participating artists, as well as for its hurrying pedestrian commuters. Artificially lit, visually monotonous, and generically similar to countless other such purely utilitarian thoroughfares, the Tunnel can nonetheless offer rewards to artist who embrace its challenging layout and develop ways of using its attributes. With *Lightz Out!* the Singapore/Indonesian trio comprising Steve Chua, Betty Susiarjo and Soh Ee Shaun devised a tripartite message-based series of drawings and paintings wittily and light-heartedly tackling smoking. Far more than an advertising campaign relying on slogans and scare-images, the three practitioners' works showed how art, as distinct from propaganda, can function in a deeper, more substantial way for the promotion of public health. A second Tunnel work this quarter, created by Chua Chin Chin, Chloe Hew and aiwai of Singapore and Malaysia, was *Sketchbook*. Process-bound and seemingly fragmented in its narrative account, with descriptive documents, photography and text-based images, the piece successfully pulled Tunnel-walkers into the three artists' realm of sensation and emotion. Both groups of practitioners made particular use of the Tunnel's forced intimacy and frieze-like wall space, perfect for continual story-telling and landscapes.

The three Cone skylights that illuminate the commercial passageway joining the art centre's Concert Hall and Theatre with the complex's marina-facing rear were this quarter the locus for Singaporean Yeoh Wee Hwee's organic-feeling white space sculpture. As with Naomi Ota's *Scent of Whiteness* and Sopheap Pich's *Strands*, Yeoh's *Untitled* was understated in its choice of monochrome, deliberately at odds with the multi-coloured frenzy of merchandise and signage characterising the string of shops lining the corridor. Soft and diaphanous in pure white –rather whimsically constructed with plastic twisty-ties–, Yeoh's three subtly different pieces made a strong artistic statement against their hectic commercial backdrop.

