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## The Formation of Identities and Art Museum Education:

### The Singapore Case

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Leong Wai Yee Jane

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctorate of Education

School of Education

University of Durham, U.K.

2009

Supervisor: Professor Michael Byram

23 JUN 2009





## **DECLARATION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The two main questions that guide this study are: Can collections and exhibitions in art museums function as markers of national identities? What role should art museum education play in contributing to the understanding of national artistic heritage and thereby to national identity? To answer these questions, this study investigates the theories or beliefs held in society about the educational role of a public art museum in constructing national (and regional) identities. It does so by focusing on the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) as the site of analysis.

Using a case study and qualitative data, two avenues of inquiry are pursued in this study. First, an examination of the official/formal discourse – revolving around notions of arts heritage and the role of the Art Museum in fostering a sense of local identity – locates the discussion within the socio-political context of Singapore and its relation to recent developments in museum practices in general.

Next, data were collected from informants in the fields of museum and art education through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and these data were analysed using grounded theory techniques to conceptualise and represent the views and experience of the informants about local art and identities in an Asian educational and cultural setting.

The final analysis draws upon the theories that emerged from the informants' discourse and compares them with the official discourse about the educational role of the art museum. The findings shows that informants affirmed the belief that art museums could and should play a role in the formation of national identity but they remained critical of the reality factors that affect policy and practice in the case of SAM.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Context of the Study

Throughout the developed world, structural trends and changes in society have exerted a profound influence on the role of museums and galleries for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Among the principal trends are the emergence and implications of post-industrial society, developments in technology, changing government attitudes, and the concept of education for life (Knell, Macleoad, & Watson, 2007; Middleton, 1998, pp. 27-34; Vergo, 1989). On an international level, art museum and gallery practices are readily related to an aesthetics revolution, which over the last decade, has brought about a complex artistic transformation, renewing people's history and bringing artistic and creative interests into people's lives (Dalin & Rust, 1996, pp. 55-56; Sandell, 2002).

The rise of a broad-based political and cultural movement towards pluralism has significantly challenged the accepted definitions and purposes of contemporary museums. The notion of 'pluralistic museums' in contemporary society can be seen in the number of roles that museums have come to play – collection, conservation, research, exhibition, interpretation as well as acting as cultural centres and social instruments (Black, 2005; Edward, 1996, pp. 14-15; Witcomb, 2003). Over the years, the role of museum education has moved beyond providing access to collection or simply creating a teaching and learning environment for individuals. The growing interest in the social and cultural roles that museums play within communities is evident among researchers in the fields of art and museum education (e.g. Kaplan, 1996; Karp, Kreamer, & Lavine, 1992; Whitehead, 2008).



Vinson (2001) noted that cultural heritage and museum collections continue to remain the core of the *UNESCO World Culture Report 2000* because “people want to share and enjoy all kinds of world cultural creations, but also want to preserve their own identity and the symbols of their cultural differences” (p. 61). Museums are institutions which do not only contribute to the production of cultural knowledge but also influence the ways in which we imagine our community and ourselves.

No exception to these general trends, the past decade has witnessed significant steps by the Singapore government towards the national plan of developing the nation into a ‘global city of the arts’. Since the establishment of the Singapore National Heritage Board (NHB) in 1993, a statutory board under the Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA), considerable efforts have been made to explore and present local/national (national) culture and heritage through a network of three national museums. They are the National Museum of Singapore, the Singapore Art Museum and the Asian Civilisations Museum. The emphasis on the development of heritage understanding as a way to foster identity and nationhood is articulated in the mission statement of NHB:

To foster nationhood, identity and creativity through heritage and cultural development (NHB, 2006, p. 12).

As the sole national art museum in Singapore, SAM asserted itself to be the ‘first of its kind in the region to be solely dedicated to collecting and showcasing 20<sup>th</sup> century Singapore and Southeast Asian contemporary art’ (<http://www.nhb.gov/SAM/Collections/> Access 9 Feb 2006).. This has resulted in a search for new perspectives and possibilities of integrating the educational role of the museum into the Museum’s core function. This



study aims at using Singapore as a case study to understand the relationship between art museum education and the formation of identities.

### *The Singapore Art Museum*

In order to provide a preliminary orientation for international readers, the context of the policies and practices of SAM will be sketched out by situating the role of the Museum in the cultural development of the nation.

Since the independence of Singapore in 1965, its government was anxious to build national cohesion and secure economic survival. In the early years of nation-building, the government structured an education system to provide mass education, social cohesion, economic growth and bilingualism. However, the general perception about the arts in society remained impoverished and there has been a paucity of research in Singapore into the nature and significance of art museum education in development and learning. The increased awareness of the role that museum education could and should play in a balanced art curriculum from early childhood to adulthood came in the early 1990s with the establishment of the National Heritage Board, which began to oversee the State's network of National Museums.

The establishment of the Singapore Art Museum in 1993, being reincarnated from the former National Art Gallery in the National Museum, marks an important development in the arts infrastructure of the nation. The National Museum itself has been established for over a century. It evolved from a colonial institution in the late nineteenth century to a

National Museum in the 1960s with the main emphasis as a repository of the nation's cultural heritage. The opening of the National Museum Art Gallery in 1976 was an important boost to the development of Singapore's visual arts scene. Through the years the Art Gallery has grown in terms of collection and educational programmes (Liu, 1987, p. 6).

The Singapore Art Museum was officially opened in January 1996 as it entered into a new era of expanded interest and programmes in the areas of collection, public education, research and publication. Located in the civic and cultural district, the Art Museum was converted from a heritage building, St. Joseph Institution, formerly a Catholic boys' school founded in 1852. When the school relocated in 1987, the premise was gazetted as a national monument (<http://www.museum.org.sg/SAMprofile/facilities.htm> Access: 6 February 2006) (Appendix A: Images of the Singapore Art Museum).

The role of SAM is closely related to the national cultural developments of Singapore, where an infrastructure for the arts has been set in place for 21<sup>st</sup> century. This includes the establishment of the National Arts Council (NAC) in 1991 and the National Heritage Board (NHB) in 1993 – both are statutory boards under the then Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA)<sup>1</sup>, the Esplanade arts centre; the development of an arts market, and the upgrading of art colleges.

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<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) was expanded to incorporate Infocomm technology (ICT) function since 2001 and renamed Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts but retained the acronym MITA. It was in 2004 that the MITA acronym was officially changed to MICA.



The Singapore Committee on National Arts Education in 1996 affirmed the significance of arts education to the nation's development. In *The Next Wave of Creative Energy: report of the Committee on National Arts Education* (1996, pp. 20-22), the provision for arts education in the context of Singapore's economic, social and cultural development was recommended. A three-pronged approach was proposed as an effective way of implementing national arts education at the levels of the school system, the community at large, and tertiary arts institutions.

While Singapore's education policies and the development and administration of the formal school system came under the Ministry of Education, museums and libraries are administered by MITA to provide a core resource for the intellectual capital of the nation. It was MITA's mission to further their potential by seeking partnerships with industry and formal education establishments to form a network of centres of learning for life.

Against this backdrop of a response to the changing needs of the cultural development of the nation, SAM has become part of a network of art centres and community centres to provide arts education for schools and the general adult population. It can therefore play an important role in helping to raise the standards of artistic knowledge and produce a critical mass of creative citizens.

The national museums, under the National Heritage Board (NHB) are accorded the role of engendering a sense of nationhood through the understanding of the history and heritage of Singapore. This can be seen in the mission statement of NHB:

To foster nationhood, identity and creativity through heritage and cultural development (NHB, 2006, p. 12).

In the case of the Art Museum, the search for new perspectives and possibilities of integrating the educational role of the museum into its core identity is spelled out in SAM's mission statement:

To preserve and present the art histories and contemporary art practices of Singapore and the Southeast Asia region so as to facilitate visual arts education, exchange, research and development (NHB, 2002, p. 24).

The practice of art education in SAM through its exhibition and educational programmes will be further discussed in section 4.1.

## **1.2 Purpose and Significance of the Study**

This research arises from my interest in the role of art museums in facilitating the construction of identities. The major arguments in the body of literature on museums and identity work revolve around the function of museums as 'identity-defining machines' (Duncan, 1995) for the nation-state and museums as 'purveyors of ideology and of a downward spread of knowledge to the public' (Kaplan, 1996: 3). As museums are a foreign import to Asian societies through colonialism, it is of particular importance to analyse how theories generated from studies in the Euro-American context could be applied to contemporary Asian societies.

The purpose of this study is two-fold: to provide an analysis of the policy and practices of art museum education in Singapore, and to interrogate the role played by art museum

education programmes in the construction and representation of national identity. Two major research questions are asked in this study: Can collections and exhibitions in art museums function as markers of national identities? What role should art museum education play in contributing to the understanding of local/national artistic heritage, and hence to local/national identity? Issues to address will include the role of exhibitions, the role of art education service (for example with respect to servicing local schools). The questions will be addressed in terms of what key informants in the art community believe and what should be the future roles and how these might differ from the official discourse. It is important to note from the outset that this is not an attempt to investigate the actual effect on audiences.

My decision to conduct research in the area of art museum education evolved out of my work as a teaching faculty in the art education department at National Institute of Education in Singapore for the past decade. My initial understanding of museum education was derived from the curatorial perspective and can be traced back to my postgraduate research in art history and participation in exhibition projects in the U.S.A. The main focus then was exhibition practice as scholarly research and catalogue publications.

It was working with student-teachers in utilising museum resources for curriculum development that presented a different perspective about the practical implementation of educational programmes in the museum context. With my experience as an 'insider' of an art museum – performing curatorial and research work, and an 'outsider' – developing



and integrating museum resources in art education, I began to realise the complexity of the roles, responsibilities, concerns and aspirations of museum professionals. Indeed, 'museum education straddles the world of museums and the world of education' (Hooper-Greenhill, 1991, p. 2) and requires cross-disciplinary research and practices.

In the course of formulating the research topic for my thesis, I drew upon my knowledge gained in two units of the EdD programme in Durham University, namely "Policy Studies: Educational Studies in Britain and Abroad" and "Intercultural Studies and Bilingual Education". The former course prompted me to examine the factors that enable and inhibit the implementation of art museum educational policy while the latter informed my understanding about fundamental concepts of identity and its relation to the broader educational context.

As researchers in the art education community called for "a more substantial and sustained approach to the development of 'research-based practice' in the international museum context" (Xanthoudaki, Tickle, & Sekules, 2003, p. 3), it is timely for more qualitative studies on art museum education which focus on contemporary Asian societies. The present study can be seen as a product of concerns and aspirations as I endeavour to gain a deeper understanding about the role of art museum education and identity formation. By using the empirical study method of investigation, a more in-depth analysis could be drawn, leading to a better understanding of "the intersections between everyday life as represented by the experiences of actual visitors and professionals, and the more abstract world of theoretical literature" (Rice, 2003, p. 79).

### **1.3 Organisation of the Study**

In the discourse about museum work and identity, it is crucial to review some of the concepts that help to inform the discussion. Chapter 2 deals with a literature review and analysis which forms a framework for understanding art museum education and its relationship to local/national identity. The initial section draws upon the concepts of local/national identity and then relates them to the discussion of the theoretical perspectives of museum researchers. Studies pertaining to the Singapore context will also be examined. In the second section of the review, research studies addressing the educational role of the art museum will be examined.

Chapter 3 outlines the research process and establishes the qualitative methodology used in this thesis. The case study approach is used to provide a richer and deeper understanding of the topic and grounded theory as a guide for understanding the concepts of local/national art identity among informants will be addressed.

Chapter 4 deals with the analysis of the official discourse of local/national art and identity in Singapore. The reader will be provided with an overview of the national policy and practices of the Singapore government in arts and museum education as well as selected exhibitions and educational programmes to illustrate the discourse. There will be a discussion about how local/national identity as discussed in Chapter 2 is being operationalised in policies and its impact on art museum education

Chapter 5 concerns the informants' discourse with a focus on their conceptualizations and theories about local/national art and identities in the context of art museum education. Three themes that emerged from the in-depth interview data based on the Grounded Theory method will be presented and their interrelationships discussed and analysed in the final section.

Chapter 6 focuses on the analysis of the data through a comparison of the official and informants' discourses. The final section summarizes some of the findings regarding the informants' views and experience about local/national art and identities in the art museum context. Implications for the educational role of art museums in the context of formation of identities will be discussed.



## **CHAPTER 2 REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF LITERATURE**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the research literature exploring the relationship between art museum education and local/national identity. The first part of the chapter presents the approaches to the discussion of national identity, while setting out the traditions of thinking in which these conceptions have emerged. Research conducted specifically on identity work and the arts in Singapore will be examined. The second part of the chapter provides an analysis of the ideology of museum education, with an emphasis on the educational role of the art museum.

### **2.1 Museums and National Identity**

#### **2.1.1 National Identity as a construct**

This research is premised on the notion that national identity is culturally constructed and focuses on the analysis of the policy and practices of national art museums as systems of public representation. The rise of the nation-state, the public and the public museum in late-eighteenth century Europe were inextricably linked together. The continuing development of the nation state and its associated public institutions, not least including public/state education was evident throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It affected colonised countries during and after colonisation and although “the nation is a goal rather than an actuality” (Alter, 1989, p. xi), the quest for a national ‘self’ remains a powerful force in postcolonial life and politics.

Due to the multidimensionality of national identity, it is essentially complex and contains “a number of interrelated components – ethnic, cultural, territorial, economic and legal-political” when combined with other identities (Smith, 1991, p. 15).

In the following discussion, I will outline the approaches to the discussion about national identity by drawing upon the works by Anthony Smith, Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm. These three scholars have been widely referred to in the literature of national identity and their theories are helpful in analysing the relationship of identity and the educational role in the museum context.

In his discussion of national identity, Smith (1991, p. 14) distinguishes between a civic-territorial (or Western) model and ethnic-genealogical (or non-Western) model. While the former model has emphasis on territory, a legal-political community, a common culture and a common civic ideology, the latter focuses on common descent, ethnicity and blood ties. Every nation contains civic and ethnic elements in varying degrees and different forms.

He highlights five common assumptions about the bases of nationalism and national identity: (i) an historic territory, (ii) common myths and historical memories; (iii) a common, mass public culture; (iv) common legal rights and duties for all members and (v) a common economy with territorial mobility for members. Furthermore, as one of the internal functions of nations, ‘common values and traditions’ are called upon to provide a social bond between individuals in communities (Smith, 1991, p. 16). In his discussion about the ethnic bases of national identity, Smith highlights three factors that contributed

to the influential model in non-Western nations, which will be useful in the analysis of the discourse about national identity in the case of Singapore below. The first two factors deal with the historical and sociological grounds of the ethnic model of the nation. He argues that nation-states have deep roots and were created out of older cultures and loyalties often found in old ages, as some identities must have existed previously and a general sense of community was not entirely invented in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As a consequence, the ethnic model has become popular and extended its influence across the globe (ibid, p. 41). The third factor points to the need for new nations to create cultural symbols for a unified national identity:

...even where a nation-state-to-be could boast no ethnic antecedents of importance and where any ethnic ties were shadowy and fabricated, the need to forge out of whatever cultural components were available a coherent mythology and symbolism of a community of history and culture became everywhere paramount as a condition of national survival and unity (ibid).

Here, the idea of the interpretation of history and shared symbols providing a sense of nation resonates the notion of 'the invention of tradition' proffered by Hobsbawm (1983).

Arguing from a historical standpoint, and referring especially to the nineteenth century, Hobsbawm (1983) states that the 'nation' as a historical innovation, is one of the many traditions 'invented' and 'created' by political elites to legitimise their power in a century of revolution and democratisation.

In this connection, one specific interest of 'invented traditions' for, at all events, modern and contemporary historians ought to be singled out. They are highly relevant to that comparatively recent historical innovation, the



'nation', with its associated phenomena: nationalism, the nation-state, national symbols, histories and the rest (Hobsbawm, *ibid.* p.13).

Drawing upon Hobsbawm's argument, traditions could be defined as the essence of what belong to a group of people, which is essentially how nations are self-defined and nations in addition 'must possess compact, well-defined territories' (Smith, *ibid.*, p. 9) where these traditions are to be found. There is then a necessary demarcation or 'boundary' between values and traditions that belong to one group versus those of the 'others'.

The demarcation of boundaries is also a major argument presented by Barth (1969) in his discussion of ethnicity. Barth indicates the ways in which boundaries and markers are being created and function, and argues that rather than the content of these markers (beliefs, behaviours, characteristics), which could change and be re-constructed over time, it is the functioning of boundaries, marked by different phenomena and different points in history, which are the important focus of the conceptualisation of social and especially ethnic groups. Hence at any given point of time, markers are constantly used to differentiate between 'our' groups and the others as ethnic groups are viewed as 'other-defined'. In addition there is work on relationship of identity and place (Clifford & King, 1993; Davis, 1999; Graham & Howard, 2008) but this would go beyond the constraints of this thesis.

Anderson's idea about the creation of a national community or imagined community in Europe and its export to the rest of the world coincides to a large extent with Hobsbawm's discussion about the 'invention of tradition'. Anderson (1991) points out that thinking of oneself as a member of a national public entailed a particular feat of the

imagination “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (p.6).

It involved projecting a sentimental belief in a shared past, present and future within a boundary of the national community. In this sense the nation is imagined as ‘limited’ because “even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations” (ibid. p. 7).

Anderson makes the point that the imagination is sustained by the presence of ‘print-capitalism’ in which the development of print-as-commodity made possible the reproducibility and mass dissemination of books and other print materials, resulting in “growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways”, thereby created the possibility of a new form of imagined community (ibid: 36-46).

Anderson (1991) then analyses the transfer of notions of the nation state to colonised and other countries outside Europe and the west. Referring to Southeast Asia as a case of study, he suggests that census, maps and museums are three institutions of power in modern (post-colonial) states.

The present proliferation of museums around Southeast Asia suggests a general process of political inheriting at work. Any understanding of this process requires a consideration of the novel nineteenth-century colonial archaeology that made such museums possible (ibid, p. 178).

Anderson regards the census, the map and the museum as interconnected with each other and functioning as technologies for the legitimation of power which is “made possible by



the technologies of navigation, astronomy, horology, surveying, photography and print ,  
to say nothing of the deep driving power of capitalism” (p. 185).

The ‘warp’ of thinking was a totalizing classificatory grid, which could be applied with endless flexibility to anything under the state’s real or contemplated control: peoples, regions, religions, languages, products, monuments, and so forth. The effect of the grid was always to be able to say of anything that it was this, not that; it belonged here, not there. It was bounded, determinate, and therefore – in principle – countable (p. 184).

This view is developed by museum researchers such as Hooper-Greenhill (2000b) in the area of museology and museum education. She states that the map is seen as a metaphor for the museum in shaping values, geography and legitimacy of ancestry of states due to the following (ibid p. 17-18):

- Both maps and museums work through a combination of text and image and bring the world into an apparent single, rational framework with ordered and assigned relationships between nature, the arts and cultures. Museums construct relationships, propose hierarchies, define territories and present a view.
- Similar to maps which act as official, legitimating documents, museums have the authority of the official, the authenticated. Moreover the establishment of collections, like drawing a map, is a form of symbolic conquest.
- Both maps and museums are put together from a particular point of view and are not neutral; they construct hierarchy of values and produce relationships between people, nations and ideas through the objects selected, the way they are displayed and the relationships between them.



As observed by Parmenter (1997, p. 26), though different researchers proposed various models of national identity, it appeared that all the models contain some reference to an identity based on the following:

- Shared territory (political/geographical sphere)
- Shared culture and community (cultural/social sphere)
- Shared descent (ethnic sphere)

Parmenter states that the political/geographic and ethnic spheres are generally the most clearly defined of the three spheres, but could still be problematic (ibid). Hence, national identity often encompasses a sense of 'boundary consciousness' (ibid, 21), as expressed in the temporal dimensions of both Hobsbawm's (1983) and Anderson's (1991) theories that a particular nation has its own history which is unique and not shared by others. Through the 'invention of traditions', national identities were being created "as if they were 'natural', even eternal features of human existence" (Billig, 1995, p. 25).

These different perspectives of analysis of concepts about nation and national identity complement each other and help to establish a framework for the following discussion about identity work in the museum context. Of particular importance to this discussion is the notion of 'the invention of tradition' which makes it possible for the imagination of a national community.

In his seminal publication *Birth of Museums*, Bennett (1995) reflects upon the theories established by Anderson and Hobsbawm and states that "as ways of imagining, and so organizing, bonds of solidarity and community, nations take the form of never-ending

stories which mark out the trajectory of the people-nation whose origins, rarely precisely specified, are anchored in deep time just as its path seems destined endlessly to unfold itself into a boundless future” (p. 148). This notion of ‘never-ending stories’, as we shall see, forms an important contribution to the discussion about museums and identity work.

### **2.1.2 The role of museum and identity work: Theoretical perspectives**

In this section, I will employ the theoretical concepts of national identity discussed in 2.1.1 as a basis for analysing the discourse of national art museums and museum education. The emergence of public museums in the eighteenth century and their close relationship with the formation and solidification of nation states in Europe is pertinent to the present discussion (S. MacDonald, 2003). As noted by McLean (2005, p. 1), “national museums are implicit in the construction of identities”. Drawing upon the notion of ‘imagined communities’ by Anderson (1991), museums are considered as established sites for bringing together important cultural objects and therefore “readily appropriated as ‘national’ expressions of identity”:

Public museums, then, were from their beginnings embroiled in the attempt to culture a public and encourage people to imagine and experience themselves as members of an ordered but nevertheless sentimentalized nation state (S. Macdonald, *ibid*, p. 5).

The nineteenth century international museum culture was committed to the idea that the first responsibility of a public art museum is to enlighten and improve its visitors morally, socially, and politically (Duncan, 1995, p.16). Inherited from the European model in the nineteenth century, in which princely collections were opened up to the public due to “the



conviction in the power of art to humanize and civilize” (Hooper-Greenhill, 1991, p. 13) as exemplified by the case of the Louvre in France, Duncan (ibid) argues that art museums are not neutral sites for collection and display but function as ‘identity-defining machines’ for the nation-state. Hooper-Greenhill (2000b, p. 27) echoes this notion by pointing out that:

At the national level, museums were signs of the secular religion of nationalism, indices of a general maturity of taste and level of civilization, as well as markers of the responsibility of the state towards those for whom it was gradually becoming more responsible.

To follow this line of argument, it is pertinent to note the creation of ‘national art’ as an important indicator of ‘nationhood’ which has been pointed out by art researchers (e.g. Preziosi, 1996; Webb, 2005). It is not uncommon to find in national arts and cultural development policies, statements that articulate the role of the arts as a promoter of national identity, as we shall see below in the case of Singapore. The notion that selected artworks can act as metonyms for the nation, often displayed in national galleries, parliament houses, or embassies to inscribe national identity typically reflect “something authorized about that nation, its traditions, myths of origin and its worldview” (Webb, 2005, p. 31).

Similar to the role of most national museums, state-funded national art museums are also imbued with the complex function of fostering a sense of ‘national identity’:

Museums create master narratives through acting as both the constructor of a present-day ‘reality’ and through bringing into focus a memory of the past that (coincidentally) supports that present. Museum master narratives



concern Art, Nature, Man [sic], and Nation (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000b, p. 25).

The notion of 'narratives' expressed by Hooper-Greenhill is closely linked to the discussion by Anderson and Hobsbawm in that nations imagine and represent themselves through invention of stories about their past, present and future.

One of the precursors of examining museums and national identity is Kaplan's (1995) *Museums and the Making of "Ourselves"*, a series of case studies that chronicled some of the ways in which collections have played important roles in creating national identity and in promoting national agendas. As observed by Kaplan (1995) "the spread of museums in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was apparently spurred by burgeoning science and capitalism in the West; and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by industrialization, change and the demise of colonialism" (p.1).

The cases in Kaplan (1995) are presented in three categories: the first is concerned with new nations in the twentieth century, seeking unity amidst diversity, for example the case of African states which are created out of many ethnic groups. Museums and museum systems are treated as instruments in defining self and nation. The second category deals with museums that emerged at a time of expanding scientific research and economic development in the mid- to late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when there was considerable growth of capitalism. The development of commerce and industry, the widening of markets, urbanization, the speeding up of communications, all these processes made it easier for people to 'imagine' their membership of a national

community, as discussed with reference to Anderson's imagined community in 2.1.1 as the precursor of all this.

The third category embraces recent change, rising consciousnesses of gender roles, imagery and 'nationness', which deals with the more universal concept of the state being a 'nation' as differed from the assertion of 'national identity' among particular communities. It also considers the roles and place of objects in defining the 'self' among nations which are delimited territorially, and those not so defined.

What does it mean when the art museum asserts that it aims at promoting awareness of national identity through its exhibitions and educational programmes? Karp (1992) discusses the relationship between personal identities and community identities, as manifested in forums of public culture, ranging from museums to fairs. He maintains that the multiple identities that people experience in various communities often overlap and even contradict one another. There are four aspects of the process of identity formation as these emerge in museum-community relations (ibid, p. 20):

- (i) identities are defined by the content and form of public-culture events such as exhibitions and performance;
- (ii) identities are subjectively experienced by people participating in public culture, often in ways conditioned by their other identities and experiences;
- (iii) expressions of identities can contain multiple and contradictory assertions – that is, there can be more than one message in a single expression or performance of identity – and the same is true for the experience of identities;

(iv) identities are rarely, if ever, pure and uncontaminated by other identities, because they are usually fabricated from a mix of elements.

The above description helps to elucidate the notion of 'identity' as constructed through a dynamic interaction of personal, social and cultural factors. It is also significant to highlight that one can neither sustain a 'pure' tradition/heritage nor a 'whole' identity in the contemporary environment. The concrete expressions of a tradition and traditions more generally, do not develop 'automatically'. For a tradition to continue, it cannot remain the same because human history unfolds with new circumstances and new challenges (Kwok, 1994). This then points to the parallel idea advanced by Barth (1969) mentioned above that the contents of ethnicity may change but it is the marking of boundaries which is important.

As argued by Euro-American museum researchers, state-funded art museums that emerged in the modern nation-building era have remained as powerful sites in the formation of 'national identity'. It is therefore the focus of this study to investigate how a particular nation state, in this case Singapore, has attempted in policy making to put into operation the general principles which have been introduced here and how those who are responsible for putting the policies into practice see the reality of operationalisation.



### **2.1.3 Balancing Local/National and Global Identities in Singapore**

In this section, I will focus on the discourses about local/national and global identities in Singapore and their relation to the Art museum policy. As seen in the foregoing discussion, the rise of public art museums as important fixtures of a State has spread from the West to other parts of the world:

As much as ever, having a bigger and better art museum is a sign of political virtue and national identity – of being recognizably a member of the civilized community of modern, liberal nations (Duncan, 1991, p. 89).

Webb (2005, p. 30) observes that it became “practically mandatory to possess national art in order to claim the status of a modern nation”. The invention of ‘national art’ as part of the tradition and heritage of a community recalls the arguments proffered by Anderson (1991) and Hobsbawm (1983) that the imagined unity of a nation are reinforced through symbolic means, such as the invention of symbols like national flags, anthems and languages, and then, as Billig (1995) argues supported by a ‘banal nationalism’ of constant un-noticed reinforcement in everyday life.

