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## MEDIA RELEASE

### ACM UNVEILS ITS FIRST-EVER CONTEMPORARY SINGAPORE FASHION EXHIBITION #SGFASHIONNOW



**Singapore, 23 June 2021** – From this Friday, design, culture, and fashion enthusiasts can visit ACM’s first display of contemporary Singapore fashion, exploring creative practice in Singapore in the context of Asia’s cultural heritage. Branded *#SGFASHIONNOW*, the showcase is presented in collaboration with LASALLE College of the Arts’ School of Fashion and the Textile and Fashion Federation (TaFF) – a result of ACM’s first tripartite partnership within Singapore’s fashion ecosystem.

At *#SGFASHIONNOW*, visitors can encounter cross-cultural works and fashion-forward ideas by Singapore designers organised in two sections: the first is the curtain-raiser display *ACM x TaFF*, where four ensembles by Singapore-based finalists of fashion design competition *Singapore Stories 2020* are on show at the ACM Lobby; the second, *ACM x LASALLE*, showcases works by eight practising local designers, including established professionals Andrew Gn, Goh Lai Chan, and Priscilla Shunmugam, whose works are mounted alongside *Singapore Stories 2020* winner Carol Chen’s debut creation.

Kennie Ting, Director of ACM and the Peranakan Museum, explains, “As an exhibition, *#SGFASHIONNOW* is a first for us in many ways. It is our first display of contemporary Singapore fashion, and in typical ACM fashion, we explore creative practice in Singapore within the context of Asia’s cultural heritage. It is made possible by way of a first-time, multi-party collaboration between museum, community and industry – ACM x LASALLE x TaFF x Singaporean and Singapore-based designers. It is also the first time ever that the central task of curating an exhibition has been ceded by ACM curators – in this case to the School of Fashion students, with ACM staff and LASALLE faculty providing mentorship.

I hope *#SGFASHIONNOW* encourages new ways of thinking about the question “What is Singapore fashion?” from the perspective of Singapore’s essence as a multi-cultural, cosmopolitan port city. Having recently re-positioned ourselves as Singapore's National Museum of Asian Antiquities and Decorative Art, the exhibition also represents our commitment to championing innovation in the space of tradition.

We are extremely thankful for the strong support from our partners, our donors, and the Singaporean and locally based designers who have agreed to come on board with us. In these challenging times, it is all the more important that we come together to support the talent we have right here in Singapore. In that light, I am pleased to say that *#SGFASHIONNOW* will return in 2022 and, depending on the public’s reception to the first two installments, we will explore if there should be more.”

### Exploring Singapore’s diverse fashion identities

Visitors can engage with a visual dialogue on Singapore’s fashion identities at the anchor display *#SGFASHIONNOW: ACM x LASALLE*, located at the Contemporary Gallery nestled in the heart of the museum. As visitors make their way to the show by traversing through the Level 1 Trade galleries, they will discover how Singapore grew and thrived as an open port city by sharing cross-cultural flows and artistic exchanges with the region and the world. This context of a shared heritage informs this *ACM x LASALLE* display, where the diverse approaches and craftsmanship of eight Singapore designers takes the spotlight.



Created in response to the ongoing pandemic, Paris-based Singaporean designer Andrew Gn’s gown from his *May There Be Light* collection aims to bring hope, pleasure, and joy. The cape is a nod to Chinese export



The gara of this ensemble from Stylemart by Kavita Thulasidas features intricate silk thread handiwork inspired by traditional Parsi embroidery, with flora and fauna that symbolise purity and protection. The

shawls of the 20th century, often called “Manila shawls”.

fabrics were woven and embroidered in India before being pieced together in Singapore.

Focusing on the craft of making clothes, the works displayed engage with ideas of materiality and slow fashion (local artisans rather than industrial production, attention to eco-friendly materials, etc.), some representing notable moments in history, and all made in recent years. The chosen designers drew from the rich heritage of fashion, craft, and cultural ideas of Singapore and Asia.

In this snapshot of Singapore’s fashion landscape, emerging designers were selected alongside established veterans to create a developmental showcase to highlight contemporary applications of traditional craftsmanship and ideas for the modern, international audience. For instance, visitors will see Singapore's cheongsam maestro Goh Lai Chan sharing the same space with up-and-coming designer Hu Ruixian of Studio HHFZ, who offers one of her own interpretations of what Singapore fashion can be. Experimental works like Baëlf Design’s 3D printed creation show a Singapore label’s take on the future of sustainable fashion, and its inclusion here points to the role a museum can take in supporting innovative ideas.