SCENT OF WHITENESS

Artists

Naomi Ota

Australia/Japan

Title

Scent of Whiteness

Medium

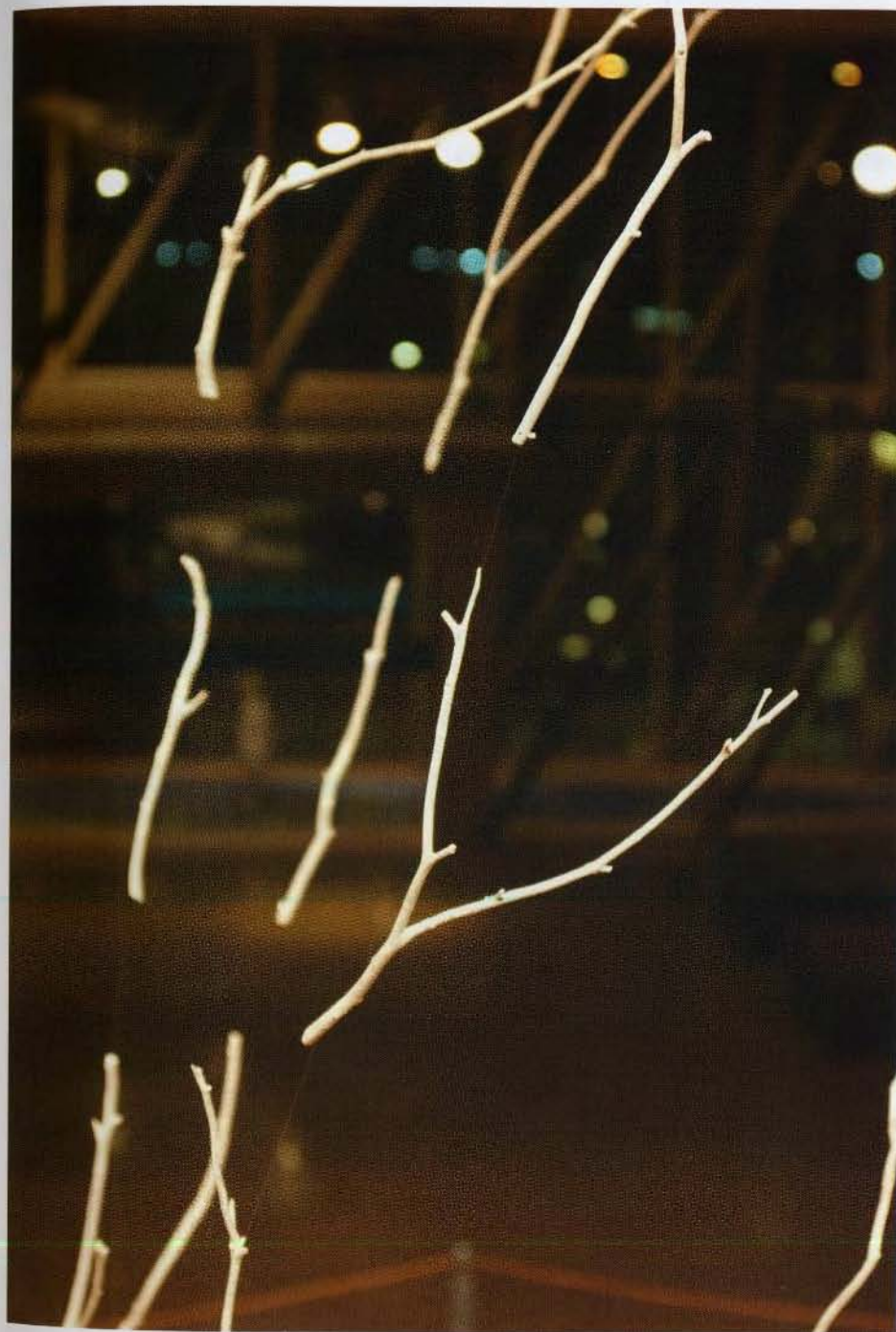
Mixed Media

Date

12 Apr – 18 May 08

Location

Concourse

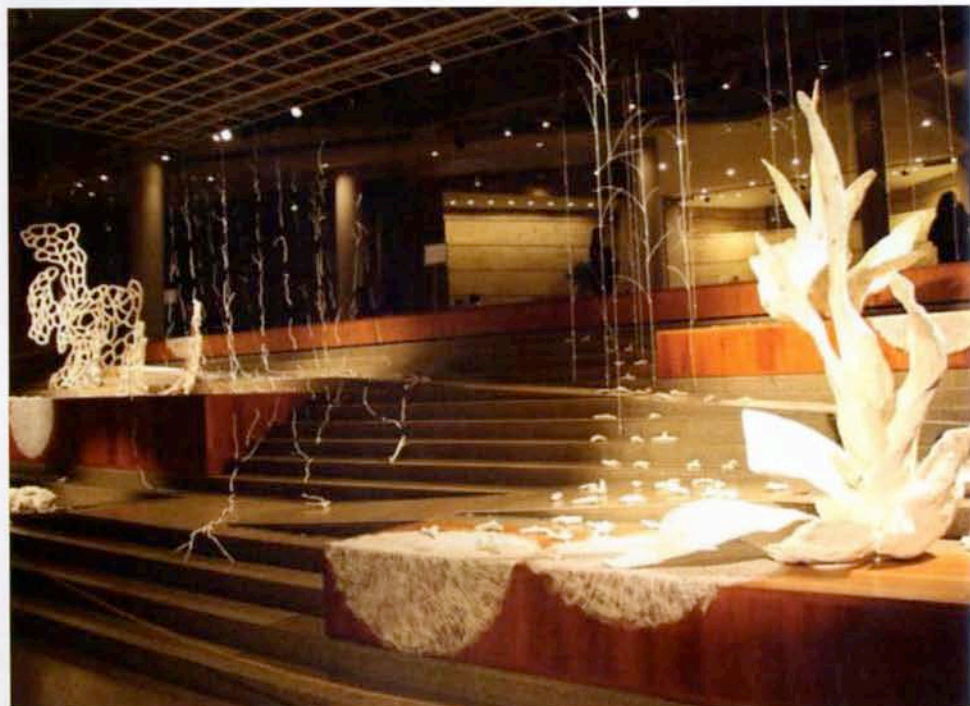
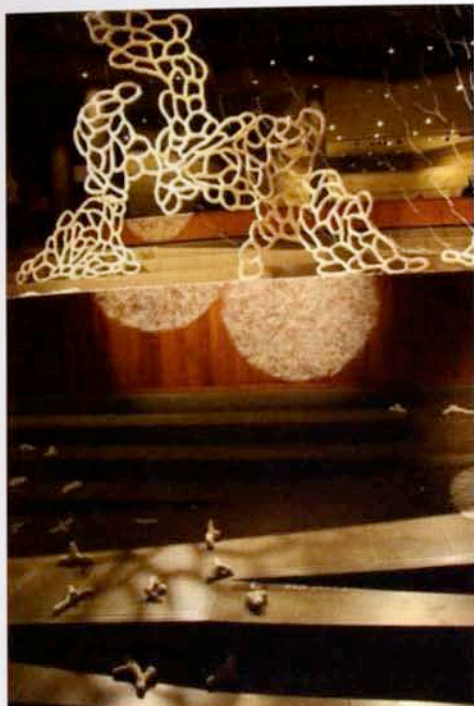


SCENT OF WHITENESS

Japanese sculptress and installationist Naomi Ota has been based in Melbourne, Australia for several years. For Scapes and Senses, Ota produced Scent of Whiteness, a three dimensional work which she put up in the arts centre's central and light-filled Concourse space. Visual expressive language originating in Australia is often influenced by the power of the country's breathtaking landscapes as well as the extremes of its climate and seemingly unlimited space. Naomi Ota, though inspired for Scent of Whiteness by her indigenous country's Taketomi Island in Okinawa's Yaeyama archipelago, with this work references the transcendent characteristic of nature everywhere.

Ota's installation, crafted from fibre, is quintessentially organic in feel, an intricately assembled composition of white-hued stems, flat sand-dollar-like forms and honey-comb-like structures that filter air and light. Soft and flexible in appearance, the work points specifically to the sacred groves (*utaki*) of Taketomi Island where delicate white coral shards pepper the landscape. Japanese aesthetic sensibility, so often assimilating natural phenomenon with spiritual and philosophical values, is echoed here as *Scent of Whiteness* can be interpreted, through its stylised imitation of *utaki*, with *yohaku-no bi* or the beauty of extra white, in turn understood as the emptiness of Zen Buddhism.





Whether the audience chooses to see the installation in such austere philosophical terms, or rather as its creator views it, intimately connected with the transient pleasures of everyday life, the piece, its volumes playing with positive and negative space as well as with light, speaks eloquently of joy and beauty whether these be of intellectual or more pedestrian nature.

At Esplanade, the various components of *Scent of Whiteness* swayed gently from the Concourse rafters or were positioned unobtrusively on the Concourse steps. The piece provided a quiet, subtle respite from the aggressively competing array of publicity banners and other advertising materials that populate the arts centre lobby, successfully diffusing the Concourse's random cacophony of coloured signs and pedestrian traffic.



Australian Government



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