The symbolic role of the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) as an important development in the arts infrastructure of the nation was acknowledged by the then prime minister Goh Chok Tong on the occasion of the opening of SAM in 1996:

The commitment to build an Arts and Heritage District as well as the Art Centre marks our desire to make our country’s development more balanced and rounded. After the initial years of preoccupation with economic development, it is time now to have our senses touched and stimulated by aesthetics and creative works (MITA, 1996).

However, the belief that economic development is a precondition to artistic development, as expressed in the above comment, is challenged by Kong (2000, p. 413) as a view not borne out in reality. She cites the argument by Sabapathy (1995) that though Singapore in the 1950s and 1960s was not well-developed economically, artists produced innovative works and contributed to the exciting art scene in that period.

It is not surprising that the government's justification for turning the nation into a regional hub for the arts often carries economic overtones. As a young nation, the Singaporean education system has been developed over the past four decades to fulfill the dual needs of nation-building and of sustaining economic development (Ashton & Sung, 1997). The Government's current policy towards the development of arts and culture is consistent with this. The state's view of the culture industry as a new and desirable area for economic growth was evident when Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong – on the occasion of announcing the vision for Singapore to be a 'Renaissance City' – stated that 'artistic creativity is an important element of a knowledge-based economy' (MITA, 1999, p. 46).

Chang (2000) notes that the term 'a global city for the arts' was first coined by the Singapore government in 1992 to "spearhead its vision of cultivating a thriving arts, cultural and entertainment scene, not only for economic reasons (to attract tourists and foreign talents) but also for socio-cultural objectives (enrichment of Singaporeans and nation-building)" (p. 819). He argues these ideas were further developed in the 'Renaissance City' tagline to serve global (economic) and local (sociocultural) goals.



In the Singaporean context, the complexity of forging a sense of 'national identity' through an understanding of the local artistic heritage is deepened by the trends of 'globalisation'. Brown (1998, p. 35) defines 'globalisation' as "the latest phase of capitalist expansion (most usually periodised from the early 1970s), involving the shift from international to transnational networks of trade, investment and finance, so that the movement of economic resources is increasingly outside the control of any state". Indeed the balance between the local and global in relation to the Singapore government's vision for the city-state as 'Renaissance City' and 'Global City for the Arts' has become a focus of local research.

Chang (2000) examines the challenges and accomplishments in Singapore's quest to be a Renaissance city by examining primary data (surveys of Singapore and foreign companies from the tourism and leisure enterprises and interviews with representatives from the visual and performing arts sector) and secondary data obtained from government publications, on-going peer research and press clippings. His findings reveal that the global-local tension remains a struggle in Singapore's arts and cultural scene in the 21st century by identifying three sets of challenges:

- (i) balancing the economic and humanistic perspectives of the arts;
- (ii) importing foreign arts talent and exporting local talents; and
- (iii) globalising local practices and mindsets in accordance with international norms.

These three challenges will form a basis for the following discussion as parallel and related ideas are raised by other scholars who researched on national identity and the cultural development of Singapore (Brown, 1998; Kong, 2000; Ooi, 2003; Wee, 2002b).



*Balancing the economic and humanistic perspectives of the arts*

Kong (2000) highlights the possible conflict between the social and cultural development priorities as envisaged by art practitioners as opposed to economic priorities as embodied in Singapore's cultural economic policies. In her research study, Kong conducts interviews with a range of arts practitioners such as playwrights, directors, actors/actresses and dancers so as to explore their reception and attempts to negotiate state policies. While the major motivation behind Singapore's cultural policy is economic, arts practitioners remain critical of the state's interpretation of Singapore as a regional centre for the arts, as "providing the 'hardware' (infrastructure and facilities) without concomitant attention to the 'software' (creative development)... is deemed regressive for the development of local/indigenous arts" (ibid, p. 419).

A similar argument is put forth by Chang (2000) as he observes that a fine balance between the economic perspective on the arts and a humanistic perspective remains difficult to sustain. For example, the construction of mega structures like the Esplanade<sup>2</sup> to house blockbuster performing arts events rather than accommodating smaller scale, local, experimental and non-profit productions, shows that the priority is for arts infrastructure development over local human talent. Such an overemphasis on the economic/global city perspective is seen as contrary to the government's aim at creating a culturally sensitive and gracious people (p. 821-823).

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<sup>2</sup> Esplanade – theatres on the Bay was officially opened on 12 October 2002 which aims to be a performing arts centre for diverse audiences. Its programme encompasses music, dance, theatre and visual arts, with a special emphasis on Asian culture.

In examining the recent development of Singapore's arts scene, Wee (2002b) observes that the Singapore government's current vision for a 'global city for the arts' is in sharp contrast to its utilitarian and instrumental-rationalist policy in the 1960s and 1970s, which has shaped the general mindset of Singaporeans till today. While the creative possibilities for arts practitioners increased with globalisation and development of an arts market in Singapore, Wee states that the danger of "substituting aesthetic and cultural values with commercial values subject to market place is real, especially so in a society in which these values are still very little understood" (p. 232). He highlights the connection between the arts and the ongoing formation of a national cultural identity in the arts scene, with particular reference to English-language theatre, and points out the misconception that the arts can flourish if commercial utility were to be the only driving force without the provision for 'a protected space' where they can develop. Wee argues that Singapore's own history of pragmatic economic instrumentalism remained the major stumbling block for the vision of 'the global city of the arts' and there would still be a distance to be traversed "before the arts can flourish and be an effective part of the symbolic life of the city-state, a realm that should not be wholly commercialised" (ibid, p. 235).

### *Importing foreign art talent and exporting local talents*

The second challenge that Singapore faced is to balance the import of foreign artistic talent with the export of local talent. This can be seen in the import of foreign mega-events with the intention of attracting investment and as part of cultural tourism. Some examples include blockbuster museum shows, featuring works from the Guggenheim;



mega-events like Tresors (an art and antique fair) and popular concerts by Michael Jackson and Rod Stewart. Despite the success of such events from an economic angle, importing foreign productions wholesale to the city without any local involvement gives Singapore the image of a 'borrowed city for the arts' (Chang, 2000, p. 825-826).

This has led to the recognition of the importance of training locals and gradually refocusing on raising the standards of local artistic production. Chang (ibid) cites the downscaling of SAM's foreign blockbuster exhibitions to an emphasis on local/national and Southeast Asian art as an example of ensuring the arts calendar has both an international and indigenous flavor.

In the area of exporting local talents, the state faces the difficulty of showcasing Singaporean talents to the world. This is exemplified by the case of a handful of successful musicians on the world stage, whose identities as Singaporeans are obscured. It raises the question about the definition of 'Singaporean' and 'local' and whether it is possible to consider a 'cosmopolitan' as 'Singaporean' (ibid; p. 827).

Wee also observes that while the Singapore government's current policy holds up the arts as a realm that can provide cultural ballast to the nation and as a way of anchoring national identity, the state voluntarily subjects its people to further globalisation (Wee 2002, p. 233). This can be seen as the strategy of globalisation and regionalisation as a means of maintaining and extending Singapore's economy brought up by Kong's (2000) research.



*Globalising local practices and mindsets in accordance with international norms*

The third challenge that Singapore faced is balancing global trends with local/national values in realising the aspiration of 'global city of the arts' status.

Excessive rules and regulations prohibit creative people and activities, while fines and self-censorship lead to safe and predictable art forms. This contrasts markedly with the free and easy atmosphere prevalent in other arts cities like Montreal and Edinburgh (Chang, 2000, p. 828).

Chang recognizes that the need for the government to liberalise rules and regulations to meet 'international norms' is not limited to the policy level. He places emphasis on 'globalising' local mindsets as the anti-social behaviour of Singaporean audience at concerts, art performances and cultural festivals are deemed as an obstacle for the country's aspiration to 'global city of the arts' status (ibid).

On the one hand, Chang raises the point that restrictive rules harm Singapore's image as an arts and entertainment hub. On the other hand, there are fears that simply importing foreign practices might lead to a phenomenon of 'hollowed-out global cities' with all the trappings of a world class infrastructure but devoid of value and meaning to local communities (ibid, p. 821).

Brown (1998) uses the term 'reactive nationalism' in describing the Singapore state's response to globalisation, in which "myths of cultural harmony and symbols of state modernity have been counterposed to depictions of 'Western' society as being culturally

and politically decayed” (p. 42). By depicting aspects of globalisation as a threat to indigenous identity and culture, the Singapore government has initiated a nationalist ideology which invents and propagates myths and symbols of a Singaporean identity in relation to the Western other. Brown argues that the majority of the Singaporean society is responsive to the nationalist propaganda due to the widespread identity crisis generated by rapid modernisation and globalisation, resulting in feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. In particular, individuals become more susceptible to images of the kinship community, both in the forms of appeals to ethnic solidarity and to nationalism (ibid).

The practice of a hyphenated identity (national-ethnic) was adopted by the Singapore government from the early 1980s, reflecting the ideology of multiracialism/multiculturalism and the construction of a national identity. The policy is seen as a continuation of the colonial practice of ascriptive ethnicity in which every Singaporean is also classified as Chinese, Malay, Indian, or Other. The revitalisation of ethnicity was also part of a broader strategy in countering what the government perceived as the deculturalisation of its population and served to appease and contain ethnic demands, thereby contributing to the nation-building process (Hill & Lian, 1995, p. 5).

This statist social engineering approach which formed the basis for nation-building is present in the cultural policy-making in Singapore observed by Wee (2002b). As mentioned earlier, he considers “how the arts have to a fair degree been concerned with issues of identity, multiculturalism, cultural heritage, and history as a reaction to the Singapore state’s top-down approach to economic orientation, along with an intensive



modernization of society that allowed little space for cultural issues” (p.222) . As public policies about national identity assume that there are naturally defined ethnic groups, and each person belongs to only one of them, Tamney (1996, p. 189) argues that the local/official interpretation of ‘multiculturalism’, based on a four-culture framework (Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others) has become more of an exercise to keep the different communities peacefully apart than to draw them dynamically together .

The Singapore government’s penchant for central planning leads to the state’s dominating approach to the arts. Although the last decade witnessed a gradual opening up of the art scene in Singapore, the government continues to reserve their power to determine whether any particular form of expression counts as art. It has been several years since performance art became *de facto* banned art forms as the state agencies cease to consider requests to fund such art forms entirely and refused to allow such items to appear in any programmes they organised (George, 2000, p. 146; Kuo, 1999).

This raised the issue of artistic freedom in the context of a national art museum, in which self-censorship becomes a deeply entrenched phenomenon. The censorship incident in the 1998 ‘Artists’ Regional Exchange 5’ exhibition in SAM is a case in point. The exhibition brought together 15 invited artists from Singapore, Hong Kong and Australia in a residency project aimed at promoting cultural exchange and encouraging artists’ networks. The artworks by a Hong Kong artist, depicting local political figures in the style of ‘cartoon caricatures’ were removed by museum officials prior to the exhibition opening on the grounds of ‘insensitivity’ to the cultural context of the exhibit’s venue. One of the images depicted Lee Kuan Yew, then Singapore’s Senior Minister patting



Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's back, while he was spraying pesticides in the form of the word 'penalties' on the 'Lee Garden'. That SAM has yet to embrace humorous political art as a valid and acceptable art form remains a contentious issue (Lee, 1999; Lenzi, 1999).

Some local art professionals and academics have proposed an 'open-ended' and global approach to cultural and artistic development rather than a single authoritative approach (e.g. Kuo, 1998; K.-W. Kwok, 1993). This is because "a lively culture cannot be created by decree. It must depend upon the participation of individuals, free to express themselves in their search for the meaning of life" (Jeyaretnam, 1994, p. 94). Kuo (*ibid*) argues for the necessary empowerment of the arts community in order for creativity to truly flourish. One of the major concerns for contemporary artists has been the question of what constitutes art. Artistic freedom means "allowing artists to explore this question without suddenly having arts' cloak torn from their shoulders" (Jeyaretnam, 2000, p. ix).

### *Art Museum and Identity issues*

Apart from discourse about local/national and global identities at the cultural policy level, researchers have also examined the relationship between local/national and regional identities in the context of Singapore's national museums. To draw upon the discussion about national identity as a construct, it can be argued that the conceptualizations of regions and regionness are fundamentally human constructs (Rajah, 1999). Furthermore, Rajah points out the conceptual weakness of the unity-in-diversity paradigm in the depiction of Southeast Asia as a region. He questions the attempt to identify Southeast

Asian as a region in terms of cultural characteristics deriving from physical geographical determinants (p. 44-46). Not only are the variations and differences among Southeast Asian countries more complex than previously imagined, he argues that there is a lack of human, empirical experience of what it means to be part of a 'region'.

In Ooi's (2003) research study, the 'identity stories' created in three national museums (Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore Art Museum and Singapore History Museum) are analysed through an examination of official documents and interviews with top officials in the National Heritage Board and Singapore Tourism Board. At the macro level of official discourse, Ooi maintains that SAM's efforts in asserting Singapore as South-East Asian and as an art centre of the region proves difficult as ethnic closeness is more imagined than real. That SAM borrows the political formation of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in its construction of Southeast Asia as an 'aesthetic region' despite its heterogeneous backdrop is a case in point. Ooi (ibid: 85-86) problematises the construction of such an aesthetic region as:

- Politically sensitive due to the issue of sovereignty and national property rights and SAM's actions could be perceived as signs of Singaporean cultural imperialism by other South-east Asian countries;
- Individual countries would want to keep their national art treasures at home rather than loan them to SAM for their exhibitions;
- Southeast Asian art as a genre has yet to be established as the Southeast Asian nations are very different socially and culturally. Although SAM employs a



harmony-in-diversity strategy to affirm Southeast Asia as a legitimate art entity, the vision is difficult to maintain;

- Local players questioned if resources should be used to assert a Southeast Asian identity, rather than a Singaporean one.

The challenge to expand Singaporean identities beyond the island state brings forth the tension that exists between local/national and regional, between regional and global. Despite the discourses of intricate regional links, the fixity of contemporary state boundaries makes it difficult for SAM to acquire exhibits 'to reify their stories'. Instead, such discourses "are invoked only for the purpose of packaging museum products" (Ooi, *ibid*, p. 88). While it is one thing for the Museum to claim a Southeast-Asian identity, it is another thing for it to be established and maintained. At the individual level, how people may conceptualise local/national, regional and global art is also another matter; how the stories are received and accepted may be quite different (*ibid*, p. 87-88).

Here, the argument about state boundaries in Southeast Asia relates back to the views of Barth and Anderson about markers and boundaries as discussed in 2.1.1. Markers and boundaries are constantly created to differentiate one group from the other and is a defining aspect of 'national identity'. Although Ooi (2003) argues that 'Southeast Asia' as an aesthetic region is fictitiously constructed by SAM, he does not take into account that the 'imagined communities' are more 'real' than the reality – or can be made so, due to the constant unnoticed reinforcement in everyday life which Billig (1995) termed 'banal nationalism'. At the same time, this brings us back to Brown's (1998) observation



that the majority of the Singaporean society is responsive to the appeals to ethnic closeness and images of kinship community.

From the above research studies, it is evident that Singapore has taken on the concept of nation-state and the discourse about tradition and heritage, which could be traced back to concepts of identity markers discussed in earlier sections. From the perspective of the government leaders, the arts and cultural policy are clearly linked to wealth creation and employment potential. In these terms, artistic development is treated as instrumental in improving technology and industrial development in the country. From the standpoint of the individual, however, this raises a concern about the economic worth of the arts overshadowing the values of the arts for intrinsic reasons and for social, cultural, spiritual and psychological objectives. This is a common argument seen in the research on Singapore's policy on the development of culture and the arts.

## **2.2 The Educational Role of Art Museum**

To understand the educational role of the art museum, this section will address the principles of museum education and then relate them to the art museum context, with emphasis on the role of communication in the educational processes.

The educational role of museums has evolved and broadened to encompass audiences of all ages and is delivered through an array of structured or informal activities, ranging from a combination of events, exhibitions and publications to lectures, films, workshops, concerts, mobile buses and so on (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994, pp. 141-142).

Theories and practices in museum and gallery education relating to the learning requirements for school children and the public show that, over the years, the educational role of the museum has become more reflexive, self-aware and integrated with the core identity of conservation, scholarship and display, though this varies from institution to institution and from country to country.

At the policy level, Hooper-Greenhill (ibid, p. 142) identifies three dilemmas for museums in Britain which are of relevance to the present study:

- (i) The first focused on how museum education is understood. She questions if the role of education is understood holistically and if it is integrated as a major mission of the museum, and whether this objective is enabled through the provision of adequate resources.
- (ii) The second concerned the achievement of the educational role through the museums' programmes such as events, exhibitions, educational materials or outreach work which are targeted at a range of audiences.
- (iii) The third dilemma is about funding of educational posts and their structuring into the museums.

### **2.2.1 Museum Education and Communication**

Lumley (1988, 15) argues that "the notion of the museum as a collection for scholarly use has been largely replaced by the idea of the museum as a means of communication". Generally speaking, within the educational role more audience-driven programmes are developed to cater to perceived visitors' needs. This has happened in parallel with the

broad shifts in learning theory and practice (Mason, 2005). In particular, the constructivist educational theory which argues that any discussion of teaching and learning needs to focus on the learner's needs rather than the subject to be learned has been applied to the understanding of the educational role of museums. For museums, constructivism translates to the focus on how visitors actively construct their own meanings rather than emphasise on the content of the museum (G. E Hein, 1999, p. 78).

A significant impact on museum displays can be seen in the expectations for museums to discover and respond to the public's demands rather than simply tell the public what curators think they need to know. A paradigm shift is particularly evident in the move from didactic delivery, based on the monolithic meta-narratives of modernist knowledge, to a more audience engaging, actively constructivist and diverse approach to knowing (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999b, p. xi).

Kelly (1986, cited in G. MacDonald, 1987, p. 213) argues that in an information society, people draw their status from the experiences they have and the information they control, rather than the wealth objects they possess. Hence, museum visitors attend quality shows for their information, and blockbusters for the experience, which they can share with others. Visitors now want 'experiential' exhibits where the object will not be so separated from the viewer. As a consequence, proliferations of open-air museums and children's museums have been established, in which direct contact with the exhibited objects is encouraged among the visitors. To follow this line of argument, successful educational programmes are the ones that are underpinned by an understanding of the needs of learners of different ages, which utilise different perceptions and ways of representing the



world (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999b, p. 21). The provision for a diversity of programmes and the need for regular review and assessment are seen as crucial to ensure that the museum curriculum stays abreast of these global developments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As argued by Duncan (1991, 1995b) museums are not neutral sites but are implicated in the construction of knowledge, and we need to consider 'museum pedagogy' in terms of different ideas and values that shaped their formation and functioning. Hooper-Greenhill (2000b) maintains that 'museum pedagogy' can be defined and analysed in relation to both content and style:

Pedagogic content refers to what is said, or the subject matter of teaching; in museums this means the statements made by the museum with its collections, the subject-matter of the permanent displays or the temporary exhibitions. Pedagogic style refers to the way in which something is said, or the teaching method; in museums this refers to the style of communication in displays, which includes the way the objects are used or placed, the way the text is written, the provision within the exhibition for various forms of sensory engagement (including visual, tactile, auditory senses), the use of light and colour, the use of space and so on (p.5).

A 'museum pedagogy' is structured firstly through the narratives constructed by museum displays and secondly through the methods used to communicate these narratives. Museum pedagogy produces "a visual environment for learning where visitors deploy their own interpretive strategies and repertoires" (ibid, p. 3). The pedagogic functions of museums can therefore be analysed by reviewing both what is said, and how it is said.

Central to the notion of 'museum pedagogy' is how museums communicate to their visitors and the ways visitors construct and interpret meanings in museums. As exhibitions form the basic museum experience for a vast majority of visitors, it is pertinent to look at the very act of creating an exhibit to understand the communication process. Kaplan (1995, p. 39) notes that "exhibitions originate with a curator or curatorial team responsible for the concept and content. They require architects, designers, museum craftsmen and various staff people to give ideas tangible form in three-dimensional space. The success of an exhibition is ultimately decided by the public, their attendance and word-of-mouth news of it".

Exhibits are not simply displays as they express message about objects and the worlds from which they came. The very act of creating an exhibit is thus subject to the same conditions and limitations that apply to the production of knowledge. As Forster-Hahn (1995) aptly states:

Museums, exhibitions, and above all universal expositions provided a unique public arena in which to communicate specifically structured messages (...) As visual narratives of mental constructs, be it of nationalist, modernist, or any other ideology, they often crystallize specific historic moments by imprinting images in the public mind that are more powerful than texts (p.179).

Kaplan (1995) further develops the idea of exhibitions as communicative media by stating that museums are "political arenas in which the power of dominant groups is asserted, and where it may be challenged by emerging groups" (p. 5).

Museums can be seen as mass communicators and interpersonal communicators. The former involves a one-way process, a single message source with a large group of receivers (the examples are through exhibitions, publications, advertisement and videos), while the latter is characterised by face-to-face communication, like direct contact between curator and inquirer, and some aspects of the educational work where museum teachers work directly with groups (Black, 2005; Hooper-Greenhill, 1995, p. 6).

The one-way process of communication echoes the discussion of Anderson's 'print capitalism' in that it facilitates the ability of individual to imagine themselves as members of a community as large as a nation. Whereas Anderson refers mostly to the mass information of newspapers and books, we can see that the presentation of exhibitions to the mass of the public without differentiation in some museum modes of communication also present a common message for all in the same way.

The two approaches in museum communication as 'mass communicators' and 'interpersonal communicators' are evident in the exhibition and educational programmes of SAM as we shall see in the official discourse in Chapter 4 and the informants' discourse in Chapter 5



### 2.2.2 The Aesthetic Museum versus the Public Art Museum

This section will look at the historical and structural tensions of art museums which have continued to affect the educative function in the contemporary context. Rice (1995) discusses the historic tensions of art museums in the early 1900s in the U.S.A and outlines the traditional conflict between an aesthetic position – that art speaks for itself – and a rationalist one – that museums are places for the transmission of knowledge, which is of relevance to the educational role.

#### *The Aesthetic Museum*

The model of the ‘aesthetic museum’ envisioned the art museum as a Temple, where learning was equated to the individual worship of beauty and the idea of unmediated encounter with art.

Duncan (1991) studies the aesthetic philosophy of art museums and suggests that museums make important statements about the ‘spiritual heritage of the nation’. She argues that “art museums do not simply resemble temples architecturally; they work like temples, shrines, and other such monuments” by fulfilling their declared purposes of preservation and display of art objects as a museum while carrying out broad, sometimes less obvious political and ideological tasks. The museum environment has the power to organise the visitor’s experience in ritual scenarios and through them, communicate and affirm ideas, values and identities. This could be seen in the case of the Louvre’s transformation from royal collection to public museum when it presented itself as manifesting aesthetic ideals shared by civilised Europeans. The meaning of objects which were once displays of material wealth and social status were transformed as displays of

spiritual wealth (p.90-91). The concept of the aesthetic museum then emphasised the sole purpose of the art museum in the presentation of art works as objects of 'aesthetic contemplation' and not as illustrative of historical or archaeological information (Duncan, 1995b, p. 16).

Implicit in the aesthetic model of the museum is the value system and hierarchy of the roles of preservation and exhibition over the functions of education. Such sentiments are captured in the writing of Sherman Lee, director of The Cleveland Museum of Art in the early 1970s:

In the world of visual images (...) the museum is the primary source for education. Merely by existing – by preserving and exhibiting works of art – it is educational in the broadest and best sense, though it never utters a sound or prints a word (cited in Rice, 1995, p. 15).

The belief that museums have merely to display objects to be educational is now seen as a particular ideology which upholds the structuring of authority. Referring to the context of museums in the U.S.A, McClellan (2003, p. 23) argues that an equilibrium between the goals of collection and interpretation (education) remained difficult to establish owing to the imbalanced power structure within the museum. While museum collectors and directors continue to uphold elite standards inherited from Europe, educators are mindful of serving a broad public audience.

The challenges faced by educators in developing the educational function of art museums have been discussed by researchers in museum education. Hooper-Greenhill (1999a, p. 263) asserts that "most art museums limit the mode of learning to looking and reading, a physically passive yet intellectually demanding form of learning" tend to disadvantage

visitors who are more comfortable 'learning in more active and concrete modes'. Hein (2000, p. 30) notes that art museums usually have a quiet air which may be appropriate for individual contemplation of artworks but discourages active debate and verbal interaction – an essential aspect of the learning process among visitors. This prompted him to suggest that museums should provide rooms fitted out with reference materials and reproductions which would encourage dialogue. These ideas will be of relevance when we look at the educational function of the museum in the official discourse and informants' discourse in the later chapters.

### *Public Art Museum*

The Public Art Museum model envisaged the museum as a library, in which the main function is to 'entertain' and 'instruct'. This has led to an active policy of loaning objects to schools and civic groups, and of establishing storefront museums in communities and factories (Rice, 1995, p.17).

The emphasis on the museum's responsibility as a public institution, answerable to the community means that the collection is being publicly owned and should be meaningful to the visitor. Whitehead (2008, pp. 97-98) cites the 'Art on Tyneside' as an example of people-focussed art museum which attempts "to reconcile populism, museum display and social histories of art". Cameron (2004) suggests the idea of bringing the 'forum' inside the temple of art to encourage experimentation and new thoughts in the arts and humanities (pg. 67-69). McIntyre (2006, p. 16) makes a similar point about advocating



museums as a forum for “sharing stories, for exchanging information about different cultures and for creating linkages between people”.

Concomitant to this discussion is the museums’ relentless pursuit of audiences, in the use of the singular ‘public’ in their educational programmes. Yet, McClellan (2003) points out that “the public for art is diverse and divided by interests and levels of knowledge, confidence and class, not to mention race, ethnicity, and gender” (p.1). Similarly, Hooper-Greenhill (2000a, p. 29) argues that the notion of an abstract mythical body ‘the general public’ impoverishes our view of the characteristics, agendas and desires of museum visitors. As the visitors of museums are not a uniform group, the museum curriculum should address differentiated audiences through research on their needs. At present, few art museum curators are responsive to the fact that exhibitions should be fundamentally interpretive. The problem lies in the value systems in the art museum as the priorities for the selection and presentation of material is determined by the curatorial elite (Cameron, 2004, p. 66). A similar argument is put forth by Zolberg (1994) as she notes that visitors often believed that the museum educator is the advocate of the visitor while the curator is the advocate of the artwork. She asserts that art museums continued to appeal to “artists, art historians, collectors and a well-educated public because they display ‘authentic works’” (p. 51) and further questions art museums’ desire to reach out to the uninitiated.

### 2.2.3 Education in Art Museums

As a consequence of the tensions outlined above, among the many roles that an art museum assumes, education faced increasing challenges. The first challenge deals with art museums as an elitist institution in society, largely inherited from the model of the 'aesthetic museum' discussed in the former section. The notion of 'cultural capital' developed by Bourdieu (1984) throws into relief a fundamental problem that art museums experienced in addressing the issue of widening public access: why do some people visit the art museum and other simply 'exclude' themselves from the opportunities provided?