Rather than presenting one singular “Singapore” look or style, the display shows some of the wide range of approaches in craft and ideas taken by diverse designers in imagining Singapore fashion today. They are united by a shared commitment to making well-crafted fashion, and in their cross-cultural, cosmopolitan, experimental spirit, which has characterised fashion here in this multicultural, predominantly migrant nation for the past two centuries.



For this piece, winner of *Singapore Stories 2020* Carol Chen pays homage to traditional artistry of South and



From Baëlf Design by Jamela Law and Lionel Wong, this piece from their *Anthropology of Cultural*

Central Asia. She incorporated zardozi embroidery, which features the use of silver threads and beads.

Most of the garments by Carol Chen for *Singapore Stories* were made with unconventional methods and textiles, such as laser-cutting and recycled fabric.

*Dementia* collection was inspired by Jing costumes of Chinese opera, a common form of entertainment especially popular in late 19th-century Singapore. Dragon scale-patterns and embellishments typical of Jing costumes are replaced by 3D printed intertwined fractal patterns that extend from the body to convey dynamic, flight-like movements.

### Collaborating with Singapore's next generation of fashion creatives

In an unprecedented approach by ACM, the curatorial task of putting together this exhibition was largely ceded to five final-year students at LASALLE College of the Arts' School of Fashion: Gabrielle Yeo, Celestine Wong, Jessica Faustine Suwito, Felicia Toh, and Guo Li Le. Among three submissions, their proposal was unanimously selected by a diverse judging panel including Circe Henestrosa (Head, LASALLE School of Fashion), Ho Semun (CEO, TaFF), Tjin Lee (Founder, Mercury Marketing and Communications), and ACM's director Kennie Ting. In response to TaFF's winning work and three works in ACM's collection by Andrew Gn, LAICHAN, and Ong Shunmugam selected by ACM Curator of Fashion and Textiles Jackie Yoong, the students proposed the central exhibition theme of "Craftsmanship" and proposed four designers' works (Baëlf Design, Stylemart, Studio HHFZ, and Time Taken to Make a Dress) for display. The student curators were given valuable access to ACM's resources, including curatorial and programmes staff mentorship as well as exhibition expertise, which allowed them to produce a comprehensive experience for the public to enjoy. Their roles included developing their curatorial vision, leading the exhibition design, and proposing programmes to run in conjunction with the exhibition. They will also give tours of the exhibition. An e-publication was produced by the students, consisting of exhibition content, video interviews with the designers, and essays by the LASALLE and ACM project mentorship teams. It serves as a companion resource and a permanent digital record for this project, accessible via QR codes in the exhibition.

Steve Dixon, President of LASALLE College of the Arts, shares, "This collaboration with the ACM has been a fantastic opportunity for LASALLE's students. Not only have they been able to put their curatorial ideas to the test with expert guidance from ACM, they have also gained valuable exposure to different facets of what makes an exhibition, from public engagement programmes to marketing. Partnerships such as this between industry and education play a crucial role in cultivating the next generation of Singapore's fashion designers and curators. We look forward to many more opportunities to collaborate with the ACM."

### Creating Singapore-inspired capsule collections with ACM



For this ensemble, Singapore-based designer Nida Tahir Shaheryar took reference from a kebaya panjang in the ACM collection (right). The cross-cultural elements of this ensemble reflect Nida's embrace of the hybridity in Singapore culture. Part of her brand NIDA SHAY, the ensemble embodies Nida's signature style of embroidered floral and natural patterns.



Kebaya panjang on display at *Fashionable in Asia* at the Fashion and Textiles Gallery on Level 3. The raised-thread embroidery of the wedding tunic is similar to that seen on European military uniforms of the 17th century and later, while the blazer sashed at the waist hints at the silhouette of a kebaya. The embroidery technique and application seen here inspired Nida to translate her motifs into intricate, 3-dimensional floral patterns.

At the ACM Lobby, visitors are invited to immerse themselves in the intricate details of the four ensembles of the *#SGFASHIONNOW: ACM x TaFF* display. Presented by 2020 finalists of *Singapore Stories*, Singapore's national fashion design competition, the designs pay tribute to the heritage of Singapore fashion and envision its future. To help create their own Singapore-inspired capsule collection as part of the competition, finalists were given the rare opportunity to view exquisite textile pieces from the ACM stores housed at the Heritage Conservation Centre. The realised creations are hallmarks of *#InnovationInTradition*. The finalists were able to adopt a broader approach by considering Singapore fashion in the context of Asia's rich heritage.