#### *Cultural capital and the art museum public*

In their now classic study, *The Love of Art*, Bourdieu and Darbel (1969, trans. 1990) argue that works of art in art museums transmitted specialised messages, the decoding of which is learned at school or in the family. Hence, aesthetic appreciation is socially determined, with those who possess the competence to experience art feeling at home in the gallery or museum and knowing how to behave there. For those less well equipped, misunderstanding and confusion are inevitable. As such, the claims by art museums to be accessible to all is but "false generosity, since free entry is also optional entry, reserved for those who, equipped with the ability to appropriate works of art, have the privilege of making use of this freedom, and who thence find themselves legitimated in their privilege, that is, in their ownership of the means of appropriation of cultural goods ... and the institutional signs of cultural salvation" (ibid, p. 113).

The contribution of Bourdieu and Darbel to the present analysis is that they provide a useful starting point by placing museum visiting in its broader socio-political context. Emphasis is laid on the importance of individual socialisation, principally through family and school, as an explanatory factor. They are chiefly concerned with the theory of social reproduction, in which school and family are among the mechanisms whereby society ensures that inequalities are reproduced and maintained.

Bourdieu's arguments are important in illuminating the gap between what the museums claim to do and what they actually do. The notion of 'habitus' and 'cultural dispositions' of people who enjoy art help to explain why for certain groups in the society, museums are 'not for us'. Nonetheless, the theory remains insufficient to be fully applied to the Singaporean context. One has to note that Bourdieu's work tends to over-emphasise class distinctions to the exclusion of other explanatory factors. Moreover, his arguments are directed towards the situation as it existed in Europe in the mid-1960s and not all aspects are applicable to the contemporary Asian context. Another weakness of his analysis lies in his concern with oppressive aspects of museums and their role in social reproduction and the analysis does not adequately explain the current popularity of museums. Furthermore, his work only focuses on visitors with no information regarding deterrents to non-visitors (Merriman, 1997).

### *Commercialisation and marketisation in art museums*

The implication of Bourdieu's empirical study struck a chord among academics and museum professionals and caused a chorus of critique that art museums have reinforced



socio-economic distinctions rather than undermined them. As an effort to attract visitors who would not feel 'welcome' to the museum, recommendations to invest in shops, restaurants and other amenities were made. Related to these new developments is the spread of blockbuster exhibitions with the aim of increasing attendance and revenues. The introduction of market forces into the cultural sector raised the issue about short term commercial ambition versus long term audience development when "visitors became customers and populism descended into cynical marketing as museums and corporations both pursued exhibitions that would 'sell'" (McClellan, 2003, p. 33). This idea is related to Ooi's (2003) study in the Singaporean context that the discourses of local/national and regional ideas are invoked to package museum products.

The delivery of the educational function in an increasingly commercialised museum environment may affect the quality of the visitor's experience as 'a larger audience does not equal heightened interest' (ibid, p. 34). Furthermore, Worts (2003) pointedly expresses that "seeing art museums as instruments of cultural tourism, highbrow entertainment and economic engines is to fundamentally misunderstand the potential of art in living culture" (p. 227). This recalls the argument presented by Chang (2000) and Wee (2002) in 2.1.3 that overemphasis on the commercialisation of the arts might eclipse the intrinsic value and humanistic perspectives.

King (2007) offers a different angle in the discussion about the impact of marketisation on the educational role of the museum, with particular reference to museum-school relationships. He refers to "the growing client-service provider relationship between schools and museums" and suggests that the quality of museum programmes has improved due to museums' innovative response to changing market conditions. The

positive outcomes of marketisation of museum-school relationships include higher expenditures on school programming, a clear curriculum-linked programming, the positioning of museums as ongoing resources for teachers. However, longer-range programming with schools remains a challenge because it requires fundamental institutional changes and adaptability on both sides (p. 79-81).

### *Disjunction between curatorial and educational functions*

The growing gap between the curatorial and education department presented the third challenge for art museums in fulfilling their educational mission. In her discussion about the evolution of museum educational practices in Britain, Hooper-Greenhill (1994, pp. 137-138) argues that education is often seen as an adjunct function, subservient to the processes of collection, resulting in the limited input education staff has into policy making. The fundamental imbalance in the institution between the status of curators and that of educators results from the fact that curators are guardians of the treasure that the institution is structured to preserve rather than educators using that treasure in some pedagogical mode. In their dual missions, to preserve and to educate, art museums are locked into a value system that, despite claims to the contrary, continues to place preservation (and acquisition) firmly above education.

Such a phenomenon is also recognised by McClellan (2003) in the present U.S.A context:

...to the extent that curators are trained and hired to care for their collections (and the word 'curator' comes from *curare*, to care), they are drawn away from public service. Care for the public is left largely to



educators and volunteers who occupy a lower place in the museum hierarchy. Present in all public collections, these tendencies are especially pronounced in art museums where the objects collected are rare and valuable (p. 2).

Another aspect of the curator's role that impedes the communicative role of art exhibitions lies in the area of scholarly research. For museum curators, the exhibition is the primary vehicle of scholarship, often leading to a lengthy publication or catalogue. Although the exhibitions serve to inform the museum public, the scholarly bias inherent in art exhibit planning may impede the understanding of the visiting public (Rice, 1995, p. 19). In the context of SAM, Leong (2005, p. 17) observes that curators' overuse of 'academic language' and curatorial jargon as part of the exhibition design tend to disempower ordinary viewers, i.e. to thwart understanding and autonomy of interpretation rather than promote understanding and interpretation of the artworks.

### **2.3 Implications**

This literature review has provided the theoretical framework for this study in understanding the notions of local/national (and regional) identities as human constructs. Inherent in the discourse about national identity is the belief in a shared past, present and future and that imagined unity could be reinforced through symbols, such as the invention of national flags and anthems. The majority of the research on museums and identity work, especially those studies conducted by Euro-American scholars tend to theorise the role of the art museum as a site that constitutes and constructs identities. This could be applied to the invention of national art in which collections, displays and exhibitions of museums are explicitly promoted as part of national cultural policy, as in the case of



Singapore. However, empirical studies that deal with the formation of identities in the art museum context remain scanty.

It is therefore the intention of this study to explore the role of art museums as markers of national identity through examining the policy and practices of the Singapore Art Museum at a macro level and the beliefs and theories of informants from the individuals' perspective.

The research on museum education is helpful to this study in locating the ideas about the communicative aspect of exhibition practices and the challenges faced by art museums in delivering their educative function.

Although the literature on art museum education and national identity is not well developed in the case of Asia, the research studies on Singapore have formed a basis for the discussion of both policy and individual perspectives. It is noted that studies conducted in the Singaporean context have utilised empirical data in the form of questionnaires and interviews in their analysis and are not merely abstract theories. This study aims to integrate the knowledge from the perspectives of museum education with that of the perspectives established by researchers in the context of Singapore's arts and cultural policy to understand the role of art museum education and the formation of identities.

## **CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Having addressed the theoretical issues in the subject area of this study in Chapter 2, this chapter will describe the research process and discuss issues pertaining to the research methodology of this study. In particular, the chapter comprises four sections that will:

- (i) describe, contextualise and justify the site of study and the choice of qualitative case study as a method,
- (ii) introduce the case of the key informants and issues of access and confidentiality,
- (iii) describe the procedure of data collection and analysis and discuss the rationale of using grounded theory techniques as a method for analysis of interviews with informants,
- (iv) explicate the stages involved when analyzing the data and the final writing up of the analysis.

### **3.1 The Research Process**

This inquiry focuses on the educational role of the art museum in constructing national (and regional) identities. The formulation of this research topic underwent a few stages of refinement as my initial interest was to investigate the ideology of the art museum and the role of contemporary art exhibitions in the representation of national identity.

The original focus stemmed from my interest in the literature on the 'culture and politics of display' from the disciplines of art history and anthropology which made explicit the notions that art museums, collections and exhibitions are products and agents of social

and political change (e.g. Karp & Lavine, 1991; Preziosi, 1995, 1996). In other words, I began with a specific hypothesis and attempted to prove two working assumptions: (i) that art museums function as 'identity-defining machines' (Duncan, 1995) for the nation-state; and (ii) that museums are purveyors of ideology and of a downward spread of knowledge to the public (Kaplan, 1996: 3).

As I delved into the literature on museology and museum education, I noted the way that art museums function today are derived from ideas that emerged in Europe during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and still command influence upon contemporary institutional operation and professional practice. In the previous chapter on literature review and analysis, I mentioned that Euro-American researchers argued that state-funded art museums that emerged in the modern nation-building era have remained as powerful sites in the formation of 'national identity'. It is therefore timely for a study to be conducted in an Asian site to investigate if such ideas could help illuminate our understanding beyond the Western contexts.

As I took a more focused view on the context of Singapore, I observed that the studies on Singapore's arts and cultural development, though they include empirical data tend to devote attention to policy issues at a macro level (Chang, 2000; Kong, 2000; Wee, 2002a). A study that uses empirical data and focuses also on the micro level will contribute to the existing research in Singapore's arts development in general and attempt to fill the gap in the literature on museum education in the local context. By taking into considerations



policy and individual perspectives, this study will be useful to both museum professionals and art educators for understanding the role of art museum education.

Two sources of knowledge guided the search for my questions: first, in my own professional career I had experienced the different perspectives about the role of art museum education. From the curatorial point of view, the fulfillment of the educational purposes is largely through scholarly research about the museum collection, resulting in exhibitions and publications. From the pedagogical perspective, museum educators often face the challenge to develop strategies to communicate the visual (exhibition) and textual (publication) materials to a diverse audience. My involvement in curriculum development work in the area of 'visual arts education in museums and galleries' for my teaching prompted me to search for new perspectives by linking the disciplines of art history, museology and museum education.

Second, through my reading of the literature on museum studies and museum education, I gained an interest in the discourse about museums as sites that contribute to the development of identities. Drawing upon my personal interests and professional experience, I formulated and refined the two main research questions:

- Can collections and exhibitions in art museums function as markers of national identities?
- What role should art museum education play in contributing to the understanding of national artistic heritage and thereby to national identity?

Issues to address will include the role of exhibitions, the role of art education service (for example with respect to servicing local schools). The questions will be addressed in terms

of what key informants in the art community believe and what should be the future roles and how these might differ from the official discourse.

As this study evolved from a theoretical based concern (the ideology of art museums) to an empirically based method (an investigation of the beliefs held in society about national identities and art museum education), it moved from the spectrum of hypothesis-testing to that of theory-building. Based on an understanding of the foundations underlying different research paradigms, I selected a qualitative approach because of the interpretive nature of the inquiry.

Merriam (1998, pp. 3-5) like others (e.g. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Hammersley, 1993; Mertens, 1998) distinguishes three orientations to educational research by linking them to different philosophical traditions based on the typology discussed by Carr and Kemmis (1986), namely positivist, interpretive and critical. While quantitative research is commonly linked to positivism, qualitative research could be traced to phenomenology, symbolic interaction, constructivism and critical social science. The following is a summary of Merriam's discussion (p. 3-5):

- (i) the *positivist* forms of research emphasise knowledge gained through scientific and experimental research as objective and quantifiable as 'reality' is perceived as stable, observable and measurable.
- (ii) the *interpretive* forms of research considers knowledge as gained from an inductive, hypothesis-or theory-generating mode of inquiry, based on the belief that 'multiple realities' are socially constructed by individuals.

(iii) the *critical* research orientation focuses on ideological critique of power, privilege, and oppression in educational practices, and draws upon Marxist philosophy, critical theory and feminist theory, which might encompass a strong participatory, action component.

In determining the methods and methodology for educational research, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) indicate that the principal concern lies in the range of approaches in the gathering of data “which are used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction” (p.44). Although the term ‘method’ has often been associated with the positivist model in which responses are elicited to predetermined questions, recording measurements and performing experiments, it is essential to extend the meaning to include methods of research associated with the interpretive paradigm, such as participant observation, role playing, non-directive interviewing, episodes and accounts.

It is however, erroneous to equate quantitative methods with the scientific paradigm and qualitative method with naturalistic paradigm even though there is a strong relationship (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) discuss how qualitative and quantitative scholars could involve different styles of research, different epistemologies and different forms of representation of addressing the same set of issues. However, positivist and postpositivist science traditions underlie both research paradigms. While positivists believe in a reality ‘out there’ to be studied and understood, postpositivists



argue that reality can only be approximated. These perspectives have led to different forms of representation, interpretation, trustworthiness and textual evaluation.

Qualitative researchers tend to use ethnographic prose, historical narratives, first-person accounts, still photographs, life histories, fictionalized “facts”, and biographical and autobiographical materials, among others. Quantitative researchers use mathematical models, statistical tables, and graphs, and they usually write about their research in impersonal, third-person prose (Denzin and Lincoln, *ibid*, p. 12).

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) affirm the complementary nature of both quantitative and qualitative approaches by referring to the views of Merton and Kendall writing already in 1946:

Social Scientists have come to abandon the spurious choice between qualitative and quantitative data: they are concerned rather with that combination of both which makes use of the most valuable features of each. The problem becomes one of determining at which points they should adopt the one, and at which the other, approach (Merton and Kendall, 1946, cited in *ibid*, p. 45).

As this study entails an exploration of beliefs about national and regional identities, an interpretive inquiry which consists of the main tenets of qualitative research – describing, understanding and explaining – will be useful to throw light on the abstract and complex concepts.

Merriam (2002) describes the qualitative study as an examination of a specific phenomenon that is characterized by the discovery of new relationships, concepts, and understandings. As the “key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that

meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” and that qualitative researchers are “interested in understanding what those interpretations are at a particular point in time and in a particular context” (p.4). She outlines the key characteristics that are common in interpretive qualitative designs and can be applied to the present study (p. 5-6):

- (i) Researchers strive to understand the meaning constructed by individuals about their world and their experiences. The intention of this study is to understand the beliefs about the formation of identities as experienced by the key informants in the art museum context.
- (ii) As the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis in this study, the advantage is that I can stay responsive and adaptive in the process of collecting and analysing data. However, the human instrument has short comings and biases which should be identified and monitored rather than attempting to eliminate these biases or subjectivities. This will be of relevance in the discussion of validity and reliability of the case in the later sections.
- (iii) Researchers often undertake qualitative study due to the lack of theory or the inadequacy of existing theory to explain a phenomenon. This observation can be applied to the Singapore context as the theoretical perspectives on museum and identity work are mainly derived from research in the Euro-American context, which have not been addressed in an Asian site as discussed earlier.
- (iv) The product of qualitative inquiry is richly descriptive with words and pictures rather than numbers to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon. In the following chapters, I will present a description of the context, data in the



forms of documentary analysis and participant interviews' excerpts to contribute to the analysis and in support of the findings of the study.

### *Role of researcher*

My own purposes, practices and relationships as a researcher evolved through my interactions with the context in which I was located. In the course of the research process, I have attempted to develop the 'reflexive' stance, where the researcher engages in systematic inquiry, using the knowledge that is available to her to make a case for the plausibility of her explanations, while acknowledging that they are neither infallible nor absolute (Gomm, Hammersley, & Forster, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The knowledge Hammersley and Atkinson refer to here may well include knowledge of researcher's own implicit theories and beliefs of the context under study and of the interaction between the two.

This brings to mind the notion of a 'stranger' discussed by Simmel (1908/1971) in the union of closeness and remoteness as individuals' membership within a group involves both being outside it and confronting it. When applied to the research context, a contrasting view can be found in the analogy of a 'stranger' (Schutz, cited in Miles & Huberman, 1984), which points to a researcher who is not a member of the culture he/she wants to study but can understand a social situation better than someone who is already a part of it. Other researchers (e.g. Jules-Rosette, cited in Hammersley and Atkins, 1995) have argued that one must 'surrender' oneself to the situation under study to experience it as those who are in the situation naturally do. My personal experience as an immigrant



from Hong Kong working in Singapore allows me to maintain a distance in examining the context in this study while at the same time being close enough as a participant of its culture. These observations are crucial to the various stages of data collection, analysis and writing which will be addressed in the latter part of the chapter.

### **3.1.1 Qualitative Case Study**

In defining the characteristics of case study, it is “crucial to remember that what distinguishes a case study is principally the object which is to be explored, not the methodological orientation used in studying it” (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 316). The aim of the case study approach is to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon. Based on the discussions by various researchers (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 2000; Yin, 1989), the major characteristics of case study can be summarised as:

- it is descriptive, with the end product being a rich and vivid description of the phenomenon;
- it is also heuristic, meaning that previously unknown relationships and variables can be expected to emerge which may lead to a rethinking of the phenomenon;
- it is inductive, which means that, for the most part, case studies rely on inductive reasoning (logical conclusions based on the data). Upon examination of the data, generalisations, concepts or hypothesis emerge from the data grounded in the context.

In the process of defining a case, Hitchcock and Hughes (ibid, p. 319) discuss the various types of boundaries – temporal, geographical, organizational or institutional – to be

drawn around the case. Boundaries can also be defined by the characteristics of individuals and groups involved as well as the role of functions of participants.

Stake (2005, pp. 445-446) identifies three types of case study: intrinsic, instrumental and multiple or collective case study. An intrinsic case study is undertaken to gain a better understanding of a particular case, and not to come to understand some abstract construct or generic phenomenon. The purpose of the instrumental case study is to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalisation and the case itself is of secondary interest. The multiple case study is considered as an extended instrumental study in which a number of cases are studied jointly to investigate a phenomenon, population or general condition.

In identifying the boundaries for the present study, it is apparent that geographical (Singapore) and institutional (Singapore Art Museum) boundaries helped to define the nature and scope of the case. When I reflected upon Stake's (ibid) discussion about the intrinsic versus instrumental interests, it is possible to view this study as encompassing both aspects. There was a development from an 'intrinsic interest' in the case of SAM itself by exploring the beliefs held in the Singapore society about the construction of local/national identities to an 'instrumental interest' in the case in helping me understand the concepts of identity in the larger contexts of art museum education. SAM is therefore taken as a case study because it is the only national museum and has declared the purpose of creating and reinforcing national identity in its mission statement.

The above discussion provides a framework for understanding about the characteristics of the case study approach and is useful for generating the appropriate questions for my research. To encompass the two main interests (both intrinsic and instrumental), it entails a study of the formal discourse at the policy level as well as individuals' experiences in the operationalisation of the concepts of various identities. The following guiding questions were developed as a means to investigate the case being studied:

- What is SAM currently doing in helping the public understand about local/national visual arts development and local/national identity?
- What do informants think the art museum is doing in promoting local/national art and local/national identity?
- Can and should art museum education foster local/national art as a feature of local/national identities in museum context?

With respect to data collection in a case study, Yin (1994, pp. 78-79) recommends the use of multiple sources of evidence and identifies six major sources: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts.

With reference to Yin's case study protocol, the sources of primary data of the present study include:

- (i) interviews of key informants: an interview schedule was developed relating to the two research questions and the specific issues they embody, as presented at the beginning of this chapter. The interview questions involved general orientation questions and then specific questions corresponding to the specific issues in the research questions.

General Orientation Questions:

To what extent do you think that the Singapore Art Museum has been fulfilling its mission?



Over the years, do you think SAM helps you/public understand the visual arts development in Singapore through the exhibitions?

Questions on Local/National Art:

What are your views about the permanent collection in SAM? Do you think there are sufficient works in the SAM collection to represent contemporary local artists?

Do you have any comments about the exhibitions held in SAM (with reference to Singapore art and contemporary Southeast Asian art)?

To what extent do you think that SAM's programmes 'promote' local arts successfully reach out to public? e.g. Community & Outreach programme, traveling exhibitions, projects with local libraries, Nokia Singapore Art, Venice Biennale

Questions on education services:

Could you comment on the variety and sufficiency of educational programmes offered by SAM to schools/public in the area of Singapore contemporary art? What is the strategy of SAM in terms of art educational programmes? i.e. any 3-year plan or 5 yr plan etc.

What role should SAM play in creating awareness among school children & the public about the local/national art in Singapore?

Question on the specific identity concept:

Do you think SAM propagate a particular notion about Singapore's national / local identity'?

Question on future roles:

What do you think should be the future directions for SAM in the promotion of local art?

- (ii) documentary information, including archival materials: government publications, policy documents, SAM's publications (including exhibition catalogues, newsletters, educational brochures and web-based materials), ministers' speeches,

press releases and newspaper clippings (Appendix B: List of Documents for Analysis of Official Discourse).

(iii) analysis of exhibitions through visits to SAM.

Primary data obtained are supplemented with secondary data drawn from literature on national identity, museum studies and museum education. The rationale for triangulation or the use of multiple sources of evidence is to help promote validity of the case (ibid, p. 91-92). This will be addressed in the next section 3.1.2

Through the intensive and in-depth investigative nature of the case study approach, it is possible to concentrate on a single entity (the case) and arrive at an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon. It is also the focus on a single unit of analysis that sets case study apart from other types of qualitative research and makes it possible to combine with other types of studies (Merriam, 2002, p. 8). This can be applied to the present study as grounded theory methods were used in the collection and analysis of data as we shall see below.

Yin (1989, p. 57) states that “each individual case study consists of a ‘whole’ study, in which convergent evidence is sought regarding the facts and conclusions for the case; each case’s conclusions are then considered to be the information needing replication by other individual cases”. He asserts that single cases can provide an opportunity to take an in-depth look at a phenomenon and the thinking and perceptions within it. Miles and Huberman (1994) state that multiple cases do not represent a larger universe but allow one to bring in different perspectives and layers of meanings to illuminate the theory building process.

The traditional prejudice against case study approach is the concern that it provides little basis for scientific generalisation. Yin (1994) argues that case studies are generalisable to 'theoretical propositions' rather than to populations or universes. This is similar to experiments which do not represent a 'sample' and the researcher's aim is "to expand and generalise theories (analytical generalisation) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalisation)" (p.10), and a similar view is taken by Gomm, Hammersley and Foster (2000).

As the above discussion suggests, the unique case study is not to identify what is universally applicable, but to point out possibilities and alternatives, which may be tested in different contexts. Referring to research conducted in art museum education contexts, the strength of case studies and in-depth reports lies in the presentation of a range of perspectives while opening up "the realm of possibilities across the boundaries of particular institutions, places and research-based practices in a way that stimulates further development and international collaboration among gallery and museum educators" (Xanthoudaki et al., 2003, p. 12).

### **3.1.2 Credibility and Trustworthiness**

The issues of validity and reliability are essential in all types of research study and can be applied to both quantitative and qualitative research. In conventional terms, validity can be classified into two main principles of internal validity and external validity. Internal validity seeks to demonstrate that the explanation of a set of data which a research study provides can be sustained by the data and is concerned with accuracy. External validity refers to the degree to which the results can be generalised to the wider populations or



situations. Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated (Cohen et al., 2000, pp. 105-109).

The issue of generalisation is problematic in the qualitative case study as discussed in 3.1.1. In addressing the issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research, it is pertinent to draw upon the discussion by Lincoln and Guba (1985) about naturalistic inquiry. These writers posit that 'trustworthiness' is essential in establishing the worth of a research study, which involves four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Below is a summary based upon the work of Miles and Huberman (1994, pp. 277-280) in their paring of traditional terms with those proposed as more viable alternatives for assessing 'trustworthiness':

- (i) Credibility/ Internal Validity focuses on researchers' confidence in the 'truth value' of their findings.
- (ii) Transferability/ External validity aims to show that the findings have applicability in other contexts.
- (iii) Dependability/Reliability concerns with the consistency of the findings and that the findings are consistent and could be repeated.
- (iv) Conformability/Objectivity is a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest.

In the process of enabling 'trustworthiness' in this study, various strategies were used to address the above criteria. These include triangulation, audit trail, researcher's reflexivity and thick description, as illustrated in a summary table in Fig. 3.1.

The use of triangulation was a key strategy in this study to compare and contrast the data to see the difference between policy and practice. First, data were triangulated within the policy analysis by referring to different sources (official documents, speeches, websites and exhibition texts, etc). Second, data from interviews was triangulated within the analysis of practice by referring to different informants in various positions within the art community.

Another way to help with the validity of data analysis and assure 'conformability' of findings is by 'getting feedback from informants' (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 275). This is based on the rights of informants to know about the findings and is related to the issue of 'access', which will be addressed in the next section. Although I was the sole investigator in the study, efforts were made to take the data and interpretations back to the subjects to check for plausibility of findings.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) conceptualise reliability in qualitative research as 'dependability' since "there can be no validity without reliability (and thus no credibility without dependability), a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter" (p. 316). They caution that it is not the researcher's task to provide an index of transferability and suggest that researchers should provide 'thick description' as an appropriate base of information for potential appliers to make judgments about transferability (p. 317-8).

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Description</b>
Triangulation	Using multiple sources of data and collection methods to confirm emerging findings
Audit trail	A detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study
Researcher's reflexivity	Critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation.
Rich, thick descriptions	Providing enough description to contextualize the study such that readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situation matches the research context, and hence whether findings can be transferred.

Fig. 3.1 Strategies to promote 'trustworthiness' in the study (adapted from Merriam, 2002, p. 31, Table 2.2)

Ultimately, as qualitative research draw from the different assumptions about reality, to ensure validity and reliability in these studies requires the investigation to be done in an ethical manner (Merriam, 2002, p. 28-29). This will be discussed in relation to the collection of data processes in the following sections.

### 3.2 Key Informants

The background of the informants, their contexts, their conceptions of identity in the museum context raise important questions that qualify, challenge or complicate our current understanding of identity work in museums. The aim of informants' interviews was to generate qualitative data on the subjective perceptions, values and attitudes of practitioners underlying the relationship between local/national identity and the educational role in art museums, ultimately with a view to comparing with the analysis of policy.



The eight informants in this case study were purposefully selected to represent a range of perspectives within the art and art education community of Singapore. The use of 'theoretical sampling' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 cited in Strauss, 1987, pp. 38-39) in determining the choice of informants who are likely to develop the emerging ideas of the study is applied in this case. The selection of informants was made purposefully to identify "key informants", i.e. those most likely to embody the shared perceptions of the art community. The purpose of choosing a particular group of informants is to gain rich data, so that different people who played more than one role in the arts community, were included in the study. The key informants were museum professionals (both curatorial and educational positions), artist-educators at secondary school and tertiary level, art curriculum planner, curator/administrator of non-profit arts organisation. The different functions of the informants are show in Fig. 3.2.

<i>Informants</i>	<i>Organisations</i>	<i>Functions</i>
S1	Non-profit art organisation	Curatorial/educational /Administrative
S2	Tertiary Education	Artist -Educator/ Art education researcher
S3	Tertiary Education	Art criticism/ Cultural studies researcher
S4	Museum (former official)	Curatorial/ Administrative
S5	Secondary Education	Artist-educator / Art curriculum planner
S6	Museum	Curatorial/ Educational / Administrative
S7	Independent artist	Artist / Art Educator
S8	Museum	Educational/Art Curriculum planner

Fig. 3.2 Informants and their different functions

The focus of the research is on the views and theories of the art community and how they think the national policy is being implemented rather than the views of the target audiences. It was decided therefore not to interview other groups such as visitors.

On the other hand, I was aware that the national policy might be analysed both by document analysis and also by interviewing people in authority, especially the Director. He however refused to be interviewed although some of his writings were included in the document analysis.

### **3.2.1 Access**

My access to the art community was gained through my teaching position at a University Art Education department in Singapore and my on-going collaborations with museum educators in developing resources for teacher-education. However, I encountered some problems in obtaining approval to interview museum professionals as there was a case that the negotiations took almost four months. This is related to the issue of 'gatekeepers' of formal organisations in which access has to be negotiated in the form of official permission (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 63). As SAM is a government organisation, it also raises the question about interviewing museum officials who are currently in office versus those who have left the Museum. The inclusion of government officials as respondents is deemed to be a less effective strategy than to focus on those who have left office as they are much more likely to feel free to provide inside information (ibid, p. 138). This study was, in line with this view, able to involve informants who were former staff of the Art Museum as well as officials currently in service to help gain multiple perspectives of the subject. It is important to note that there

is only one main person responsible for the educational curriculum in SAM although the curator has a role to play. From the different perspectives obtained from a number of informants, both insiders and outsiders points of view provide rich data for analysis and also help to alleviate the issue of bias among informants.

As mentioned earlier, the rights of informants to know about the findings is related to the issue of access. I made it clear to informants that the findings would be made known to them as it is important to keep an open channel of communication and feedback findings to informants was used as a precondition for access (Stake, 1976 cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 275).

### **3.2.2 Informed Consent**

Informants were informed of the purpose of research and participated in the research voluntarily. Permission was also granted to the researcher to analyse and use the data for academic purposes, including publications. Informed consent is considered essential in the research process as weak consent could affect the quality of study when informants try to protect themselves in a mistrusted relationship. However, truly informed consent is impossible in qualitative studies as events in the field and the researcher's actions cannot be anticipated (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 291).

As I had direct contact with all the informants, I could offer explanations to them about the purpose and aims of the study but it was not possible to fully predict the directions of the research process which made it difficult for the informants to fully comprehend all the



ideas in advance. This is related to the issue of 'benefit, costs and reciprocity' as observed by Miles and Huberman (1994). They highlight that study participants can benefit from the research studies as they get to be listened to during interviews, which may in turn help them to gain insight or learning and contribute to improvement of their personal practice. However, research participants are seldom compensated in terms of the time spent beyond whatever else they are doing (ibid, 291-2).

### **3.2.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity**

The issues of confidentiality and anonymity are related to the ethical responsibilities of the researcher. Confidentiality refers to not disclosing what people say and this may apply to specific issues they raise in the course of an interview which they do not wish to have used even anonymously. Anonymity refers to ensuring that what is used as data cannot be traced to any specific person. At the outset of the study, I assured all the informants that they will not be identified as the source of any information by name, position or institutional affiliation. However, during the 'feedback from informants' about the analysis and findings of the study, two informants nonetheless raised the issue of 'anonymity' for fear that readers from the local site, in particular the art community may identify them.

While the question of anonymity in survey and experimental studies is not particularly problematic due to the presentation of data in aggregated form, the same cannot be said in qualitative case studies in which the intensive investigation of a local site often made it impossible to protect the identity of the participants involved (Merriam, 1998, p. 217).

As noted by Stake (2005), case study research shares an intense interest in personal views and circumstances, “those whose lives and expressions are portrayed risk exposure and embarrassment, as well as loss of standing, employment, and self-esteem. Something of a contract exists between researcher and the researched: a disclosing and protective covenant, usually informal but best not silent, a moral obligation” (p. 459).

While I became more conscious of the ethical dimensions of the ‘confidentiality and anonymity’ issues on the one hand, I had to ensure that the quality of analysis and reportage would not be compromised in the process of hiding the informants’ identities. The issue was addressed through discussion with the informants and we came to an understanding that the full transcripts will not be disseminated to a wide public but reserved for the purpose of thesis examination. For publication purposes, I will have to negotiate with the informants concerned about the dissemination of data and findings in future.

Throughout the research process, I developed a deeper understanding about the ethical responsibility of the researcher and recognised the importance of ‘reflexivity’ in the process. Although there are guidelines and recommendations for dealing with the ethical dimensions of qualitative research, the actual practice comes down to the individual researcher’s own values and ethics. The researcher will not be able to anticipate all possibilities, including his or her own responses (Merriam, *ibid*, p. 218).

### **3.3 Grounded Theory**

In the present study, Grounded Theory techniques are used to develop the theories emerged from the informants' discourse about local/national identity and art museum education. Grounded theory is defined as a "qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon" and the aim is "to build theory that is faithful to and illuminates the area under study" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 24). Thus, theories remain grounded in the data collected rather than generated in the abstract. I will describe the procedures involved in applying the grounded theory approach to the data collection and analysis processes in the following sections.

#### **3.3.1 Interviews**

The use of interviews in the data collection process addresses what Merriam (1998) defines as the key concern in qualitative research in "understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's" (p. 6). In a case study approach, interviews are of an 'open-ended nature', in which key informants provide insights into the topic under investigation (Yin, 1994, p. 84).

A total of eight in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to capture the richness and extensiveness of the concepts about local/national identity in the art museum context. The interview questions emerged from a set of guiding questions (Appendix C) and further questions arose throughout the research process as each unique interview



progressed. Some clarifications were sought through the phone with informants to further the understanding of the concepts.

The interviews ranged from 50 to 100 minutes each, and were all recorded by audio-tape and transcribed verbatim into texts for analysis (Appendix D: Interview transcripts). Notes were also made after each interview to remind myself about key ideas that could be of use in the analysis process.

Due to my teaching schedule, most of the interviews were conducted during the University's semester recess weeks and took about 13 months to complete. The recursive process of data collection and analysis also required me to complete some analysis of one interview before proceeding to the next one, thus facilitating the researcher's reflexivity. Grounded theory (its philosophy) was useful in helping to identify themes and issues; although I had research questions in mind, I tried not to be straitjacketed by them and through the interviews, was able to uncover more issues. In particular, the facilitating and constraining conditions identified by informants within the context of SAM in promoting the awareness of local/national art to the public implies the possibility of action and agency.

During the interview process, I used the 'interview guide approach' (Patton, 1980 cited in Cohen et al., 2000, p. 271) in outlining the issues to be covered but maintained flexibility in deciding the sequence and workings of questions in the course of the interview. This makes the data collection somewhat systematic for each informant and logical gaps in data can be anticipated and closed. Although this resulted in fairly conversational interviews, some important and salient points may be inadvertently omitted and

interviewer flexibility in sequencing and wording of questions can result in substantially different responses, thus reducing the comparability of responses. This shortcoming was addressed by the coding method in the data analysis procedure, which will be discussed in the next section.

As the informants were conversant with the issues about museum education and art, I also used direct questions to elicit their responses regarding 'local/national art and identity' to enable my understanding of their views and to determine the saturation point of each interview i.e. a sense that further interviewing would not produce new material. Contrary to popular opinion, the use of deliberately leading questions in qualitative research interview does not always reduce reliability but could serve to enhance it through checking repeatedly the reliability of the interviewees' answers, as well as the interviewer's interpretations (Kvale, 1996, p. 159).

By focusing on the emerging concepts derived from the interviews, I was able to reach saturation point with the present number of interviews as there were shared views and concepts that contribute to the understanding of the topic. In other words, additional interviews within the sector will not enhance the knowledge of the concepts derived from the analysis.

### **3.3.2 Coding**

In order to interpret the data received through interviews, coding techniques were used to uncover the concepts for analysis. As noted by Orona (1997, p. 179), the grounded theory

research process is not linear in a sense that one can start with coding, followed by memo writing and then analysis. Rather, it went from one technique to another and back again.

The following discussion will capture the three stages of analysis suggest by Strauss and Corbin (1990): open coding, axial coding and selective coding, while bearing in mind the recursive nature of the process. These writers highlight that 'openness and flexibility' are necessary when one adapts the procedures for different phenomena and research situations rather than a strict adherence to them (p. 26).

I considered the use of software such as N:Vivo, but decided that this would not be advantageous. It would be possible to handle the transcripts myself and this has the advantage of not losing contact with the data.

During the first stage of opening coding, each interview transcript was coded as an initial step to conceptualise the data. The use of mindmaps for each of the interviews further enhanced the comparison of the main ideas expressed by the informants (Appendix E: Examples of interview mindmaps). Establishing open categories to capture the raw ideas at this stage was a vital component to "break through assumptions" while allowing "the mind to wander and make free associations that are necessary for generating stimulating questions, and for coming up with comparisons that led to discovery" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 27).



It is important to ask questions about the thinking – beliefs and values – behind each interview as the aim of open coding is to explore the common grounds which would help explain the phenomenon under study.

In Fig. 3.3 an extract from the opening coding of the transcripts shows how the key ideas of four interviews pertaining to the various categories were captured for comparison purposes at the initial stage of data collection. As additional data were collected, more categories were established which helped in the continual process of analysis, resulting in the grouping of concepts or subcategories. For example, ‘art history’ was defined as a category in the opening coding stage but through constant comparison and selected coding, it was found to be a sub-theme of the phenomenon of local/national art collection, and not a phenomenon itself.

	Exhibitions	Collections	Audience /Public	Art History	Local/ national Art
S1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- quality vs. quantity</li> <li>- need focus, not cohesive</li> <li>- canon</li> <li>- permanent shows</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- use to develop programmes</li> <li>- policy important</li> <li>- make connection</li> <li>- R &amp; D</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- need to include adult</li> <li>- need expansion</li> <li>- balance promoting local art to local &amp; international audience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- chronology</li> <li>- contextual</li> <li>- link to curriculum</li> <li>- themes</li> <li>- use SEA art as platform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- insufficient promotion</li> <li>- important to do well in SEA Art</li> <li>- relate to international trends</li> </ul>
S2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ‘put some deserving ones on pedestals’</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- antiquated idea of cultural blood bank</li> <li>- how it’s being used</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- grassroots creativity</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- framed &amp; pitched</li> <li>-</li> </ul>
S3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-small scale</li> <li>- need to develop ambitious shows of permanent coll.</li> <li>-space constraints, relate to heritage policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- need to use more of permanent coll.</li> <li>- no one sees it, inadequate exposure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-need to develop local audience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>R&amp;D through Nanyang school interact with SEA &amp; colonialism*</li> <li>- Malay art</li> <li>- Artists village</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- limited rep</li> <li>- Nanyang school</li> </ul>
S4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- quality depends on curators’ focus/ strength?</li> <li>- impressed in volume (no .of shows)</li> <li>- balance between local &amp; international</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- underexposed</li> <li>- contemporary artists &amp; media</li> <li>- content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- small quarter of intellectuals with vested interest in local &amp; SEA art</li> <li>- larger visitor base shows disinterest (assoc. w/ blockbuster shows)</li> <li>- community-based support helps success of shows in terms of visitorship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- gaps need to be addressed in R&amp;D</li> <li>- visual art development link to international trends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- local art , regional and international correspondences</li> <li>- canon is problematic</li> <li>- pioneer artists still need research</li> </ul>

Fig. 3.3 Extract of opening coding of interviews

During the second stage of axial coding, the paradigm model recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 99) was used to discover patterns and to establish relationships between categories. The aim of the paradigm model is to illuminate the causal relations of the phenomenon by specifying various intervening and facilitating conditions. This is achieved through a comparison of all opening coding categories to obtain a bird's eye view of the phenomenon. An example of axial coding by using the 'paradigm model of grounded theory' is illustrated in Fig. 3.4.

Strauss and Corbin defines causal condition as "the events or incidents that lead to the occurrence or development of a phenomenon" but in reality "a single causal condition rarely produces a phenomenon" (ibid, p. 100). In the discussion about 'local/national art exhibitions' at SAM, the causal relationships are represented as the Museum policy which includes the mission and different exhibition programmes (local/national, Southeast Asia and international).

In analysing the intervening conditions, it is important to think about the "broader structural context" as these are "broad and general conditions bearing upon action/interaction strategies" (ibid, p. 103). Informants viewed the intervening conditions as both facilitating and constraining conditions for the development of local/national art exhibitions. The facilitating conditions are the State-funded capital for a national art museum and curatorial focus while the area of research, acquisition methods and space are considered as constraining conditions.



The phenomenon and informants' expectations about it are seen as a result of the causal conditions. In considering the phenomenon of local/national art exhibitions, the expectations of informants on the Art Museum's role revolved around the following areas:

- To conduct in-depth research and study about local/national art history
- To develop a clear sense of Museum identity
- To develop methods to communicate to a diverse audience

It was through identifying the expectations of informants that a story line began to emerge about the phenomenon.

Action /interactional strategies are "directed at managing, handling, carrying out, responding to a phenomenon as it exists in context or under a specific set of perceived conditions". It is noted that "failed action/interaction is just as important to look for, as when action/interaction is actually taken or occurs" (ibid, p. 104). This led one to ask why these strategies were not taken to manage the phenomenon, which has certain outcomes and consequences. However, these might not always be predictable or what was intended. From the informants' perspectives, the categories in the outcome and consequences are the same as their expectations, which focused on the limited representation of local/national art in SAM, the incomplete art narrative on Singapore art and the tensions that exist in balancing the Museum identity.



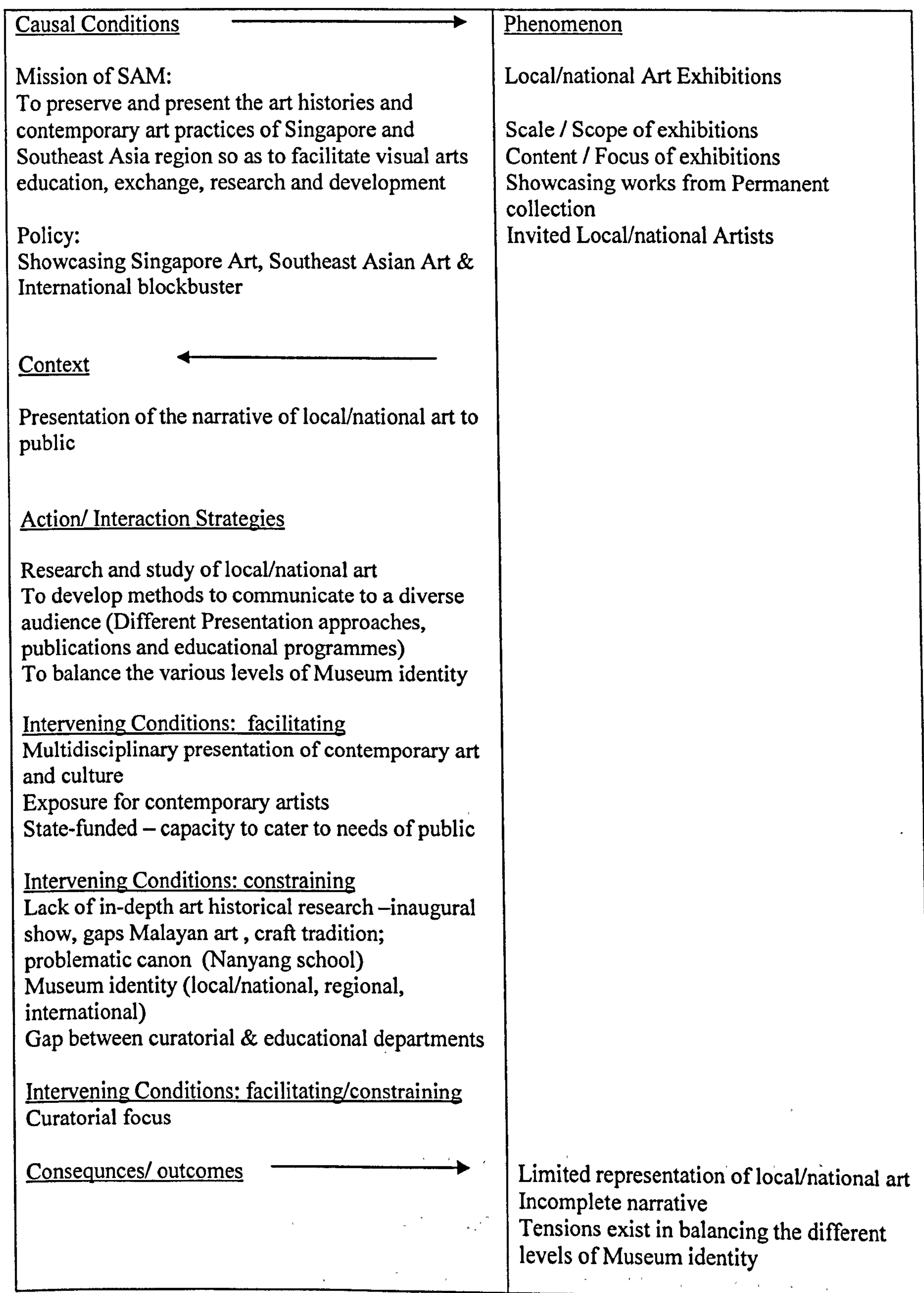


Fig. 3.4 The Paradigm Model of Grounded Theory

The final stage of the coding process is selective coding in which a “descriptive narrative about the central phenomenon of the study” began to emerge (ibid, p. 116). The aim is to integrate the various categories to form a grounded theory. As the objective of this study is to explore the beliefs held in (a specific section of) society about local/national and regional identities in the art museum context, I tried to uncover the underlying beliefs of informants by integrating the concepts and theories that emerged in the discourse. I started to ask myself what the general overview of the story was about and began to “arrange and rearrange the categories” to fit a storyline for the eventual presentation of the data.

However, in this study, I came to understand that it was not necessary to follow all the procedures of selective coding as theoretical saturation had been reached at the axial coding process, which means: (i) no new or relevant data seem to emerge regarding a category; (ii) the category development is dense, and (iii) the relationships between categories are well established and validated (ibid, p. 188).

What was crucial for me at this stage was to understand the interconnectedness of the various concepts and theories that emerged from the informants’ discourse. I reminded myself that the purpose of grounded theory “is to develop theory and not to merely describe phenomena”, therefore “concepts must be systematically related, because it is not enough simply to say certain conditions exist and then require readers to figure out what the relationships to the phenomena might be” (ibid, p. 167). I found out that the underlying belief could be uncovered through an analysis of the interrelationships of the

concepts, theories and expectations of informants. This understanding became the framework for my presentation of the data.



### **3.4 Analysis and Presentation of Data**

It is apparent that the analysis of informants' discourse took place at the various coding stages as discussed in the foregoing discussion. While the informants' discourse was analysed using grounded theory techniques, the formal discourse was analysed through thematic close reading of the official documents, speeches and exhibition texts. To make sense of the data it is important to discover 'patterns, themes, consistencies and exceptions' (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p. 296). It was through the categorisation of themes and patterns that groups of concepts could be formed. This was the approach taken to analyse the official documents.

Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 245) note that in qualitative analysis, the first conclusions are drawn by "noting patterns, themes; making contrasts, comparisons; clustering; and counting" (p. 245). This applies to my analysis of the documents as I looked for patterns and recurring ideas that were captured in the various official statements as well as



exhibition texts. The use of 'counting' in terms of the number and types of exhibitions that SAM organised over the years also proved to be helpful in validating the official discourse as well as served as a basis of comparison with the views of informants.

In the course of going further than thematic analysis and using grounded theory techniques in interview data analysis, I experienced what Strauss and Corbin refer to as theoretical sensitivity in giving meaning to data and developing a capacity to understand and separate the pertinent from what which is not (ibid, p. 42). Apart from personal and professional experience, literature can be used to stimulate theoretical sensitivity by providing concepts and relationships that are checked out against the actual data.

In this study, literature was used in the course of analysis by comparing with existing theory when the theory has been generated from interviewees. In particular, the literature on national identity and museum education provided a framework for the interpretation of the data. By looking back and forth at the data and theory, I was able to construct a set of understandings of the informants' discourse about art museum education and national identity. A thematic analysis was used to present the data so that the informants' discourse could be illuminated through a systematic presentation of the linkages, causal conditions and contextual phenomenon of the three themes:

- The under-utilised local/national art collection
- Limited representations of local/national art through exhibitions
- Difficulty in facilitating visual art education in the museum

These themes were presented through the voices of the informants. During the writing process, I faced the difficulty of being attached and detached simultaneously in dealing with the data. In the initial stages of writing I found myself being influenced by the theoretical perspectives in literature and my prior assumptions and was not able to maintain the requisite 'neutrality' in interpreting the data. This brings to mind the discussion about the role of researcher in 3.1. While I immersed myself in the process of writing, it was necessary to take time to step back and reflect on the meaning of the data.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This study has taken a qualitative case study approach in exploring the relationship between identity formation and art museum education. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I had to stay open to theory emergence rather than using pre-conceived ideas in interpreting the data. This was facilitated by the use of thematic analysis and grounded theory techniques. Memos, concept maps and diagrams helped to provide a framework for reviewing the data, extracting relevant information, and organising information. The presentation of the data and findings is a creative act and is one of the most challenging aspects of the research process. Ultimately, reflexivity remains a key to the entire process as it is important to develop sensitivity as a researcher to a wide range of theoretical perspectives and have the capability to draw out meanings and relationships from the data. Furthermore, as I was engaged in this study over a period of time, it helped to promote my growth as a researcher as I gained deeper understanding about qualitative research methods and the subject area of investigation.



## **CHAPTER 4: ART MUSEUM EDUCATION AND LOCAL/ NATIONAL IDENTITY: POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN THE SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM**

Using the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) as the site of analysis, this chapter will develop an understanding of the official discourse on local/national art and identity. It begins by describing the context of SAM as situated in the socio-cultural environment of Singapore, which frames the Museum's policies and practices in education. The chapter will then consider the discourse on local/national art and identity as gleaned from data comprising of government publications, policy documents, SAM's publications (including exhibition catalogues, newsletters, educational brochures and web-based materials), ministers' speeches, press releases and newspaper clippings capturing interviews with museum and government officials about the arts and culture.

### **4.1 The Practice of Art Education in SAM**

As outlined in section 1.1, the role of SAM is closely related to the national cultural developments of Singapore, where an infrastructure for the arts has been set in place for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The current search for new perspectives and possibilities of integrating the educational role of the museum into its core identity is spelled out in SAM's mission statement:

To preserve and present the art histories and contemporary art practices of Singapore and the Southeast Asia region so as to facilitate visual arts education, exchange, research and development (NHB, 2002, p. 24).

The purpose of preservation and presentation is made evident in the phrase 'so as to facilitate' and one of the purposes is 'education' which is the first in the list and perhaps



given thereby a certain priority. The following section will address the various strategies adopted by curators and educators at SAM as mechanisms for achieving its educational mission.

#### **4.1.1 The Purpose of Exhibition Programmes for Singapore and Southeast Asia**

To highlight the Museum as 'a dynamic institution of multicultural modern art' (<http://www.nhb.gov/SAM/Collections/> Access 6 Feb 2006), three broad categories are established in its exhibition programmes: Southeast Asia, Singapore and international 'blockbusters'. There is perhaps some indication of priority or of the way in which Singapore is to be seen as part of South East Asia in the order presented here:

The Singapore Art Museum (SAM) continues to develop and present exhibitions in three major areas – Southeast Asia, Singapore and international. The museum collection focuses on the first two areas (NHB, 2000, p. 32).

As the Museum boasts the largest holdings of contemporary Southeast Art in a public institution internationally, which stands at more than 6,000 works, it was evident that SAM is tasked at the policy level to fulfill its mission as a centre for exhibiting and researching contemporary art in both local/national and regional contexts:

Besides fulfilling its primary mission to preserve and present the art histories and contemporary art practices of Singapore and Southeast Asia, the Museum's curatorial mission is to see it evolve into an international authority on Southeast Asian Art research (NHB, 1996, p. 25).

SAM's exposure and participation at regional and international events are conscious attempts to develop the Museum's policy of furthering the cause of art as exchange:

Efforts to bolster local, regional and international relations have been stepped up progressively. Collaborations with other institutions have led to Singapore's participation in several key events. Through collaborative programmes the Museum introduced the nation's art and artists to international audiences at major art seminars in Jakarta and Johannesburg. Participation in regional art seminars, symposia and exhibitions has attracted specialist visitor and curators from the US, Sweden, Japan, New Zealand, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia to the Museum (NHB, 1996, p. 29).

The statement indicates the way in which Singapore is to be seen as part of the Southeast Asian and international network, and has implications for SAM's development of local/national and regional identities as we shall see below.

At the policy level, SAM affirms its role as a centre for furthering research in both local/national and Southeast Asian arts. In conjunction with the exhibitions, relevant supporting resources, usually in the form of publications, are provided for audiences to engage in understanding and interpreting local/national and regional visual arts development (Leong, 2003).

The vision of SAM as a cultural site for fostering a sense of local (national) and regional identity can be seen in the approaches of the exhibition programmes. Since the inauguration of SAM in 1996 till 2008, a total of 154 exhibitions have been presented to the public (Appendix F: List of SAM Exhibitions 1996-2008). The different categories of



exhibitions over a twelve-year period are presented in Figure 4.1. The broad categories, namely 'Singapore', 'Southeast Asia' and 'International' are established to highlight the focus of SAM's exhibition programme. It is evident that the number of exhibitions revolving around Singapore art (41%) and Southeast Asian art (26%) far exceeds exhibitions with an international orientation. Therefore, the assertion of a sense of local/national identity through exhibitions is a deliberate move on the part of the Museum.