Semun Ho, Chief Executive Officer of TaFF, explains, "The partnership with ACM in *Singapore Stories* has been invaluable. It helps to bolster our efforts in creating a dynamic fashion industry with cultural appreciation. Through the learnings and interpretation from ACM artefacts, the *Singapore Stories* contestants are encouraged to create a truly Singapore-inspired capsule."

"TaFF's vision is to position Singapore as the innovative fashion hub of Southeast Asia through three key areas of focus: Technology and Innovation, Sustainability, and Asian Craftsmanship. These defined themes differentiate us in the global fashion context and highlight the uniqueness of Singapore as a multicultural city nation. *Singapore*

*Stories* is one of the key programmes that TaFF has created to galvanise the community, with the goal of spotlighting and supporting homegrown and locally based fashion talents. Founded three years ago, the aim of the initiative is to encourage designers to delve into the history of Singapore fashion and arts, which, many a time, is a fusion of different cultures. TaFF is grateful to be able to participate in the museum's *#SGFASHIONNOW* showcase as it provides the opportunity to shine a light on Singapore fashion," she adds.

### **Fashion and Singapore women**

Besides reflecting the pulse of society in time and space, fashion is also very much about the wearer and self-expression. The selection on display might appeal to a diverse range of women in Singapore and beyond, reflecting different ideas of beauty and nationality. For example, the donor of the Ong Shunmugam custom dress – the author Paige Parker – chose to wear the creation to the Cannes Film Festival, as she felt the design and colours expressed Singapore well. The actress Constance Lau chose to wear Time Taken to Make a Dress's work to the red carpet premiere of the movie *Crazy Rich Asians* in San Francisco to represent her Singapore roots and support a local label. Labels like Studio HHFZ, with its youthful designs, appeal to many Singaporean women.

*#SGFASHIONNOW* is part of ACM's focus on presenting innovation in the space of tradition, with the aim of sparking conversations around cross-cultural Asian identities, heritage, and craftsmanship. The exhibition opens on 25 June and runs through 19 December 2021.

In conjunction with the exhibition, members of the public can look forward to a series of student curator tours, interactive activities and workshops focusing on fashion, craft, and design – available online and on-site. Entry is free for Singaporeans and Permanent Residents. For more information, please visit [www.acm.org.sg](http://www.acm.org.sg) | [@acm\\_sg](https://www.instagram.com/acm_sg) | [facebook.com/asiancivilisationsmuseum](https://www.facebook.com/asiancivilisationsmuseum) and follow our hashtags: *#SGFASHIONNOW* and *#INNOVATIONINTRADITION*.

### Acknowledgements

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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### SUPPORTED BY



MAJOR SUPPORTER  
**PAIGE PARKER**

### DESIGNERS FEATURED

Baëlf Design  
Carol Chen  
Andrew Gn  
LAICHAN  
Ong Shunmugam  
Studio HHFZ  
Stylemart  
Time Taken to Make a Dress

### DONORS AND LENDERS

Andrew Gn  
Paige Parker  
National Museum of Singapore

### TEXTILE AND FASHION FEDERATION SINGAPORE (Taff)

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For additional details, please refer to:

- **Annex A: About #SGFASHIONNOW**
- **Annex B: Exhibition highlights**
- **Annex C: Exhibition programmes and activities**

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#### About the Asian Civilisations Museum

ACM is Singapore's national museum of Asian antiquities and decorative art. As the only museum in Asia with a pan-Asian scope, ACM is devoted to exploring the rich artistic heritage of Asia through our outstanding collection of masterpieces, and through ground-breaking special exhibitions. Opened in 1997 and in its present building by the Singapore River since 2003, the museum traces its roots to the Raffles Museum, founded in the middle of the 19th century. ACM focuses on the many historical connections between cultures and civilisations in Asia, and between Asia and the world.

Singapore's history as a port city that brought people together from all over the world is used as a means of examining the history of Asia. Objects on display tell stories of the trade and the exchange of ideas that were the result of international commerce, as well as the flow of religions and faith through Asia.

Special exhibitions bring magnificent objects from around the world to our Singapore audience. For more information, visit [www.acm.org.sg](http://www.acm.org.sg) or follow the museum on Facebook ([@asiancivilisationsmuseum](https://www.facebook.com/asiancivilisationsmuseum)) and Instagram ([@acm\\_sg](https://www.instagram.com/acm_sg)).