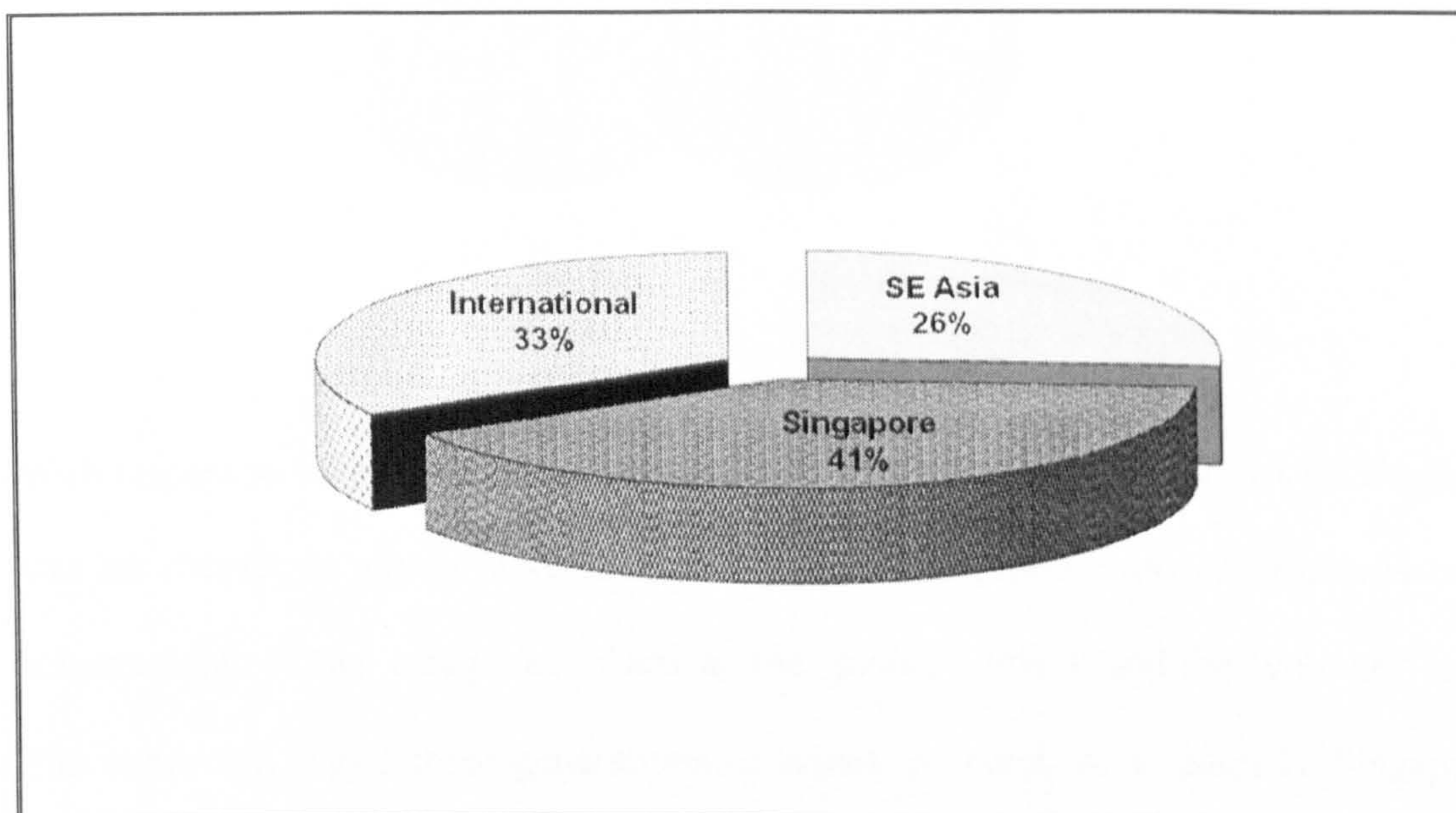
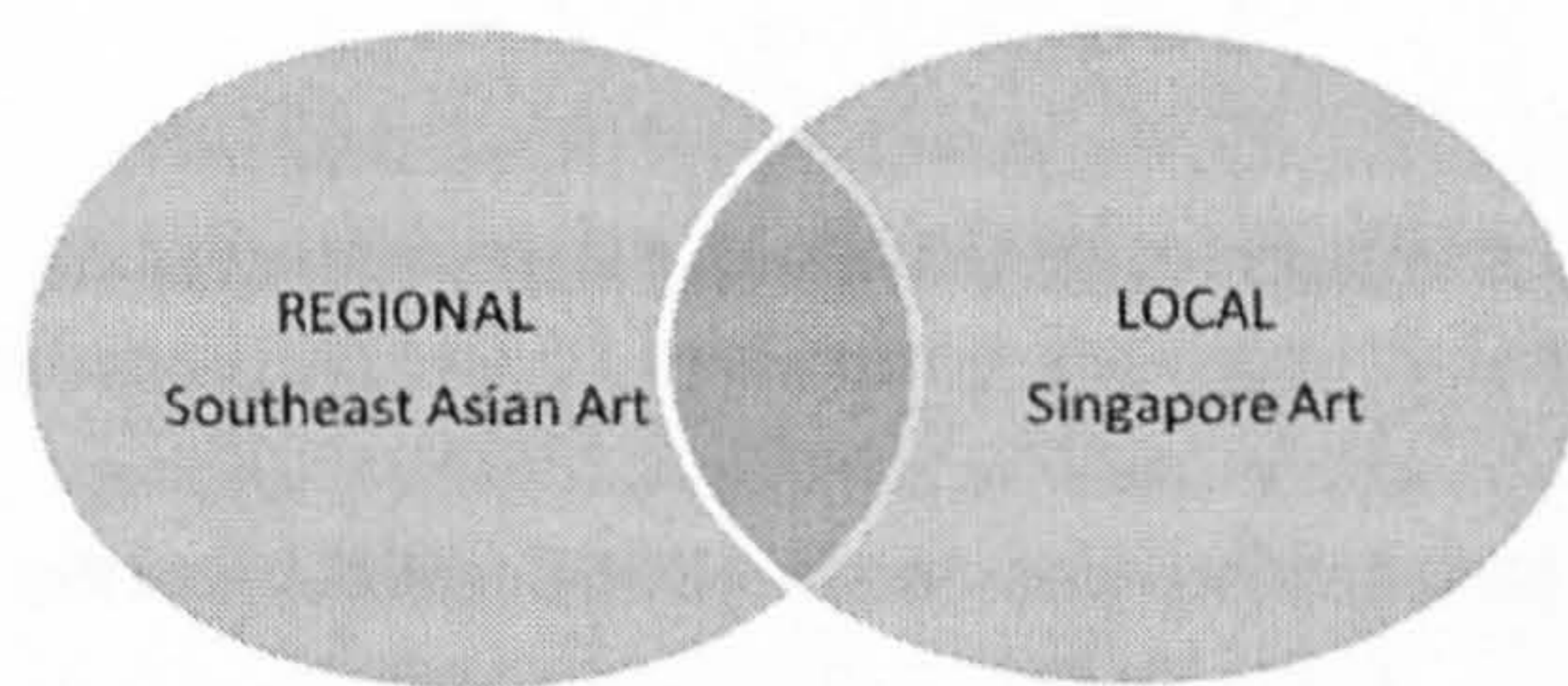


Figure 4.1 SAM Exhibitions grouped by categories (1996-2008)

A comparison of the inaugural exhibition, *Modernity and Beyond: A Century of Art in Singapore and Themes in Southeast Asian Art* in 1996 and the *Art of Our Time* exhibition series (2005-2008) helps to highlight the curatorial direction and discourse of the Museum's permanent collection over the years.



Both exhibitions are divided into two components: 'Local/national Art' and 'Southeast Asian Art' respectively. The official view of the relationship between local art and Southeast Asian art as distinct categories which influenced upon each other can be summarised in the diagram below:



With respect to local/national art, the 1996 exhibition 'A Century of Art in Singapore' was an attempt to narrate a visual arts history of Singapore with an emphasis on the achievements of two categories of artists: the 'pioneer artists' and the 'younger' artists. The exhibition traced three generations of artists in search of a uniquely Singaporean identity. As Kwok Kian Chow, Director of SAM wrote in the exhibition catalogue, *Channels and Confluences: A History of Singapore Art*:

...in documenting the development of Singapore Art, where only a single historical survey in monograph form has been published, it is deemed necessary to rely on a loosely chronological framework to systematically introduced selected artists and their works (...) It is clear then, that while the history of Western art serves as an important reference for a study of Singapore's modern art history, Singapore art is not derivative of any international art trends (K. C. Kwok, 1996b, pp. 7-9).



The underlying assumption in the chronological presentation of pioneer artists and works of artists in the subsequent generations is continuity and development in the visual arts scene and that Singapore claims a 'distinctive' art history that reflects the development of the nation's history. Moreover, Singapore's art historical narrative is nationally defined and seen as not derivative from international art trends. It is implied here that there is a demarcation between national and international categories.

This approach is adopted in the "Unyielding Passion: 8 Masters of Singapore Art" in the *Art of Our Time* series (2005-2008) from the permanent collection, albeit on a much smaller scale.

This exhibition introduces eight Singapore artists whose dedication and commitment to their art have influenced the development of modern art in Singapore into the present. Four of these artists – Chen Wen Hsi, Cheong Soo Pieng, Liu Kang and Georgette Chen – are among those accorded the title 'Pioneer Artist' to celebrate their contributions to the early development of Singapore art (...) Assuming their roles as teachers and mentors, the four younger artists – Iskandar Jalil, Tan Swee Hian, Tang Da Wu and Chua Mia tee – explored new genres and ideas... (SAM, 2005, p. 2).

The role of the 'pioneer artist' is seen as a precondition to the formation of a Singaporean art history narrative.

I think 'Pioneer Artists' refers to those who led in the early years, it does not matter about style but the artist must have influenced a younger generation. The artist must also have had an impact on art in Singapore through their art and exhibitions (...) Georgette Chen is certainly a

'pioneer artist'. Liu Kang, interview in June 1995 (Wall text, *Art of our time Exhibition* 2005).

In the Singaporean context, 'pioneer artist' is synonymous to the 'Nanyang School painters', which is a recurrent focus in the local/national art exhibitions. The Nanyang School, often considered as the first artistic style of painting in Singapore, is interpreted as an adaptation of traditional Chinese brush painting and/or Western painting to depict local/national (Nanyang) scenes and subject matter. It came to full blossom in the 1950s after the 1952 trip to Bali (Indonesia) made by the 'pioneer' artists: Liu Kang, Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Wen Hsi and Chen Chong Swee (K. C. Kwok, 1994; Sabapathy & Piyadasa, 1983). However, it is evident in the above quotation that style does not play as much an importance part as the fact that these 'pioneer artists' were an influence which accords them the status.

Historically, the term 'local/national artists' could also include both Singapore and Malaysian artists when it was used to refer to pre-1965 Singapore, which was part of the Straits Settlements and culturally strongly linked with Malaya.<sup>3</sup> That Singapore has its national artists is articulated by SAM in the description of the local/national art collection:

In addition to its breadth of coverage, the collection's strengths also lie in its comprehensive representation of Singaporean art and its unparalleled holdings of works by major Singaporean artists such as Georgette Chen, Liu Kang, Chen Chong Swee, Lim Tze Peng and Huang Yao (<http://www.nhb.gov.sg/SAM/Collections/> Access: 9 Feb 2006)

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<sup>3</sup> While Malaysia was formed on 31 August 1963, Singapore left the Federation to become an independent republic in 1965.



Although the 'Singaporean' artists mentioned in the above SAM website were not born in Singapore but migrants from China, the identification of the pioneer artists and the Nanyang style exclusively with Singapore is directly connected with the attempt to establish a national art, namely 'Singaporean art'.

With reference to the Southeast Asian component of the inaugural exhibition, 'Modernity and Beyond: Themes in Southeast Asian art', art works from the region are acknowledged as 'diversely rich' (Sabapathy, 1996) but unified by the following common themes:

- Nationalism, revolution and the idea of the modern
- Traditions of the real
- Modes of abstraction
- Mythology and Religion: traditions in tension
- The Self and Other
- Urbanism and popular culture

These six themes were employed by curators as a way to organise, present and interpret the vastly diverse artworks of the Southeast Asian countries. For example, 'nationalism, revolution and the idea of the modern' was chosen as a theme to describe the influx of modern western art in Southeast Asia from 1930s onwards, which coincided with the rise of nationalism in various Southeast Asian countries.

A closer analysis of the visual and textual materials in the exhibition reveals that the thematic exhibition displays are not congruent with the organisation and presentation in

exhibition publication. Instead of using common themes as organising principles, the catalogue essays are categorised by artists and artworks based on each of the 6 countries represented in the exhibition:

- Glimpses into Art in Brunei Darussalam
- From National Identity to the Self: Themes in Modern Indonesian Art
- Thematic Approaches to Malaysian Art History
- Some Aspects of Nationalism and Internationalism in Philippine Art
- Brief Notes on Traditionalism in Modern Thai Art
- A Preliminary Thematic Survey of Vietnamese Contemporary Art

The reasons for a different presentation between the visual (display of artworks) and the textual (writings about the artworks) components of the exhibition are offered by the chief curator, Kanaga Sabapathy in his introductory chapter of the catalogue:

Art writing by Southeast Asians is developed along turfs circumscribed by national boundaries; rarely do writers venture into neighbouring terrain, and when they do, they do so furtively, sporadically, and skirt along the surface (...) Be that as it may, a glaring consequence of this is the absence of a regional outlook (Sabapathy, 1996, p. 8).

Here, the attribution of the absence of a regional outlook in the art writings on Southeast Asia to the fixity of national boundaries recalls the discussion by Barth and Anderson in 2.1.1 about the notion of 'boundary consciousnesses' as a defining aspect of national identity.



Although the 'Modernity and Beyond' exhibition showed SAM's attempt to assert Southeast Asia as an 'aesthetic region' through a thematic display, the research was still conducted within the boundaries of national art histories:

...this publication marks a discreet departure from prevailing offerings; the writers have struck out into domains away from their domicile, thereby breaking customary, critical habits and decorum (...). Even so, they stop short of proposing a regional frame, or casting a regional prospect or overview; the themes have been developed along country interest and art histories; attempts have not been made to suggest or forge lateral connections and relationships. This is deliberate; it is to permit a gradual, incremental advancement of art historical knowledge along methods and procedures that are most developed, i.e. in tandem with country vistas (ibid).

What is apparent in the above comment is that most developed art historical methods in researching 'Southeast Asian' art are still demarcated by the boundaries of different countries, which makes it difficult for the creation of a regional framework. This discussion recalls the notion that Southeast Asia as a region is essentially a human construct as proffered by Rajah (1999) in 2.1.3. He points out the conceptual weakness of the unity-in-diversity paradigm in conceiving Southeast Asia as a region due to the vast cultural differences of the different countries. The constraint posed by the unity-in-diversity concept is also shown in the acquisition of artworks for the same exhibition as observed by Sabapathy:

The exhibition consists of works from acquisitions by the museum and from collections in institutions in the countries which are featured. The aim has been to span the years immediately after the Second World War until the present. Not surprisingly, it has been extremely difficult to secure

works produced between 1945 and 1960 as these are in repositories in individual countries with stringent stipulations regarding their display and movement, especially beyond the shores of the country. Such conditions have to be respected (ibid, p. 9).

The above comment points out the difficulty faced by SAM in acquiring works from other countries in the 'region' to narrate a Southeast Art history was discussed by Ooi (2003) in 2.1.3. Once again, Ooi points out those contemporary state boundaries hindered SAM's acquisition of exhibits to reify their stories despite the discourse about intricate regional affiliations and connections.

Since the inaugural exhibitions in 1996, SAM has consistently applied the same conceptual framework in the discussion of local/national and regional art history. While in the narration of Singaporean art history, SAM underscores the uniqueness of a local/national art history, the concept of 'unity in diversity' has been consistently employed in the discourse about contemporary Southeast Asian art by connecting apparently diverse artworks from the region. This can be seen in the more recent exhibition series entitled *Art of Our Time* (2005-2008), which adopted a thematic approach by placing the selected Southeast Asian artworks under four broad themes: *Histories: passages in art; Gods and Spirits; Art of the People; and Traditions: materials and motifs*, with the intention 'to look at art within the region's cultural diversities' (SAM, 2005, p. 1).



#### 4.1.2 Educational Programmes

Apart from exhibitions, museum professionals have developed specific educational programmes to promote an understanding of the nation's visual arts history as well as nurture an appreciation of the art of Southeast Asia and the world. This section will highlight the aims and purposes of two types of educational programmes in SAM, namely:

- (i) School programmes that cater for schools from kindergarten to tertiary levels; and
- (ii) Public programmes developed for the general audience.

##### *School programmes*

The objectives of the school programmes were documented during the inaugural stage of the Museum's policy:

SAM's educational programmes were geared towards developing schoolchildren's creative sensitivity and promoting the significance of art as an integral part of Singapore's cultural heritage. This will continue to be SAM's educational thrust for the future (NHB, 1997, p. 30).

School programmes are developed to enable teachers to use the art museum as a resource centre for developing their art curriculum. This idea about the museum as a source for curriculum development and not just complementary to the curriculum is an important development over the years. For example, the opening of the Art Education Galleries and Corridors in 2003 is a case in point. The pilot exhibition, *Art Figures: Mathematics in art* (2003) which was followed by *Biotechnology and Art* in the same year marked a new initiative towards an empowering curriculum by using art objects as the centre of learning. The exhibitions presented in these spaces are designed to provide

multidisciplinary access points for students and young visitors to engage with art (SAM, 2003).

As a learning process, SAM curates and presents exhibitions. At the same time, we provide educational tours and resource kits to enhance visual arts appreciation. Workshops that cover art theory and practice for both teachers and students are also regularly organised, along with talks or discussions on art and art related issues to stimulate Singapore's cultural development (NHB, 2003, p. 8).

Some of the workshops for school children involve art production techniques as well as developing critical and analytical skills through art writing. Art museum educators have also developed outreach programmes to schools, such as *The Travelling Art Talk Series*, launched in 2003 which aimed at providing different entry points for students to appreciate selected works from SAM's collection through talks and art-based workshops conducted in school premises.

One of the educational programmes that throw light on the pervasiveness of the public rhetoric on national education was the 'Total Defence Travelling Exhibition' that SAM launched in the same year.

March 2003 will see the launch of the Travelling Art Box – where an artist will facilitate a workshop within the school, in consideration of national educational objectives such as racial harmony and total defence (NHB, 2003, p. 9).

The programme formed part of the National Education initiative, in which schools could take part in art workshops and exhibitions that promote an understanding of Total



Defence. Total Defence is part of the National Education programme by promoting to pupils that:

Singapore as a small country is vulnerable not only to military attacks but also to exploitation of economic, social, political or psychological weaknesses by others (....) it is important that Singapore has a defence capability that involves not only the Singapore Armed Forces, but also the entire civilian population playing its part. The five aspects of Total Defence are: Psychological Defence, Social Defence, Economic Defence, Civil Defence and Military Defence. Schools commemorate Total Defence Day on 15 February annually to mark Singapore's fall to the Japanese in 1942 (<http://intranet.moe.gov.sg/ne/events/tdd.htm> Access: December 10 2005).

The use of this concept of 'Total Defence' in art museum education programme can be seen as an attempt by the Museum to make links with the school system under the Ministry of Education. The aim to align the role of NHB's public education programmes in 'spearheading psychological defence and national education' was stated by their Chairman, Professor Tommy Koh. In this case both school and public education are combined:

Third, we have been tasked with a larger role in psychological defence and national education. In August 2003, the Historical Sites Unit merged with the Education and Outreach Department to form the Public Education (PE) Department (...) Through strategic collaborations with schools, community clubs and private sector organisations, NHB will devise creative and innovative programmes to reach Singaporeans at all levels of society (NHB, 2004, p. 2).

As SAM is under the aegis of the NHB, a statutory board of the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts (MICA), it means that the Museum's directives are controlled by the government. As the main purpose of the National Education programme is to forge a sense of 'nationhood' among the local/national audience, it is evident that the government also viewed the educational programme of SAM as instrumental to the state's agenda in promoting 'national identity' among its audience.

The statement on the MICA website about encouraging Singaporeans to identify with the 'invented' national symbols is made even more explicitly than the above comment:

Singapore's national symbols namely, the national flag, national anthem and Singapore lion head are our most visible symbols of our sovereignty, pride and honour. Singaporeans are encouraged to use these symbols to identify with the nation.

([http://www.mica.gov.sg/mica\\_business/b\\_heritage.html](http://www.mica.gov.sg/mica_business/b_heritage.html) Access: 26 June 2008)

It is evident that the Singapore government has made conscious attempts to implement educational programmes in both museums and schools to develop the concept of national identity. This can be traced back to Hobsbawm's (1983) work on invented traditions and Anderson's (1991) view about the creation of an imagined community through shared symbols, such as the national flag, national anthems and in the case of Singapore, the construction of the 'lion head' symbol.



## *Public Education*

This section will define the aims of the public educational programmes and a detailed discussion will be presented in 4.2.3 'Education for all' as one of the themes of the official discourse.

The Public Education unit was established in 1998 with the intention of broadening and diversifying its museum audience through outreach activities (NHB, 1998). The public education programmes aims to nurture a wider range of audiences by raising their awareness of the artistic heritage of Singapore and the Southeast Asian region.

This two-fold focus is specified as follows (ibid, p.18):

- Promote awareness and appreciation of 20<sup>th</sup> century art practices in Singapore and Southeast Asia through exhibitions, publications and public education programmes for local and overseas audiences;
- Encourage an active and stimulating cultural environment in Singapore through public educational programmes and exhibitions on a diversity of art trends and practices.

Unlike school programmes which are targeted at supporting and empowering teachers and students to use SAM as a curriculum resource, the public programmes include a broader range of activities, such as 'symposiums, forums, talks, workshops, film screening, music and dance programmes' (NHB, 2000, p. 33).

The aim to broaden the Museum's appeal was articulated during the inaugural phase of SAM:

The Museum seeks to broaden its appeal to every member of the public; whether students, art specialists, collectors, scholars, tourists or individuals

totally unfamiliar with the museum experience (...) there are demonstrations by artists, talks and open dialogue sessions hosted by prominent figures in various artistic fields, as well as art workshops and family programmes (NHB, 1996, p. 28).

The above statement shows the Museum's awareness of the diverse public as discussed by museum researchers such as McClellan (2003) and Cameron (2004) in 2.2.2.

To go beyond playing a supporting role to the exhibition programmes, the Public Art Library was launched with an aim to encourage private collecting and art appreciation:

A first of its kind in Singapore, the Public Art Library at Singapore Art Museum (SAM) allowed the public to borrow and bring home artworks created in various media by local artists. The programme encourages art collecting while promoting a greater appreciation of local art amongst the public. Regular opportunities were also created for the public to interact with the artists (NHB, 2004, p. 17).

The artists' talks and dialogue sessions can be seen as strategies employed by the Museum to incorporate face-to-face communication rather than the one-way process of disseminating information through a single source like exhibitions and publications. The practice of educational programmes in SAM recalls the concepts of museums as mass communicators and interpersonal communicators explored by Hooper-Greenhill (1995) in section 2.2.1.

To a large extent, the policy and practice in SAM reflects the evolving international trends in the museum world in integrating the educational mission with the core identity of collection, conservation, exhibition and scholarship as discussed in the literature





review section 2.2. The provision of educational resources to schools and the broader public can also be seen as SAM's attempt to balance the aesthetic functions and public functions of the art museum, which was highlighted in 2.2.2.

Education in the museum context can be seen as supporting the government's national cultural policy to develop a sense of national identity through the arts. It is therefore crucial for this study to understand the relationship between art museum education through the discourse at the official level and that of informants in the following chapters.

## **4.2 The Official Discourse on Local/National Art and Identity in the Singapore Art Museum**

In order for a close analysis of SAM's museum policy and practice and the emergence of trends and patterns to be observable, three main themes are identified and discussed in this section. It needs to be pointed out that though the focus is synchronic rather than a diachronic analysis of the discourse, concepts that are inherent to the examination of texts produced over a span of time will be discussed.

The three themes that arose from the data are:

- Local/national art and heritage
- Global city for the arts
- Education for all

### **4.2.1 Local/national art and Heritage**

On the occasion of the opening of SAM, the then prime minister Goh Chok Tong commented that by locating the Museum in the Arts and Heritage District, it 'should evoke in Singaporeans an appreciation and understanding of old civilisations they all belonged to, and the part of the world they were in' (*The Straits Times*, 21 January 1996).

In his speech he said:

Heritage and culture hold people together, make them a distinct society and provide them moral strength. We are a new country but one born of old civilisations. We are people who have come from at least three different ancient civilisations. These deep roots endow us with rich values and traditions. They belie the short history of modern independent Singapore, and give us the gravitas as a nation (MITA, 1996).



What Goh is thus doing is creating historical roots since nations are defined by their history and where there is none, a history has to be invented as Hobsbawm and Anderson both pointed out in their work respectively. Continuity and genealogy is implied in the use of the terms 'old civilisations' where Singapore came from. The notion that 'local/national' art and heritage is aligned with the government's definition of multiculturalism is explicit in reference to the 'three different ancient civilisations', i.e. Chinese, Malay and Indian which form the basis of interpretation of 'multiculturalism' on a four-culture framework (Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others).

Arts and heritage is not only seen as a way to bind Singaporeans with a 'shared heritage' (MITA, 2000, p. 41) as a nation but also to connect Singaporeans with the Southeast Asian region:

The Museums and the museums to come, the Arts Centre and the historic sites in the Heritage District should evoke in Singaporeans an appreciation and understanding of the old civilisations we all belong to, and the part of the world we are in. They link us to the richness of our past and to our neighbours (ibid).

The nature of the link he posits is however not made clear, left perhaps deliberately vague. So when the affinity of Singapore to the region is again emphasised in SAM's collection policy by boasting the largest collection of contemporary Southeast Asian art internationally, there is no precise relationship stated beyond that of 'disseminating knowledge'.

SAM has the largest collection of Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art by a public institution internationally. In our continued effort to display, generate and disseminate knowledge on Southeast Asian

art, the Museum devotes about one third of the gallery space to Permanent Collection exhibitions (NHB, 1999, p. 50).

Local/national art history is seen as an important avenue to promoting audience understanding of the nation's history:

SAM's institutional identity as a museum for modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art provided a direction for the development of its collection (...) As the national art gallery, SAM's objective is also to support the development of historical understanding of art in Singapore (NHB, 1997, p. 30).

The relationship of nationhood and artistic heritage is made explicit in an exhibition, entitled *A Heroic Decade: Singapore Art 1955-1965*, which was held in conjunction with Singapore's 40<sup>th</sup> year of independence celebration in 2005. In the Press release, the then Senior Curator of SAM, Mr. Ahmad Mashadi stated:

The development of art and culture is interwoven into the story of our nation. Art making is not contained within its own dynamics, but critical grounds for which emerging ideas about society and nation are engaged, explored and expressed in cultural terms. We have chosen to represent the 1950s as it is perhaps the most intense period of Singapore artistic history, intersecting a critical phase of Singapore's national history (<http://www.nhb.gov.sg/SAM/Information/Newsroom/> Access: 9 Feb 2006)

Here, the trajectories of national history and artistic history are viewed and presented as inextricably connected and 'intersecting' one another, thus legitimising the Museum's representation of a 'national art history'. As commented by Kwok Kian Chow, Director of SAM:



The exhibition provides a platform for artists, active or knowledgeable about the period, to contribute and inform on our art history. Working with the National Archives of Singapore, we are documenting primary sources on our artistic heritage (ibid).

The use of the term 'artistic heritage' relates back to the notion of lineage and continuity between the contemporary and the past artists as described in section 4.2.1. Through selectively assembled exhibitions of artists and their works, SAM attempts to define and validate an art historical narrative of Singapore. This is an example of the function of museums as identified in the literature section 2.1.2 about the relationship between identity work and museums. The construction of an art narrative in SAM echoes the role of museums in creating 'master narratives' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p.5) to foster a sense of 'national identity'.

The efforts in constructing a 'local/national art' narrative also go hand in hand with the development of SAM's international status. The Director of SAM has on several occasions highlighted the importance of regional and international connections for the Museum. It has been emphasised that SAM was different from its predecessor, the National Museum Art Gallery:

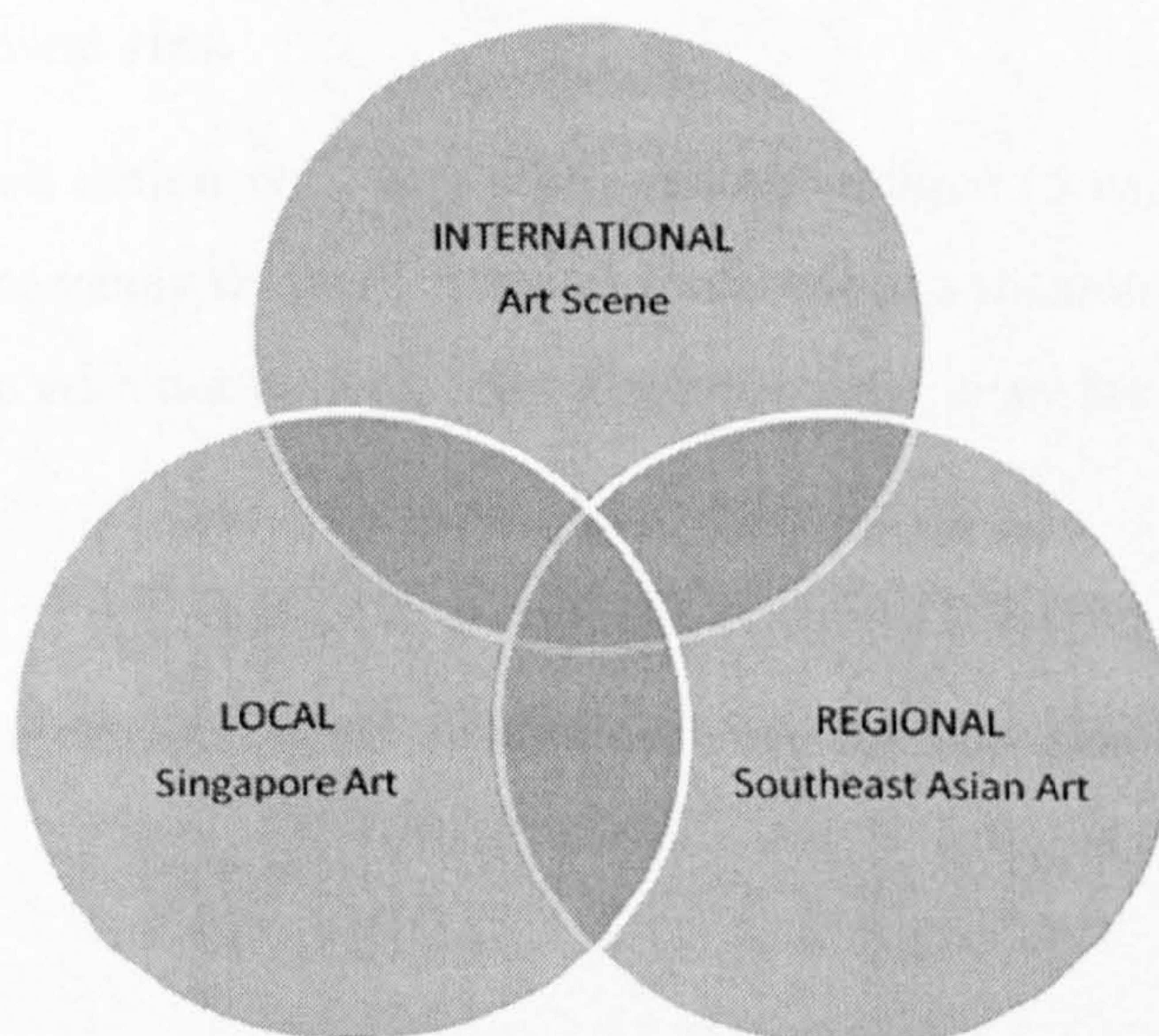
Being the art museum with an international outlook, SAM has to present local art in professional curated exhibitions. Thus, the nature of institutional support for the visual arts in Singapore has to be different from that provided by its predecessor, the former National Museum Art Gallery which provided easy accessibility for local artists to exhibit their works (K. C. Kwok, 1996a).



In this official Museum discourse, local/national art is situated within the regional context as a way to project Southeast Asian identity. This is expressed in the inaugural exhibition catalogue essay:

Thus, Singapore needs an art museum that is able to articulate and negotiate the many delicate issues in art museology, especially in terms of the interaction with the international community. The Singapore Art Museum should demonstrate adequate understanding of the complex relationship amongst the various components of arts infrastructure and how they reconfigure at different historical times. It should reflect Singapore's own history and help promote scholarships of local and regional art history (K. C. Kwok, 1996b, p. 154).

The dominant idea here is that Southeast Asia is seen as a separate category from 'international' while Southeast Asia ('regional') and Singapore ('local/national') are seen in a similar relationship to 'international'. The interrelationships of the three categories are illustrated in the diagram below:





The vision of SAM as a regional cultural site points to the national imperatives of investment in human capital and knowledge industry. The idea is that 'local/national' is related in the first instance to 'regionalisation' but that there will then be a next step of 'globalisation' of the workforce. With the increasing numbers of Singaporeans moving abroad to work, it is perceived that one of the tasks of the Museum is to ensure continuing ties to the local/national in both stages:

The Board through its programmes seeks to provide the social glue that will help bind Singaporeans of different ethnic communities closer. It also seeks to create in us a stronger sense of belonging and identity even though more of us will eventually live and work abroad as we globalise our regionalisation efforts (NHB, 1997, p. 5).

Related to the notion of regional affinity is that of 'art as exchange' as mentioned in 4.1 in the form of SAM's exposure to regional and international events and through the acquisition of artworks for exhibitions. This is further developed through the term 'cultural currency' though it has proved difficult to attain due to the constraints posed by contemporary boundaries.

As a small nation with very little heritage unique to us, we need to find cultural currency that will allow us to carry out a meaningful dialogue and exchange with our better endowed counterparts elsewhere (NHB, 2002, p. 11).

#### 4.2.2 Global City for the Arts – art as cultural capital

The second theme that emerged from the data reinforced the discussion in the former section about the development of SAM's position in the global art scene.

From the mid-1990s, phrases such as 'a global city for the arts' and 'cultural renaissance' have entered into the official discourse of government leaders in their pronouncement of policies. *Singapore: Global City for the Arts*, a glossy brochure jointly produced by the Tourist Promotion Board and the Ministry of Information and the Arts in 1995, made a very clear declaration of the government's intention of forging close links between the arts and the economy:

In the new millennium, a cultural renaissance of historic importance will accompany the dramatic economic transformation of East Asia. By being of continuing service to the region and the world, Singapore hopes to do for the arts what it has done for banking, finance, manufacturing and commerce, and help create new ideas, opportunities and wealth (STPB, 1995, p. 5).

The state's view of the culture industry as a new and desirable area for economic growth was evident when Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong – on the occasion of announcing the vision for Singapore to be a 'Renaissance City' – stated that 'artistic creativity is an important element of a knowledge-based economy' (*The Straits Times*, Sept. 26, 1999). The two aims of the 'Renaissance city report were reiterated by the then Minister for Information and the Arts: (i) to make Singapore a global city of the arts, and (ii) to strengthen the sense of national identity by nurturing an appreciation of local arts and culture (*The Straits Times*, 10 March 2000).



In the recent MICA Annual report (2007-2008), the government stated its commitment to the development of a strong arts and cultural base through continual funding:

MICA moved into the third phase of the Renaissance City Plan (RCP) to build a complete arts and cultural ecosystem in Singapore. A sum of \$116.25 million, or \$23.25 million a year, had been set aside over five years until 2012 for this effort. Since the RCP's inception in 2000, the plan had helped to grow a talent pool, establish arts organisations and cultural facilities, cultivate audiences and foster international partnerships. (<http://app.mica.gov.sg/internet/report/2008/index.html> Access: December 18 2008).

The vision of Singapore as the 'Renaissance nation' was captured in the original Report as follows:

We envisage a population that thirsts for knowledge, culture and the arts. This means increased demand for spaces for libraries, bookstores, museums, theatres, concert halls and exhibition areas. There will be dedicated arts precincts and cultural campuses in the city centre (...) Museums and heritage trails will dot our cityscape to showcase our shared heritage (MITA, 2000, p. 41).

Local artists are encouraged to produce works from a Singaporean perspective and clear, internationally-recognised Singapore and pan-Asian voices begin to develop (Ibid).

Here, the notion that a 'shared heritage' as a source of identity could be expressed as a 'Singaporean perspective', which is distinct and unique reinforced the national art narrative promoted by SAM, which is showcased in art forms in museums. For example, Singapore's first participation in the Venice Biennale in 2001 was seen as the arrival of

the nation at the 'international art scene' and a performance indicator of SAM's success in 'Going Global':

We spearheaded the country's first participation in the prestigious Venice Biennale, arguably the world's most important international visual arts festival (NHB, 2002, p. 35).

The arts and national identity is viewed as cultural capital for economic development:

The sum of our cultural resources, national identity, heritage, creative and artistic capabilities make up our cultural capital, which is the bedrock of the Creative Industries (MICA, 2004, p. 20).

Although the term 'cultural capital' is now a common phrase used in policy documents, it could be traced back to the theory by Bourdieu as a replacement for traditional economic capital as discussed in 2.2.3. It is therefore important to note that the official discourse makes the museums subservient to the economy.

At the museum level, the discourse about a link between museum and national-economic development is implied in the use of consumer terminology, like 'marketing' in the promotion of educational programmes:

Besides exhibition programming, the concerted drive to reach out to more Singaporeans also calls for new marketing initiatives. The Board aggressively publicized the Guggenheim exhibition at the Singapore Art Museum through collaboration with the private and public sectors. This has enabled the exhibition to reach out to more visitors (NHB, 1997, p. 6).

Branding and marketing continue to be considered as important strategies to broaden the appeal of the museum:



To help us crystallize and shape our museum brands, we have engaged a branding consultant and established a Marketing Task Force. These initiatives will help us create clear, more coherent and effective branding and marketing strategies for each of our museums. They will underpin our efforts to better understand who our target audiences are, carve out differentiated brand identities, and adopt appropriate marketing strategies (NHB, 2004, p. 2).

What is apparent here is that blockbuster exhibitions, like the Guggenheim show are brought in to increase visitorship and broaden the museum appeal to the general public. This points to the discussion about the phenomenon of the introduction of market forces into the cultural sector in museum literature in 2.2.3. In particular, McClellan (2003) raises the issue about the short term commercial ambition versus long term audience development as increased visitorship does not always mean heightened interest among the audience.

#### **4.2.3 Education for all**

The assertion that the Art Museum aims at promoting a 'local/national identity' through its educational programmes for the general public – the second strand of the education programmes – is the third theme for discussion. In fulfilling the educational mission, SAM designed its programmes to promote an understanding of the nation's visual arts history as well as nurture an appreciation of the arts of Southeast Asia and the world.

The promotion of education is firstly seen as a complementary component to exhibitions:

SAM is about art education for all (...) We placed great emphasis on art education targeted at general and specific levels. New educational

programmes were introduced to complement the exhibitions as well as to promote general art appreciation (...) SAM will continue to provide a balanced combination of exhibition, collection, educational and fringe programmes to serve the varied needs of our museum visitors (NHB, 1998, p. 31).

A recurring idea in the discourse about art museum education is that SAM provides educational opportunities for all. However, the term 'public' has not been clearly defined. Nonetheless over the years, the notion of 'education' for a school audience has broadened to include different target groups through its outreach programme:

The museum experience is part of a life-long learning experience (...) SAM's education programmes were geared towards developing school children's creative sensitivity and promoting the significance of art as an integral part of Singapore's cultural heritage (NHB, 1997, p. 30).

To achieve the educational purposes of SAM, exhibitions, publications and specific educational programmes are employed to communicate and reach out to the museum audience:

Singapore Art Museum (SAM) hopes to achieve its mission through its exhibitions, publications, public education and outreach programmes. As a learning process, SAM curates and presents exhibitions. At the same time, we provide educational tours and resource kits to enhance visual arts appreciation. Workshops that cover art theory and practice for both teachers and students are also regularly organized, along with talks or discussions on art and art related issues to stimulate Singapore's cultural environment (NHB, 2003).

The above statement shows a conflation of the meaning of school education and public education and indicates that the two types of programmes are not always distinguished in



practice. Furthermore, the definition of the public education and outreach programmes remained quite loose and vague as compared to school programmes. This is expressed in statements such as the following:

Education and outreach remained a key focus with a host of programmes designed to engage the audience in art (NHB, 2002, p. 35).

As mentioned in 4.1.2, the curatorial role is cast as an 'educational process' to highlight the educational function of exhibitions. Specific communication channels, such as tours, workshop, talks and publications are seen as efforts to reach out to the museum audience. This points to the notion of mass communications versus face to face communication in the museum context as discussed in 2.2.1.

In addition, the role of art exhibitions and art education in the museum context is conceived as supporting the larger landscape of formal education and national arts development, as articulated by the Director of SAM in an arts symposium:

Art education, art commissioning and art as heritage were the conceptual coordinates for art development (...) Art education emphasized the social-intellectual space within the educational paradigm. Art exhibitions would have been seen as study reports and an extension of formal education. Art as heritage in its less sophisticated manifestation regards the act of (traditional) painting as satisfactory communication with tradition (K. C. Kwok, 1996a, p. 85).

### **4.3 Summary**

The concept that underlies the above discussion is the 'invention of tradition' which leads to the creation of roots and links to older civilisations. In SAM these concepts are put into operation through two kinds of educational programme: schools programmes and general public programmes; and at this point we can return to the two main questions: Can collections and exhibitions in art museums act as markers of national identities? What role should art museum education play in contributing to the understanding of local/national artistic heritage, and hence to local/national identity? and how this chapter has constituted to answering them.

The mission of SAM echoes the policy on arts and arts education on a national level. As a government funded national Art Museum, SAM's educational programme aims at forging a sense of national identity through an understanding of local/national artistic heritage.

Three main themes about the official discourse can be summarised as follows:

- Local/national art or 'Singapore art' is believed to be unique and a sense of continuity is established through the narration of a national art history in SAM.
- Art exhibition and art education in the museum context are seen as part of SAM's contribution to the regional and international art scene.
- From the perspective of the government leaders, the arts and cultural policy are clearly linked to wealth creation and employment potential. At the official level, it is believed that investment in the arts industry is instrumental to promoting national economy and is a way to preserve values admired by the government.



Having traced the thinking – the beliefs and values – in the discourse of the official publications, we can in the next chapter turn to the beliefs and theories of those involved in the operationalisation of the official discourse, and the ways in which they might throw a new light on the role of art museums in education. It is evident therefore that the official position is that museum collections can function as markers of national identity and there is a top-down view that this is a major role for SAM.

## **CHAPTER 5 INFORMANTS' DISCOURSE ON LOCAL/NATIONAL ART AND IDENTITIES IN THE SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM**

Chapter 4 provided us with the background and discussion of the formal discourse of art museum education in SAM, I will present the informants' discourse in this chapter. The intention is to capture their conceptualizations and theories about local/national art and identities in the context of art museum education. Three themes emerged from the in-depth interview data based on the Grounded Theory method as discussed in Chapter 3 on research methodology. These themes are:

- The under-utilised local/national art collection
- The limited representations of local/national art through exhibitions
- Difficulty in facilitating visual art education in the Museum

The three theories will be presented and their interrelationships discussed and analysed in the final section. Linking the theories that emerged from the informants' discourse with my analysis of selected programmes at SAM will form a basis for comparison with the formal discourse on art museum education and local/national identities presented in Chapter four.

### **5.1 The Under-utilised local/national art collection**

The first theme that emerged from the data is the 'under-utilised local/national art collection' in SAM. The informants' belief is that the local/national art collection, as a major component of the permanent collection in SAM, is the 'capital' that is stored in the



collection but that it is under-exposed and under-utilised for promoting awareness about local/national artists and art development in Singapore.

### **5.1.1 The Capacity of the Permanent Collection**

The capacity of the permanent collection, with local/national art as occupying a substantial quantity is seen as a facilitating condition for the development of educational programmes. While Informant S4 stated that 'the SAM collection is an under-exposed gem' which has 'a good number of local/national works' (Interview 4, para. 44), S5 furthered the idea about the Museum's capacity in developing its local/national art collection for education:

SAM has the capital [sic] of doing that well, because of their collection of local art works. That's what I think. Even NAC [National Arts Council] has to go to SAM to ask for assistance in educating the general public (Interview 5, para. 44).

The local/national art collection as the museum's capital is attributed to the history of the collection and its relatively large proportion of the permanent museum collection, thereby affirming the Museum's deliberate move to assert a sense of local/national identity:

The Singapore collection is huge, it's almost one-third or close to half of the permanent collection. The Singapore art collection, together with the Malaysian collection, which dated back to Malaya, has had a much longer history in terms of collecting than the more recent Southeast Asian art and the Tyler print collection (Interview 6, para. 20).

To understand the underlying beliefs of informants, I will start with their definition of local/national art collection and move on to present the three intertwining factors leading to the formulation of the first concept: (i) space constraints of a non-purpose built art museum, (ii) insufficient research and study, and (iii) unclear acquisition methodology.

### **5.1.2 Defining 'Local/National Art' collection**

The nationality of artists is a defining criterion for local art works to enter into the permanent collection of SAM. The terms 'local' and 'national' are often used interchangeably to refer to Singapore art and identity by the informants. The use of the term 'local' arises from the need in this research discussion to distinguish Singapore art from the 'regional' and 'international' categories and also shows the reflections of informants about the notion of 'identities' as we shall see below.

As informant S8 said, 'It's basically artists who were born in Singapore. That's how it's defined, work made by Singaporeans', though over the years the Museum 'has acquired a small number of works by foreign artists who were/are based in Singapore' (Interview 8, para. 2 and 4). Such a definition coincides in general with SAM's official description of its local/national art component in the collection:

In addition to its breadth of coverage, the collection's strengths also lie in its comprehensive representation of Singaporean art and its unparalleled holdings of works by major Singaporean artists such as Georgette Chen, Liu Kang, Chen Chong Swee, Lim Tze Peng and Huang Yao. (<http://www.nhb.gov/SAM/Collections/> Access: 9 February 2006).



Here, the notion of 'local' is not inherent in the artworks themselves but resides in the 'nationality' of the artists. However, the idea of 'Singaporean' is not necessarily a stable category as national boundaries involved political negotiations and are historically forged. Besides, quite a few of the Singaporean artists mentioned in the above SAM website were not born in Singapore but migrants from China. The coincidence between the official statement and the views of the interviewees is not complete as the interviewees have a more nuanced concept of 'local' than the formal museum discourse.

Historically, the term 'local artists' could also include both Singapore and Malaysian artists when it was used to refer to pre-1965 Singapore, which was part of the Straits Settlements and culturally strongly linked with Malaya, as this informant made clear:

The term 'Malayan art' was used in the past as artists from the peninsula and Singapore practiced together... you can't separate them, the artists were always together...both life and art practices. When Singapore became independent, you separate the peninsular artists from Singapore, there are some problems there, you tend to miss out a few artists who are very relevant and are part of the development... Personally I would like to see politics as one thing, but when it comes to art practices, I consider Singapore art and Malaysian art as one, though there are two places, there is one group of artists, it's easier to contextualise. I shouldn't say it's easier, it's there and it's one thing, when you separate them, it's problematic (Interview 7, para.68 and 70).

In the case of defining local/national art prior to the independence of Singapore, the affiliation with Malaysia indicates shared culture and community (artists and artistic practices) and shared territory (geographical and political). The 'problem' as this

informant pointed out was created by the political separation of Singapore from the Malayan peninsula, which in reality did not force apart the visual arts community in the 1960s. Here, there is a lack of conformity between the definitions and concepts of the interviewees and the formal discourse of the Museum; and the informant is aware of this and has a theory that the divergence in thinking is caused by the use of political concepts rather than artistic concepts. The link between the political element and the cultural element in defining the term 'local/national art' will be presented in greater detail in relation to the theme about educating the public about local/national art and identity in 5.3.

The notion of 'exclusivity' underlies the definition of 'local/national art' as it is conceived as works made by artists who distinguish themselves from those who do not belong to their group. At the same time, it points to a dichotomy of artists 'belonging' to Singapore, but also 'transcending' that boundary and being connected to the rest of the world. Here, the concept of 'local/national' is inextricably connected with 'international', which is central to the informants' understanding of the contrasting relationships embedded in the term 'local/national art'. As articulated by informants S1 and S4:

...once you learn about art history in the international sense, from there, you can connect with what's happening in the local art scene (Interview 1, para. 42).

There are huge links between certain Western 'artist icons', certain 'stylisms' or international art movements... I think the international influences on local and regional art can't be ignored (Interview 4, para. 20).

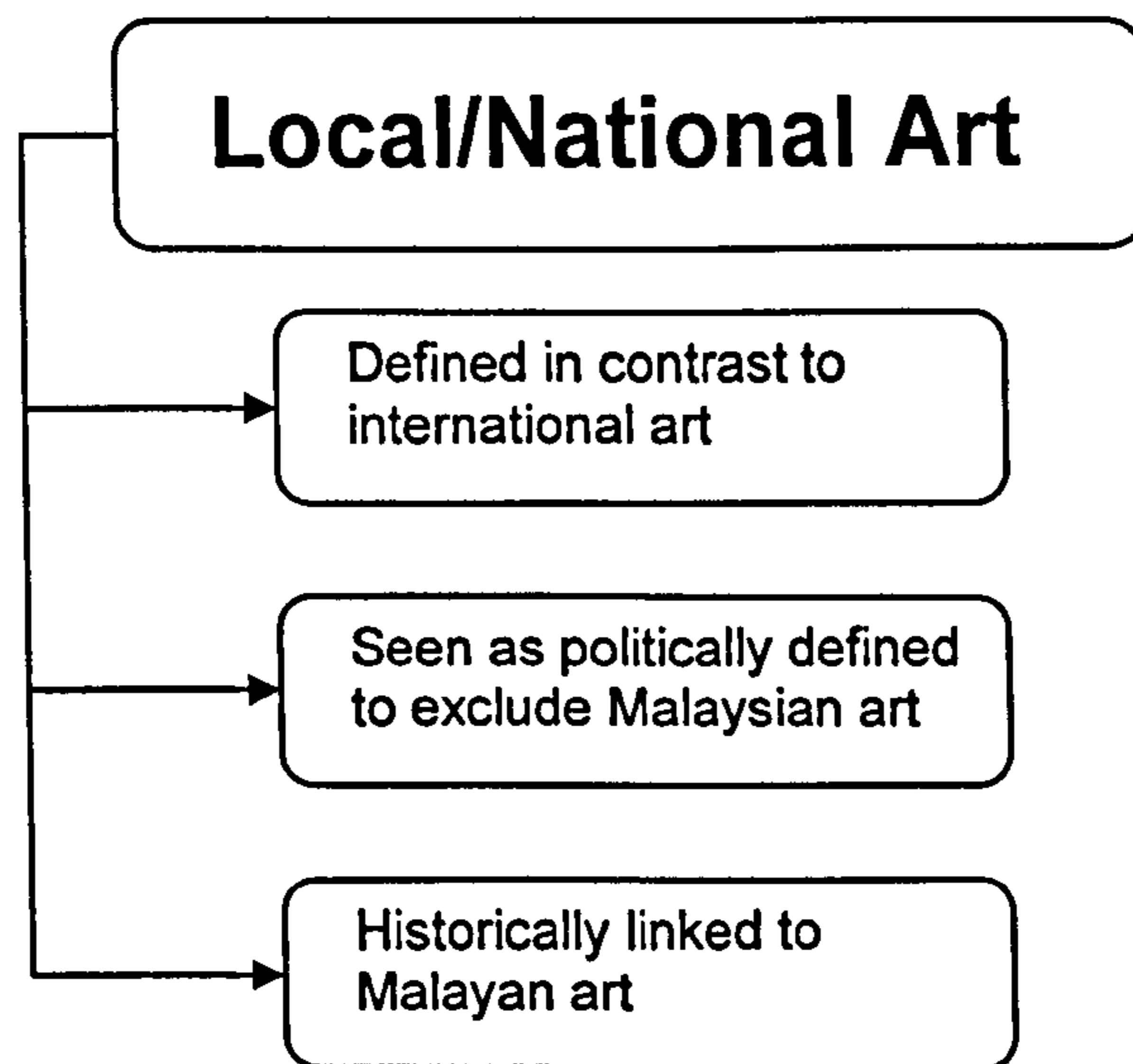


The notion of 'crossing boundaries' emphasised that local/national artists formed part of the 'international' art community. In addition, the concept of 'time' as a crucial element for the emergence of 'culture' and 'identity' implies continuity and development.

Having said that, we are not hermetic and are crossing cultural boundaries all the time, so Singapore received influences from all over the world. The idea about local art is still quite fuzzy... It's a short time frame we are talking about, I think the clarity of the concepts of 'culture' and 'identity' can be seen over time (Interview 8, para.6).

Based on informants' conceptualisations, local/national art is seen as opposite to international, but there are some divergences in terms of the conception as it hinges on the historical dimension, namely Singapore art as part of Malayan art prior to the nation's independence. This is seen as an important feature for Informant S7 when he commented about artistic affiliation between Singapore and Malaysia.

While for S6 and S8, for example focused on the notion of local/national, being it has a historical dimension in two aspects: local/national art in general and based on its collection history and the way that it is related to international art developments. In summary, the schema which can be distilled from these views is represented as below:



With reference to my overall purpose to analyse informants' views on the role of SAM in identity formation, this scheme shows how they conceptualise local/national art.

### 5.1.3 Space constraints of a non-purpose built art museum

Despite the large size of the local/national art collection, the constraint of the building poses a problem for the exposure of the artworks to the public. On the occasion of the announcement of establishing a new 'Singapore Art Gallery', the Director of SAM acknowledged the drawbacks of the Museum's limited exhibition space, he said, 'It prevents the museum from optimizing the presentation of its collection, with the bulk of it stored away in the repository' (*The Straits Times, March 5, 2005*).

From the perspective of the informants, the cultural policy and urban redevelopment schemes were both facilitating and constraining conditions for the operations of the Art



Museum. The vision for the Museum Planning Area announced in 1997 was aimed at transforming the downtown area into an Arts, Cultural, Learning and Entertainment District, thereby facilitating the development of an arts infrastructure:

... it's coming to terms to what it means to be a global city, in its limited way, it's there anyway... it's part of the URA's [Urban Redevelopment Authority] strategy, so that in the new downtown, they reserved spots for museums and art galleries, so it's there as public policy (Interview 3, para.106).

Yet, the conversion of a heritage building into an Art Museum hindered the development of exhibitions and limited the display of the permanent collection.

Because they had wanted to reuse all these old buildings on Bras Basah Road, so they turned them all into museums... the current building as every one knows is very problematic because it's so traditional looking, it doesn't seem to fit modern and contemporary art (Interview 3, para. 24 and 20).

The directive from the State as bearing down upon the museum's operations was articulated by Informant S6:

The museum is very small. The decision to allocate...and not to have a purpose-built space for a museum is something that we have to live with now (Interview 6, para. 24).

Apart from presenting difficulties for the display of contemporary art, which requires flexibility sorely lacking in the traditional building, the small sized museum is a challenge for curators for mounting larger scale exhibitions. Informant S6 elaborated:

There are constraints that some works don't work very nicely in that space or some exhibitions may be constrained by the nature of each gallery, the way the rooms are, the height of the ceiling, all that kind of things. So one

needs to work around the physical characteristics of the building... the fact that the rooms or galleries are located quite separately, so that if one wants to do a bigger show with a degree of continuity, it's not quite possible even if we use the whole museum, because the rooms are separated and are not placed in order to suggest easy navigation (Interview 6, para.30).

While commenting on the lack of exhibition space for the collection, this informant's view exemplified the belief that SAM was engaged in a balancing act between showcasing local/national art (from the permanent collection) and hosting regional and international art exhibitions.

The current space in SAM is small for its collection size. Even the entire space is used for the permanent collection, one wonders whether you can show even, say something like (...) Even 5%, can you show 5%? (...) if it's entirely devoted to the permanent collection that would be at the expense of SAM playing the role of bringing in temporary exhibitions, in particular international blockbusters (Interview 6, para. 26 and 28).

The connection between 'local/national' and 'international' echoes the earlier definition of local/national art and will form an important link to the discussion about local/national art and local/national identities.

### *Expansion plans*

Despite the government's plans for expansion, including the conversion of the Supreme Court and the City Hall buildings into a new 'Singapore art gallery' by 2013, informants have reservations as to whether the new space will address the difficulties mentioned above.



I don't know what they are going to do with the new buildings, but it's not going to be a big flexible space, so there's no space to show big installations and it doesn't look like it's going to change in the new buildings (Interview 3, para. 20).

The decision to allocate a new space for the growing collection was perceived as a tentative plan on the part of policy makers, rather than a long-term plan for museum development. As Informant S6 remarked:

I guess we don't know whether there's differentiation in exhibiting in the current museum and the new buildings. Will Singapore artworks be the focus there? It's been less than ten years since SAM is opened, and now they are talking about expanding, or moving the museum, what does it tell you about planning? (Interview 6, para. 32).

Informant S8 echoed this concern about how a long term development for the local/national art collection might have an impact on the museum practices. What is interesting here is the contrast between 'showing' and interpretation, which suggests that there is a task of interpreting local/national art for the public and thereby showing the role it can play in identity formation:

There should be a programme, or strategic planning as to how to use that space [new buildings] in the long term. If they don't set a clear direction, it will end up be a 'white elephant', I mean displaying art is not that simple, it involves interpretation, it's not just 'showing' more works, that's it (Interview 8, para. 60).

To sustain the idea about the local, that local/national art needs to be displayed and exposed to the public in a meaningful way, a properly designed space is considered as a premise to showcase local/national art.

This leads to the discussion of research and study of local/national collection as a prerequisite for understanding local/national art, which we shall see in the next section.

The underlying belief is the importance of showcasing the collection, interpreted to the public, as this is the capital for education. The views of the informants about the development of the local/national art collection can be summarised as follows:

- If local/national art is properly researched and studied by museum professionals, there will be a representation of the collection in museum displays;
- If there is a representation of the local/national art collection, it could be interpreted for the public's understanding;
- If there is a properly designed space, it will facilitate the display of the collection.

#### **5.1.4 Insufficient Research and Study of the collection**

To build up an analysis of the informants' theory about the under-exposure of local/national art in SAM, I discovered that besides their concept about space constraints of the current building, they believed that the Museum has yet to establish a knowledge base for the study of local/national art. In fact, the lack of research was seen as a main reason for the under-utilisation of the local/national art collection:

For local art, which in SAM's case is art works made by Singaporean artists...it's still very much on the pioneer artists. But, you see the identity of these ethnic Chinese artists have not been fully discussed. I wish more research could be done on this. The collection is under-utilised. There's so much inside. Has anyone done a holistic research ... to study the whole collection? (Interview 1, para. 90)



In this case, 'holistic research' implies the investigation of the collection in terms of both scope and depth. The belief in harnessing the 'scope' of the permanent collection for developing local/national art exhibitions was articulated by Informant S3:

Use more of their permanent collection. They can use half of the museum and have one big local show a year from the permanent collection (Interview 3, para. 36).

Informant S8 pointed to the centrality of the permanent collection as the basis for widening and deepening of knowledge about the nation's public art collection. Here the significant phrase is 'a place to study' which echoes the reference to research above:

As a museum collecting for a national collection, you are talking about a repository for a nation; you need to establish it as a place to study Singapore art. Art history could be used to inform the public. Right now, there is no shared knowledge base, and SAM should be a repository of that knowledge base. (Interview 8, para. 42)

To the extent that exhibitions are seen as both the process and product of research in the museum context, informants believed that there are gaps of knowledge in the understanding of local/national art development, thereby leading to the concept, 'limited representations', which will be discussed in the following section.

Two areas were particularly noticeable, namely the lack of presentation of Malay art in Singapore and the marginalisation of craft traditions, like fabrics and woodcut prints in exhibitions:

There's not much investigation of Malay art, virtually none...they have the intellectual capacity to do it (Interview 3, para. 64).

So one of the things that seem quite obviously lacking is the role of ....what happen to certain practices, for example, the Malay artists...what happen to fabrics? Or woodcut prints. Who's done what? A more detailed study is needed (Interview 6, para. 54).

S4 pointed to:

an astounding lack of information, cataloguing or archival materials on many of the 'pioneer artists'...existing family members are still not fully 'capitalised' on to supply such information. Take Chen Chong Swee or Chen Wen Hsi or even Georgette Chen – there are enormous gaps in information, dating of series of works, or information on the media and materials they used (Interview 4, para. 30 and 32).

In the same line of thought, informants considered museum publications, in the form of catalogues – one of the research outputs in the museum context – as rather 'uneven' (S3). Another informant, S1 noted the inaccessibility of textual information provided by the Museum, inclusive of publications and accompanying text for exhibitions:

It doesn't help if the art writings published by SAM made no attempt to help the public understand art. It's simply 'art for art's sake', it seems like they are writing in a way to appear intellectual so as to be taken seriously. But that's a myth, it goes back to the issue about wall texts and labels, which has to be accessible (Interview 8, para. 52).

The above criticism about museum publications affirms the importance of the accessibility of information provided to the visitors.



## *Art History*

Addressing the status of inadequate research, Informant S6 identified a few constraining factors for such development, including the issue of resources and the short history of Singapore:

Our art scene has a short period of discourse and is dominated by too little resource, too little manpower, too little experts in it. In terms of distribution of information, it's also quite wanting. (Interview 6, para.54)

Overall, informants believed that these constraints could be overcome by SAM spearheading more research and study of local/national art through the art-historical approach:

It could be done... it could be done even through the Nanyang School – how the Nanyang school engaged in Southeast Asia, like what Sabapathy did, but it's not enough ...and also explore the status of the artists as Shanghai trained, China born artists... it doesn't give us enough idea as to how they interact with Southeast Asia and the colonial times, so in some ways they could do more than just the discrete history, but art-cultural history (Interview 3, para. 56).

One of the reasons that museum professionals have not been able to conduct adequate research on local/national art was seen by informant S8 in the light of the provision of resources within the organisational structure of the museum, in this case the insufficient allocation of time for research development work:

I think SAM has failed in developing art historical research in Singapore(...) Because of the heavy administrative duties, the museum did not let researchers build up that level of work, to hone the skills of research on the

permanent collection, that's where knowledge comes from (Interview 8, para.36 and 40).

Art history was seen as important because of the belief that a narrative of local/national visual art needs to be constructed through research and interpretation. One of the prerequisites for the formation of local/national identity in the museum context is the existence of a local/national art narrative.

In this case, the combined thinking of the informants about developing the research of local/national art collection in the Museum could be expressed as the following conditions:

- If there is research, then there will be a knowledge base;
- If there is a knowledge base then there will be more utilisation of the collection;
- If there is more use of the collection then there will be impact on the public.
- If there is a narrative of local/national visual art then it will facilitate the formation of local/national art identity.

### **5.1.5 Unclear Acquisition Methods**

While research on the local/national art collection has not been firmly established in SAM, ambiguity also exists in the acquisition methodology which, in turn affects the development of the collection. Informant S1 believed that the lack of clarity in the acquisition methodology made it difficult to develop the collection in a systematic way.

A lot of museums have a very strict policy in terms of collecting and de-accessioning. They give younger artists 10 years, they'll collect; but after 10 years, if they don't think it's worth collecting, they de-accession, that's



their policy, you know. In SAM, I don't see a policy being formulated to deal with donated works or even the permanent collection, in that case, there is a danger of ending up with numbers, but not quality (Interview 1, para. 110).

To address the current problem, informants identified ways of developing a useful methodology to build up the collection. On the one hand, art historical methods was considered as useful to develop the collection:

They should start with studying the collection in art history manner, build it up like branches from a tree, determine the main pieces and then develop from there. (Interview 8, para. 42).

In addition, Informant S4 stated that 'contemporary art works', in particular new media, could help to build up the collection:

If 'contemporary' means artists who are still living and practising – then I would say that it has a good number of these. If you are talking about 'contemporary' to denote a certain media, for example cyber art, I think SAM still needs to work out how to 'collect' some of these less collectible items in a more ambitious way (Interview 4, para.46).

The beliefs of the informants about the acquisition methods could be summarised below:

- If there is to be a representative collection it will have a strong contemporary element.
- If the Museum is to develop a contemporary element then there must be a clear collection policy.
- There is no policy of the kind as to deal with the permanent collection and donated works (S1) and so there is no proper contemporary collection.
- Furthermore, there is no clear collection policy on contemporary art modes.

### **5.1.6 Summary**

The common belief that the existence of a national art collection helps to develop an understanding and appreciation of Singapore's artistic heritage and in relation to other cultures underlies the informants' expectations about the ways that the local/national art collection could be utilised.

The expectations for the Art Museum in collecting local/national art are three-fold: to nurture research & study; to develop knowledge through focused methods of acquisition; to utilise collection for public appreciation of art and cultural heritage, and thereby national identity.

In general, the informants have a sociological and historical analysis of the art collection as they hold the following connected beliefs:

- That the local/national art exist because it has been collected for a long time in the Museum
- That local/national art is not synonymous with political definitions of what is local/national
- That this local/national art must be seen as 'capital'
- That this capital is and should be used for public education

This again implies that they believe there is an educational purpose related to national identity.

Figure 5.1 represents a graphic presentation of the first theory. Amongst the three factors that underlie the theory of the 'under-utilised local/national art collection', the space

constraints of a heritage building are seen as the least controllable as it is a matter of policy and directives from the State. Although there is a new plan to convert the Supreme Court into a National Arts Gallery to alleviate the problem of space constraints in showcasing the local/national art collection, the outcome remains uncertain among informants as it is still a converted space.

The interrelationships between research and acquisition methodology, however, are areas that informants believed could be improved upon to develop the local/national art collection (in terms of improving its quality) to meet the mission of the museum, which as has been shown in the document analysis, explicitly refers to its role in the nurturing of national identity. In short, informant S4 summarised the notion that there is scope for development as:

SAM is an immense resource that has barely been capitalized in terms of publications, even merchandising, let alone exhibitions and programmes (Interview 4, para. 74).



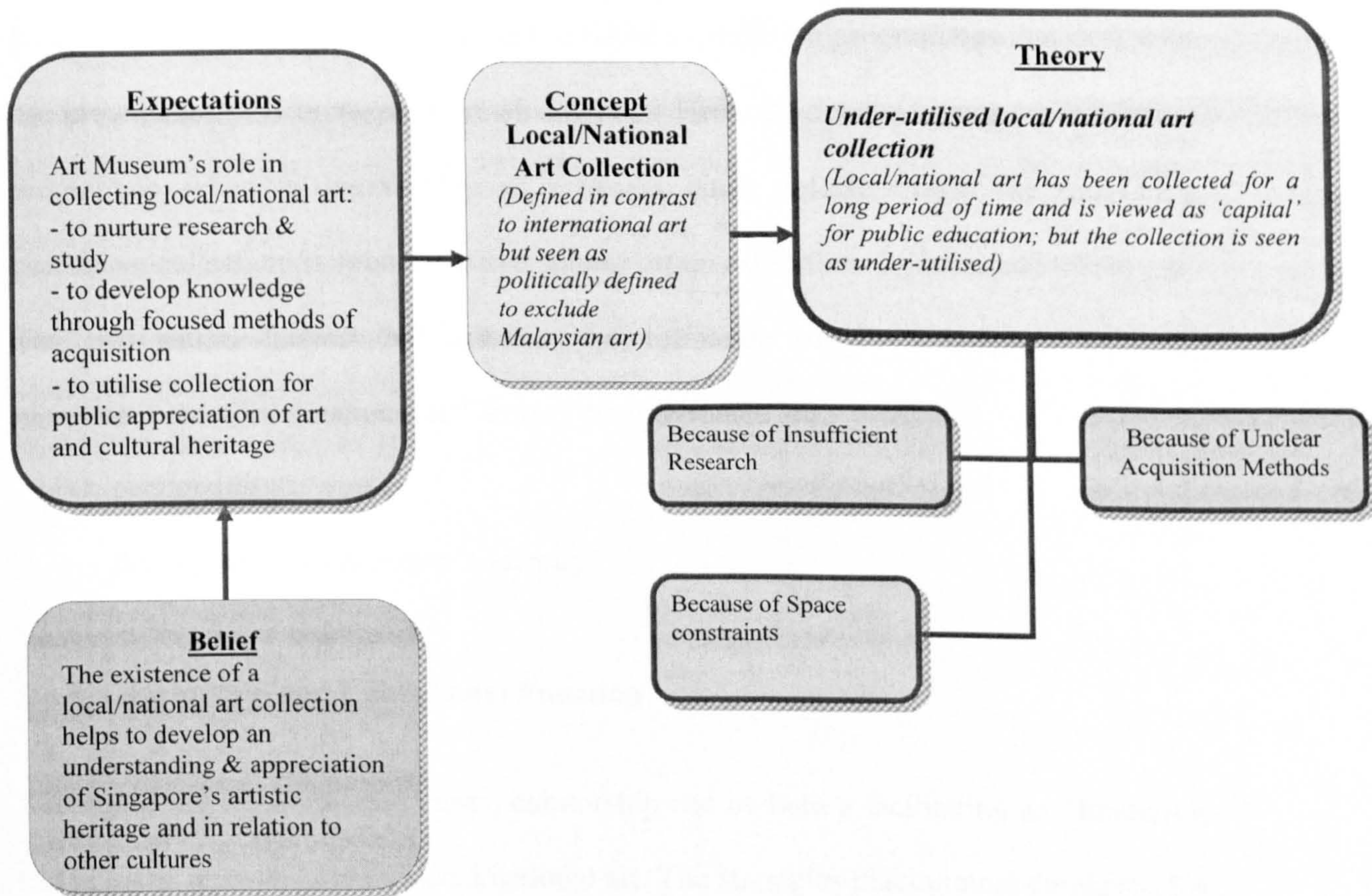


Fig. 5.1 Informants' theory about the under-utilised local/national art collection



## **5.2 Limited representations of Local/National Art through Exhibitions**

The second theme that emerged from the interviews is the 'limited representations of local/national art' and is directly related to SAM's exhibition programmes that deal with the presentation and representation of artworks. Here, the local/national art exhibition programme refers to the display of artworks either selected from the museum's permanent collection or through invited solo or group exhibitions by local/national artists. The two causal factors that underlie the formation of the concept of 'limited representation of local/national art' among the informants are:

- curatorship
- the impact of the Museum's identity

### **5.2.1 Curatorship and Educational Function**

According to the informants' views, curatorship can be both a facilitating and hindering factor in the representation of local/national art. The strategies that curators employed for articulating a 'story' involves the complex process of the selection of 'knowledge' and the presentation of values and ideas through display. As informant S7 put it:

Presenting an artwork is not so easy, it's not like just hang a picture on the wall or put a sculpture on the floor and that's it. You have to think of some ways to lead the audience into it...to help them to see and understand the art work (Interview 7, para. 36).

Implicit in this informant's idea of display is the belief in the educational function of exhibitions through a mediated experience of art. He emphasised 'leading in' and 'helping to understand': the ideas and values that curators conveyed through the

presentation of artworks has potential for promoting audience understanding. Yet, the exhibitions featuring local/national art were perceived as 'uneven' with respect to this educational function depending on individual curator's strengths:

...some exhibitions are better than others, depending on the curator and his/her capacity to do so... There have been some really thoughtful and important exhibitions on Southeast Asian and local art, but also a number of rather forgettable ones as well. I think certain curators have, very fortunately, acquired a reputation for producing certain kinds of exhibitions, I mean those with some depth of analyses and insights, while others have, well [sigh] expressed themselves in more superficial shows! (Interview 4, para. 40 and 50)

In this statement it is evident that the educational factor is dependent on 'depth' and 'analysis' as carried out by the curator; this is the educational function of curatorship. Although the quality and success of an exhibition is contingent upon multiple factors, including design, funding and preparation time, informants acknowledged the critical role that curators play in their interpretations of artworks. S4 elaborated:

Having been a curator working under certain pressures at the museum, I would say that the success of these exhibitions depends on a thicket of factors ... the curator's 'bent' – meaning their own approach or methodology in interpreting works; the time schedule for the exhibition, for example. Some shows have 2 years to develop, others 2 months; sponsorship funds, which impact on design and display sophistication and experiments; and even the 'popularity' stakes for a certain show! (Interview 4, para. 52)

What we see here then is a further refinement of the equation of the curator's ability to interpret with the educational function. The other factors are time and money available. Curatorial ambition is also seen as a crucial factor for the long term development of



exhibition programmes, and the possibility that there will be the necessary research is seen as dependent on curators' 'ambition', which can be a counter-balance to the significance of funding:

There is no big curatorial push to even do the historical element there, except in a very patchy way ...you need bigger shows than that...It has the capacity, even with limited funding, could still do it if they want to... They are not ambitious, I suppose ... (Interview 3, para. 12, 92 and 94).

In summary, the informants' combined thinking about the relationship of curatorship and educational function are as follows:

- Curatorship is fundamental to the representation of local/national art through exhibitions.
- Exhibitions communicate to the public about the interpreted knowledge of the local/national art collection, and its role in creating and nurturing national identity.

*- Canon: pioneer artists*

Informants believe that SAM provides a good platform for showcasing contemporary local/national artists, in particular, as Informant S7 noted, exhibitions that offered exposure to young artists:

...the President's Young Artists shows were usually good... it's a good example of how the museum could promote local artists, including up and coming artists (Interview 7, para. 16).

On the other hand, the recurrent focus on presenting the 'pioneer' artists in the local/national art exhibitions was considered by the informants as limiting the representation of local/national art. Informant S3 encapsulated this by referring to the local/national art exhibitions as:

Very limited, it's always the Nanyang School. If they did a show on Social Realism, that will be quite interesting, but it's very limited (Interview 3, para.42).

As mentioned in 4.1.1, the Nanyang School has been considered in the formal discourse as the first artistic style of painting in Singapore. The identification of the pioneer artists and the Nanyang style exclusively with Singapore is directly connected with the definition of 'local/national art' and its relationship with the term 'Malayan art', as pointed out by informants in 5.1.2.

The role of the Art Museum in forging a mainstream in the representation of local/national artists by showcasing selected artists, thereby raising their status in the art world, is a contentious one. From the curatorial perspective, there is a concern with the alignment of the Museum's vision with the exhibition programmes:

when we conceptualised exhibitions, there would be questions like: is this what the museum is doing? Does this fit into Southeast Asian art or a particular kind of programming spread? ... or interest or focus the museum might be offering....you are not exactly independent as a curator but one can always suggest ideas, or themes or research proposals and so on (Interview 6, para. 14).

At issue here is whether SAM perpetuates a 'canon' of local/national artists by focusing on the presentation of 'pioneer artists'. The term 'canon' refers to a 'borrowed' concept from Euro-American art criticism as is pointed out by S4:

The very idea of 'canon' is a borrowed one...suggests an abundance or even excess of literature, interest, market patronage, support for the canonized artists, like the way Picasso or the Abstract Modernists were 'canonised' by



critics, museums and the market. In Singapore, there's nothing close to the processes and experience of 'canonisation' of artists. There's hype, yes; self-promotion in some cases even, but very little in the way of in-depth research or sheer data information (Interview 4, para. 28).

The above beliefs expressed the paradox of curatorial power in the context of SAM – that certain artists (the Nanyang school for example) are being selected to further the discourse of a local/national art narrative in Singapore, but that the notion of a canon which this implies is not appropriate, being borrowed from elsewhere. The lack of sufficient research implies that there is no real basis for the creation of a canon.

Another informant questioned the limited idea of the grouping of pioneer artists, and contrasted the search for a pioneer group with the importance of art which creates questions and debate:

I'm not worry (sic) about the age grouping, whether they are pioneers or contemporary. I would like to see the museum pay more attention to the content. A good reason for putting a show together, is it because the artworks raised certain questions? For example, when they put a few artists together, there are some common questions or issues that they can share among these few artists... to create a forum, a debate, something to talk about, that would be meaningful, that would be a very good reason for putting these few artists together. Not just because these few artists are the 'pioneers'. No, that's not a good enough reason to put a show together (Interview 7, para. 62).

The belief that 'content' is an essential starting point for organising an exhibition implies the facilitating role of the museum in the sharing and enlarging of knowledge among the

public, giving them 'something to talk about'. S7's notion of the museum as a 'forum' for debate is pertinent as it expresses the idea that through exhibitions, the museum could engage people to participate in the discourse of local/national art.

The informants' beliefs about the purpose of museum education through exhibition programmes are summarised as follow:

- curators' research and interpretation cause the representation of local/national art;
- the representation of local/national art is a means to communicate to the public and to create access to the art collection, and thereby fulfill its mission in nurturing national identity.

### **5.2.2 Museum Identity**

In the course of defining SAM's identity through its programmes and activities, informants believed that as the sole national art museum in Singapore, SAM faces the challenge of balancing its 'identity' at various levels, which have been polarized in the formal discourse as discussed in Chapter Four:

- (i) local/national art versus regional (Southeast Asian) art
- (ii) local/national art versus international art
- (iii) the historical art museum versus contemporary art museum

The focus and priority of the museum's programming has been called into question by informants, as remarked by S1:

It seems to me that they have done too many exhibitions, that people are not sure what the Museum's focus is, like Inuit art [exhibition] ... I mean the whole history of it, there are so many different kinds (...). Even if they just want to talk about branding, talk about your branding clearly: What do you



want to do? Then you can spring up to do these other things to capture more audience (...) the biggest challenge they have is actually staying focused. And 'focused' means, you just do what you can, and not try to manage many other things because of other agenda. ...So they shouldn't sway with the tide, but stay focused (Interview 1, para. 2, 36 and 122).

In this statement it is interesting that the informant introduced the concept of 'branding' i.e. the creation of an identity in some deliberate and perhaps artificial way. The issue is an identity for the museum but this is implicitly related to the function of creating a national identity. At the same time the museum has a function of constructing a Southeast Asian identity through its collection and this means a further layer to the development of national identity.

With reference to SAM's construction of a Southeast Asian identity through its collection of contemporary Southeast Asian Art and exhibition programming, S4 saw the policy in these terms:

I have spoken to a number of specialists in the tourism field who are increasingly vocal about aspiring towards a very distinctive or unique profile, e.g. a Southeast Asian identity, that would distinguish SAM from other competing art museums that could have better, or more famous, spectacular etc. 'masterpieces' or keynote artworks. For these consultants, the museum's identity and mission is part of a kind of 'product differentiation' that operates to bring in tourists from other competing destinations (Interview 4, para. 16).

Again it is noticeable that there is a consumer terminology here – of 'product differentiation' – and this theme is brought out in the official discourse in 4.2.2. It is

important to note the tension that existed in the educational role of the Museum as it became increasingly commercialised in its approach to 'marketing' and 'branding'. The idea of commodification of museum education was noted by museum researchers as discussed in 2.2.3.

In the process of enhancing its Southeast-Asian identity, the Museum emphasises the affinities of local/national art to the region, thereby subsuming it as part of Southeast Asia, and on the other hand attempts to distinguish the notion of local/national from the regional. The irony as observed by the same informant is that the majority of visitors are drawn to 'blockbuster' or mega international exhibitions, rather than exhibitions on local/national or regional art forms:

I think the majority of the visitors are probably not interested in SAM pursuing its mission to be the foremost Southeast Asian art museum... You use the term 'public', I think that refers to this broad audience who often associates SAM with blockbuster exhibitions like Guggenheim, Leonardo, French art and the upcoming Botero show. To a large extent, these extravaganzas do raise 'the buzz' as there are more public enquiries, interest, attention ... so it is tempting to keep bringing in these shows to sustain a more intense spotlight on the Museum and its programmes (Interview 4, para. 18).

It is a challenging task for museum professionals as the tension lies in fulfilling the historical mission while at the same time being a cutting edge contemporary art museum.

But as a discipline of art museum, the main interest is art history or perhaps, a more discursive take on contemporary culture. And that's where SAM is taking a position not simply in art historical grounds but being interested in



the nature of contemporary culture, in how it could offer a programme that is multidisciplinary enough to engage with a wider audience interest in contemporary culture (Interview 6, para. 42).

Informant S3 delivered a caveat about SAM's future direction and development. In comparison with Fukuoka Art Museum, a one time rival with SAM in the representation of Southeast Asian art, a clear direction is required:

... it has to be more ambitious in what they are trying to do, if only doing small scale things, then you don't produce definitive things, the point is SAM has the institutional capacity to produce major historical analysis. It's two things, one is curating contemporary art, the other is the art historical dimension....SAM had that only from Modernity and Beyond, but there seems to be no money to do that anymore. Then it becomes a historical museum, which is what Fukuoka is in danger of becoming but even then, is it going to be ambitious in its historical mission? If not, then what is it? It's neither a historical museum nor a cutting edge, innovative display museum. It's left behind in both ways, it's neither (Interview 3, para. 76).

There is an implied contrast in the concepts used by the informants in their discussion about the representation of local/national art:

- The Museum devotes resources to bringing in 'international' blockbusters versus developing 'local/national' art exhibitions.
- The Museum identity as a 'regional' art centre affects a focused development in its 'local/national' art collection.
- Tension exists in defining the Museum as a 'educational' institute versus that of a 'commercial' one as branding and marketing became increasingly important.

Implicit in the informants' views about SAM's identity was the message that unless the museum stayed focused and prioritise its various positions, it will limit the representation of 'local/national art', which informants believed should command the focus of the exhibition and research agenda.

### **5.2.3 Summary**

In relation to the representation of local/national art in SAM, the concepts of informants are represented in Fig. 5.2 and summarised below:

- There are expectations among the informants that a local/national art narrative be communicated through exhibition programmes and publications.
- These expectations have not been met by the Art Museum's construction of a partial narrative so far – largely dominated by the 'Nanyang School' and some selected artists' work, and without the support of in-depth research.
- There is a strong relationship between the ideology of the collection and exhibitions in the Museum as both areas embody the values of the State and the museum professionals, which could sometimes be conflicting.
- Moreover, tensions exist in SAM's attempt to legitimise itself as a platform for contemporary Southeast Asian art while balancing its role as a national museum – a 'repository' of knowledge and ideas for the benefit of the public, including helping the public understand more about local/national art historical development and contemporary art practices.



The above views connect with the belief of the significance of exhibitions in interpreting art objects for public appreciation – one of the functions of a public art museum discussed in the literature review in 2.2.2.

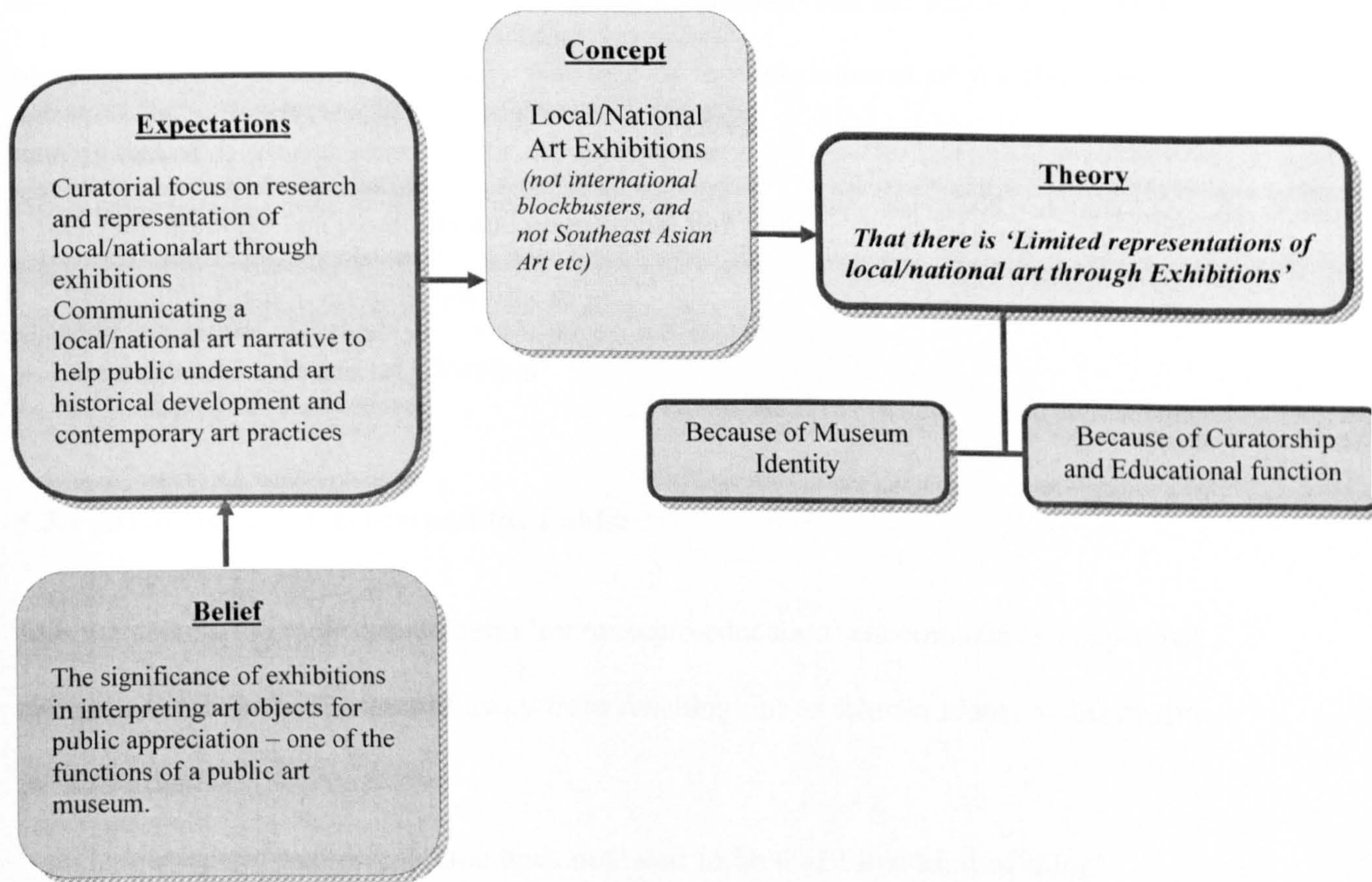


Fig. 5.2 Informants' theory about the limited representations of local/national art through exhibitions



### **5.3 Difficulty in Facilitating Visual Art Education in the Museum**

Due to the under-utilisation of the local/national art collection and the limited representation of local/national art in SAM, informants found it difficult for the art museum to 'facilitate visual art education' as spelled out in its mission statement. In this section, the informants' definitions of art museum education and the public will form the basis for discussion about the factors that lead to the development of the third theory, namely that of:

- Disjunction between curatorial and educational functions
- Multiculturalism in art museum education
- Art museum's role and art education

#### **5.3.1 Art Museum Education and the Public**

Informants held the view that the term 'art museum education' encompasses an expanded role, in a sense that it has moved away from reaching out to schools alone, as Informant S1 stated that:

...the educational programme does not need to be 4 -12 that kind of thing'  
(Interview 1, para. 18).

The role of education in SAM has significantly been broadened with the setting up of the Art Education Galleries in 2003, observed by Informant S4:

In recent years, there has been a notable shift in the scope of the educational arm of the museum. It has been 'conferred' galleries to work with, to manage the AEP exhibition, to make itself more conscious and aware of Ministry emphasis and the art curriculum; I think it has made exponential



progress in the way it conducts its programmes – moving away from the typical education pack or kit that was so popular previously (Interview 4, para. 70).

Here, the informant was positive about the contributions of the educational role of SAM, with specific reference to the programmes developed by the Education unit and contrasted this with the education ‘pack or kit’ of the past. It is also clear that there is reference to the Education Ministry and the education curriculum, but that education is broader than this.

The broadened view of education in the museum context stems from an awareness of a diverse public audience and the need to address differentiated needs and interests. As such, the notion of ‘target groups’ among the audience furthers informants’ concept about the expanded role of education that could reach out to a varied audience:

... the public’ itself is not homogenous...as a museum addressing its public art educational role, we produced a number or range of programmes ...the issue is how does the museum communicate that to a member of the target group in the public. As to whether the Museum has done that successfully, that has to be assessed, I think that’s the critical issue for assessment (...) The question then is: has the museum been very successful in its communicating strategies? Maybe it hasn’t (Interview 6, para. 2 and 6).

The idea about ‘communication’ as an integral part of education in the Museum is worth noting. As this informant said later:

...when we talk about education, we mean communication of certain information as educational processes (Interview 6, para. 46).

As noted by S4, a broad range of outreach initiatives was considered as one of the education methods to connect to the wider public:

I think that SAM has tried to make that 'bridge', that extension of hand to a much broader public – particularly to the libraries; or in its education sector, with initiatives that lent out art works to a borrowing public. These are all novel initiatives that 'lightened' the idea of contemporary art, and made it more accessible or at least more 'circulated' (Interview 4, para. 58).

This informant furthered the idea that it was important to embrace the public by '[stripping] away the codes and contexts that make art in museums 'elitist', difficult or a chore to understand' (Interview 4, para. 62).

The issue of the communicative role of the museum has been raised by Informant S8 in the former section 5.1.4 whose concern was the inaccessibility of textual information provided by the Museum as the 'art writings published by SAM made no attempt to help the public understand art' (Interview 8, para. 52). The notion of intellectual access on top of physical access to the Museum is seen as a crucial factor for the development of the educational function of the museum. In this case, the publications and wall texts as exhibition components have been identified by museum researchers as a mass communication process.

Another method of communicating to the public is face to face contact, such as dialogue and interaction between artists and the public that the following informant believed to be more effective than mass communication:



...if the Museum invites artists to meet the audience or public, I'm sure the general public wants to meet artists, the face to face contact is very nice and you can have a conversation. You understand the artist and artwork directly. This direct contact is usually better than through a third person. I think having artists give talks or just stand in front of their artworks and talk to the public is more effective (Interview 7, para.34).

Here, the use of the terms 'face to face contact' and 'conversation' highlights this informant's view about the importance of the museum's role as interpersonal communicator rather than just a mass communicator, an echo of the discussion found in the literature in 2.2.1. Furthermore, engaging the public is seen as the role of the curator and not solely the responsibilities of museum professionals in the education department.

As I said, it's important to reach out to the public and communicate with them. Engaging the audience is what the curators should do (Interview 7, para. 44).

The notion of 'in depth discussion' in facilitating the communicative role is noted by another informant with particular reference to guided tours and programmes for schools:

I think the Museum should prepare students at a higher level (...) In-depth discussion is important, which I feel is very lacking in the museum programmes (...) Very often, the Museum make their programmes fun but not challenging to students, in particular there's a lack of thinking questions (Interview 5, para. 14, 16 & 20).

Informants pointed out that dialogue and discussion as essential communicative processes to involve audience in museum programmes. Furthermore, S5 pointed out there is still scope for SAM to facilitate and develop audience understanding and knowledge about Singapore art:

One of the functions of SAM is to promote art, take it as part of national education. Look at the history of art and help people understand what's going on in the past ten years in art scene(...) students in school still know very little about the history of our local art scene (Interview 5, para.62 and 68).

This leads to Informants' questioning the impact of educational programmes in promoting local/national art as the voices of the audience are not being heard.

When you look at the promotion of local art, you'll ask what the objective for doing it is. If one of the objectives is to get more people involved in art activities, don't you think it's important? To open up the gates and let people go in. Involvement is important, once they get involved, there's a sense of belonging, and they want to do more. If they are out of the bounds, and they can only see and look, can't even touch, then it's rather difficult to talk about the impact of education (Interview 5, para. 40).

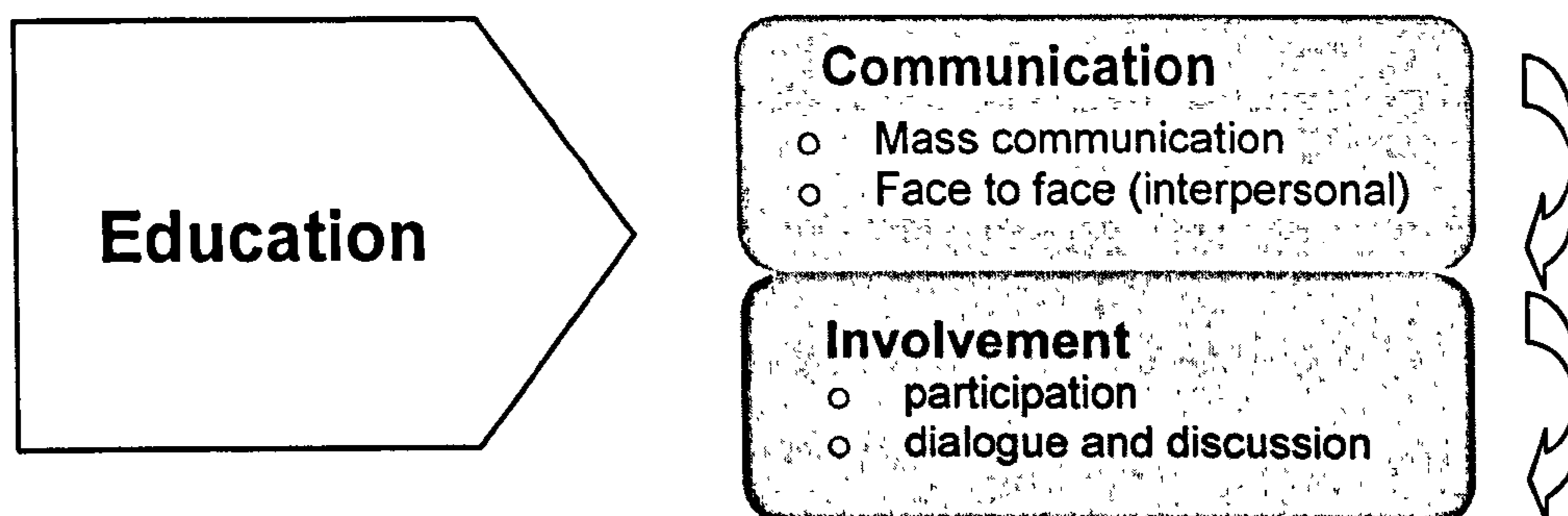
Here we see the emphasis on "belonging" and hence on identity, but Informant S5's view about the museum being 'out of bounds' for the audience as art works are supposed to be 'looked' at rather than 'touched' echoes the discussion about the barriers that existed in art museums in facilitating its educational function in creating identity, which is embedded in the tensions between the approaches of the 'aesthetic' and 'public' art museum discussed by museum researchers in 2.2.2. Both Hooper-Greenhill (1999a) and Hein (2000) note that the art museum often discourages active learning and interaction



due to its emphasis on 'looking', thus, hampering the communicative function of educational programmes. Furthermore, the idea expressed by this informant about 'opening up the gates' of the museum also implied the importance of creating intellectual access to the public, thereby encouraging participation and involvement in the museum's programmes.

The relationship between the concepts of education and communication highlighted in the foregoing discussion has been addressed in the literature review section 2.2.1. That museums function as both mass communicator and interpersonal communicator is a view also expressed by the informants. To facilitate the public understanding of local/national art, informants considered active modes of learning, such as face-to-face contact, dialogue and discussions which help to develop audience 'involvement' as crucial aspects of the goal of education. The emphasis on dialogue and discussion in the museum context is related to the notion of developing the public function of museums as 'forums' for discussion and sharing of stories among visitors as advocated by Cameron (2004) and McIntyre (2006) in section 2.2.2.

Also implicit in the informants' belief is the need for the Museum to map out the goals for different programmes and communicate to 'target' groups of the audience, thereby increasing the level of participation and support.



### 5.3.2 Disjunction between Curatorial and Educational Functions

One of the constraining factors for SAM to develop the discourse about local/national arts through its exhibition and educational programmes is the disjunction between the curators' and museum educators' perspectives on the functions of 'art education in the museum'.

There's a disparity or gap between curatorial intentions and the education department's responsibilities...When I was at SAM ... a lot of times, curators would be so caught up with organizing the exhibitions and with developing 'discourse'; it becomes difficult, or gruelling to extend curatorial attention towards developing a comprehensible 'educational' text or programme. So curators are free to use 'jargon' if they see fit and the education officer would be left to untangle it and make it a little more 'educational' and useful, and the marketing department would have to make it 'sexier' for consumption (Interview 4, para. 66 and 68).

As observed by this informant, it seems that from the curators' point of view, their main role lies in developing exhibitions through academic research and that the 'educational'



function is inherent in their 'discourse' – the interpretation of artworks. This is encapsulated in the reference to 'jargon' which suggests the curators appear to be obscure in their discourse and it is the task of the educators to clarify. It is also clear that education discourse can then go through a further stage as it is amended for the 'market'.

In this respect, the Education unit's role is tantamount to a conduit between the curator and the public – 'translating' curatorial intentions into educational materials accessible to the public – which is then in turn made attractive, 'sexier'. There are thus three consecutive stages: from curator to educator to marketer. It is implied that a hierarchy still exists in the museum as the Educational unit may not be able to collaborate directly with curators to respond to the needs of the varied public.

The growing gap between the curatorial and educational functions of the museum identified by the informants may be traced back to the tensions that existed in the aesthetic museum versus the public museum. The impact that these two models of the art museum had on the educational role has been widely discussed in the literature on museum education (e.g. Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Rice 1995; McClellan 2003) as we saw in 2.2.3. Due to the value system inherent in the art museum which prioritised preservation and collection, education has often been relegated to an adjunct function.

### Summary

According to the informants, the goal of art museum education is conceived as facilitating participation through various modes of 'communication':

- Mass communication through exhibition events and outreach activities
- Interpersonal communication through dialogue and discussion

Informants used concepts of 'involvement' and 'participation' which are closely related to each other. The various levels of communication in museum education are inter-related with a focus on providing access to a diverse audience. It is face to face contact and discussions, they believe, that could lead to greater involvement and audience participation. Also implicit in the informants' belief is the need for the Museum to map out the goals for different programmes including the goals of identity formation and communicate to 'target' groups of the audience, thereby increasing the level of participation and support.

These expectations of informants have not been met by the practice of SAM's education programmes due to the hierarchy in the museum structure and the chasm that existed for the communication of educational materials to the public: from the level of curator to educator and the marketer.

### **5.3.3 Limited understanding of Multiculturalism**

In the discussion about local/national identity, I discovered informants' view about a strong link with the term 'multiculturalism', which is reflected in the State's ethnic policy. Referring to the development of local/national / national identity in Singapore, Informant S3 considered it a problematic issue:



It's not something Singapore promotes in a coherent sense, because 'multiculturalism', 'multiracialism' has been from Kuo Pao Kun's<sup>4</sup> point of view – that most of the government's ethnic management policy is for keeping people separate, so effectively it's very hard to develop national identity, if forever doing management based on crisis mentality...they haven't transcended that, it's Pao Kun's view but it's still true! (Interview 3, para.52)

There is an implication in the comment that separation is the opposite force to national identity and a paradox existed between the national policy and museum education practices.

The public rhetoric about 'multiculturalism' is viewed by informants as hampering the discourse about local/national art and identities in the museum context. Informants felt that identities could evolve in an organic manner, rather than be forged by a top down approach:

When we talk about local art identity, it's not something you can identify overnight, it's not like you look at an artwork and you know this is by a Singaporean artist, I don't think it's like that. Like recently I saw on newspaper, that hybrid lion, a symbol of 'multicultural' Singapore, it's rather contrived. I think for artists, you don't have to force it, it's naturally there, you grew up here, you naturally use the local subject matter and work on it (Interview 7, para. 50).

What is interesting here is the contrast between the notion that the Singapore lion is 'contrived' and that the development of national identity needs to be 'natural'. The lion

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<sup>4</sup> Kuo Pao Kun (1939-2002) was a playwright, director, teacher, cultural thinker and public intellectual, and he became in his lifetime one of the most influential figures in Singapore's arts and cultural circles. (<http://www.nlb.gov.sg/IBMS/LKC/Collections/SingaporeAndSEA/SingaporePages/ExploreResources/Contributors/KuoPaoKunbio.jsp> Access: December 18 2008)

symbol has been presented as something with which people can identify 'overnight' but this is contrasted with which one 'grew up' – that is over a long time. Thus the concept that is brought out by informants is about the line of identity with a long period of history, i.e. the former is dependent on the latter; this is a theory the informants hold which is also apparent in the official discourse.

As observed by informant S8, the 'hybrid lion' (Appendix G), a new icon constructed to represent 'multicultural/multiracial' Singapore only affirms the State's efforts in legitimising its ethnic policy. Two other informants (S3 and S8) shared this view by pointing out distinctly the difficulty that SAM faced in featuring local/national art and local/national identities:

How do you have cultural identity if you have these orchid shirts and all that?  
It's not very convincing. So how do you manage cultural identity? It's very hard to talk about it in Singapore, if possible to showcase it. (Interview 3, para. 54)

We are still in the early stages of developing an art identity, perhaps just passed the beginning stage (...) If you force it to happen, it's artificial. (Interview 8, para. 16 and 18)

The informants' belief about the contrived notion of national identity as propagated by the government is further exemplified by their views on the Total Defence Art education programme.



As mentioned in 4.1, one of the educational programmes that throws light on the 'effectiveness' of the public rhetoric on national education was the 'Total Defence Travelling Exhibition' that SAM launched in 2003. The programme formed part of the National Education initiative, in which schools could take part in art workshops and exhibitions that promote an understanding of Total Defence. Informant S1 considered that programme as irrelevant to the focus of an education unit in an art museum:

I have no idea why, this doesn't fit at all what they are doing. Total defence has nothing to do with contemporary art, isn't it? This should be under History Museum, I would understand if it's done by the History Museum (Interview 1, para. 14).

Informant S2 pointed out the larger issue of the power of State directives which has a bearing upon the educational programmes in the Art Museum:

That's [Total defence] a classic example. I think it's really the bottom line where all this comes down to. It's to do with propaganda, it's to do with rhetoric, it's to do with this concept of Singapore culture... Total Defence is a very interesting one, because it's sort of saying, this is us, this is myself, and that is the other, it's actually racist... It's always saying these are the 'Other', they're foreigners. This is us, this is how we defend ourselves. Why would you want to defend yourself from other opinions? It's not big bullies coming in with guns, it's opinions actually (Interview 2, para. 18 and 20).

These examples on 'total defence' further expressed the tension between constructed contrived ideas and propaganda presented by the state authorities and what is normal and natural in art as conceptualised by the informants.

It seems that the State's invention of symbols of 'Singaporean' local/national identity is met with scepticism among informants. They also point out that there is reluctance or perhaps fear to talk about what is being done. Referring to the discourse about local/national identity, S3 asserted that 'it's very hard to talk about it in Singapore, if possible to showcase it' as mentioned earlier, while S2 highlighted the 'repressive' nature of the society in limiting such discussions.

I think the museum is as far as I know, they don't have a real grasp or if they do, it's got so buried, so repressed that it almost makes no difference...So the museum shows that I've seen...fits into a Singaporean idea of what image it should present...(Interview 2, para. 26).

Informant S2's statement exemplifies the perceptions about the state engineered nationalist propaganda:

... they're starting off with some kind of unspoken assumption which are there to begin with, there's this thing called Singaporean-ism. But even if you take this kind of word that's used over and over again, its abbreviation, its apostrophe 'Singapore 'ism', it's so peculiar, isn't it? Is there really such a thing? You keep saying: Singaporean, Singaporean, Singaporean, over and over again, you construct it, but really I suppose to get a handle on any kind of interesting knowledge or deep knowledge, you'll have to let go of the idea that you're a Singaporean to start with. You have to let go of it, I think. (Interview 2, para. 22)

We have here a counter-discourse to the official discourse which assumes nationality is a given. The belief that local/national identity is not a stable concept but a 'construct', subjected to changes over time contrasts sharply with the public rhetoric about the fixed relationship between the ethnic and nation. The idea of 'letting go' is an interesting one



as it relates to the earlier discussion about being local/national but at the same time transcending those assumptions that acted as a boundary to the concept itself.

The criticism among informants about the top-down approach adopted by the government in engendering a sense of local/national identity has been found in the literature section 2.1.3. Wee (2002) notes the statist engineering approach which formed the basis for nation-building is present in the development of cultural-policy in Singapore. The government's penchant for central planning and its authoritarian approach to the arts is seen as a stumbling block to the State's pursuit for a vibrant 'global city for the arts'.

Informants also believed that the concept of 'Singapore art' is still at the nascent stage of development in relation to national identity.

It includes language, social practices that make up a culture. Art is just a facet of all that. Having said that, is there 'Singapore Art'? I don't think it has crystallized yet. Can you say that the works by pioneer artists, for example Cheong Soo Pieng, Georgette Chen, Liu Kang, are Singapore art? If you look at the last Singapore Art exhibition, there's diversity, but the important thing is: can you actually draw up the common streams and thoughts, clues for being called 'Singapore identity'? There should be something that we share, that's what we want to call 'Singapore art'... For example, in Thai art, I can see that happening... the Philippines artists also have a 'common' language to me (Interview 8, para. 24 and 20).

### Summary

The contrasting concepts that informants used to articulate their beliefs about local/national identity could be expressed as:

- Local/national identity is subjected to change over time and is different from the fixed national-ethnic categories promoted by the government.
- Local/national identity is developed in a natural process rather than constructed as contrived national symbols.

This area of divergence in thinking about local/national identity will be addressed in the final analysis in Chapter 6.

#### **5.3.4 Misconceptions about Art in the Society**

Although informants agreed that the Art Museum plays an important educational role in promoting local/national art to its audience, it needs the support from a network of institutions, in particular the Ministry of Education (MOE). This view was articulated by S3 who pointed out the limitations faced by SAM as it simply cannot facilitate art education without the support from the education ministry:

Well, not entirely, the Museum has certain limitations because it's arts education, it's not managed by MICA [Ministry of Information Communication and the Arts], it's managed by MOE instead, there's limit to how much impact it makes (...) as long as MOE is not doing it, it's not foundational arts education... unless it's foundational arts education, it's all little bits of sticking plaster, not root and branch education (Interview 3, para.38 and 98).

As mentioned in 4.1, the Singapore government recognised the importance of implementing national arts education at the levels of the school system, the community at large, and tertiary arts institutions. This informant believed that the school system under



the Ministry of Education played a fundamental part in facilitating the development of art education. At the policy level, SAM faces the challenge as a statutory board under MICA to fulfil its educational mission due to the general lack of understanding about the arts in Singapore society.

The limited view of art in the Singapore society was seen by another informant as a stumbling block for SAM to promote local/national art among the public.

It must be difficult for the Museum. I suppose in other countries, what you would have is teachers use the museums much more naturally. They would phone in or e-mail their questions to the museums saying, you know, we want to do something about movement or colour or reflections or something like that, and have you got a lecturer who'll do that? For example, the National Tate Gallery will put something on or they would have a show that school children might be interested in, but because we are so poverty stricken in understanding about the art, so primitive, and I would say in all other subject disciplines too (Interview 2, para. 4).

As expressed by this informant, the impoverished understanding about arts development among teachers and students in the formal school system further hindered the Museum's ability to communicate its educational role.

Another reason that informants attributed to the misconception about the arts is the instrumental idea about artistic development:

It's kind of an instrumental idea about whether art makes you smart, or art makes you logical or mathematical or literate. The interesting question is: why do you want children to have more of these abilities? Yes, it's all distorted into a very limited view of what art is all about, and I suppose it's

a particular view that is extrapolated from the 'globalisation' message isn't it? (Interview 2, para.2)

Informants also believed that the marginalisation of the arts in the Singapore society made it a difficult task for the Art Museum to facilitate its educational function:

Art in Singapore is still being marginalised, so they have to put in a lot of effort to help the public appreciate art... (Interview 7, para.36).

In Singapore, art is not really well-respected, in a sense that there are a lot of misconceptions... Most of the time if you tell your parents '*ni yao zuo hua jia*' ('you want to be a painter'), most of the time it's going to be a problem [sic]. Can we change those perceptions? The society as a whole is not serious about our art training (Interview 5, para. 30 and 58).

The informants' views about the general lack of understanding in the values of art and art education echoes the findings by researchers on the cultural development in Singapore presented in 2.1.3. The debate about the arts and cultural policy in Singapore revolves around the balance of economic perspectives embodied by the government and the humanistic perspectives embraced by arts practitioners. The main concern is that an overemphasis on the economic worth of the arts will overshadow the intrinsic values (Chang, 2000; Kong, 2000; Wee, 2002).



### 5.3.5 Summary

On the whole, it can be seen that informants demand a subtler definition of local/national art identity than that conventionally allowed in texts on the subject. The informants believed that local/national art as a feature of local/national identities is not a stable concept and will evolve over time. Although underlying the belief among informants is that the Art museum plays a supporting role in the construction and formation of local/national identities, there are three major connected factors that cause the difficulty for the Art Museum to feature or discuss or address issues about local/national art identity in its programmes:

- (i) the disjunction of curatorial and educational functions in the Art Museum,
- (ii) the limited understanding of Multiculturalism in local/national identity, and
- (iii) the misconceptions about art in Singapore society

The concepts and belief of informants are illustrated in Fig.5.3. It is perceived by the informants that:

- the educational role in identity construction is hindered by the marginalisation of the arts and misconceptions about arts education in the Singapore society,
- this leads informants to believe that the Art Museum should fulfill its educational role of identity construction through developing ways to reach out to a diverse audience, in particular in encouraging participation through interpersonal modes of communication.

We shall see in Chapter 6 how this discourse is then related to the official discourse on the role of the Museum's educational function.

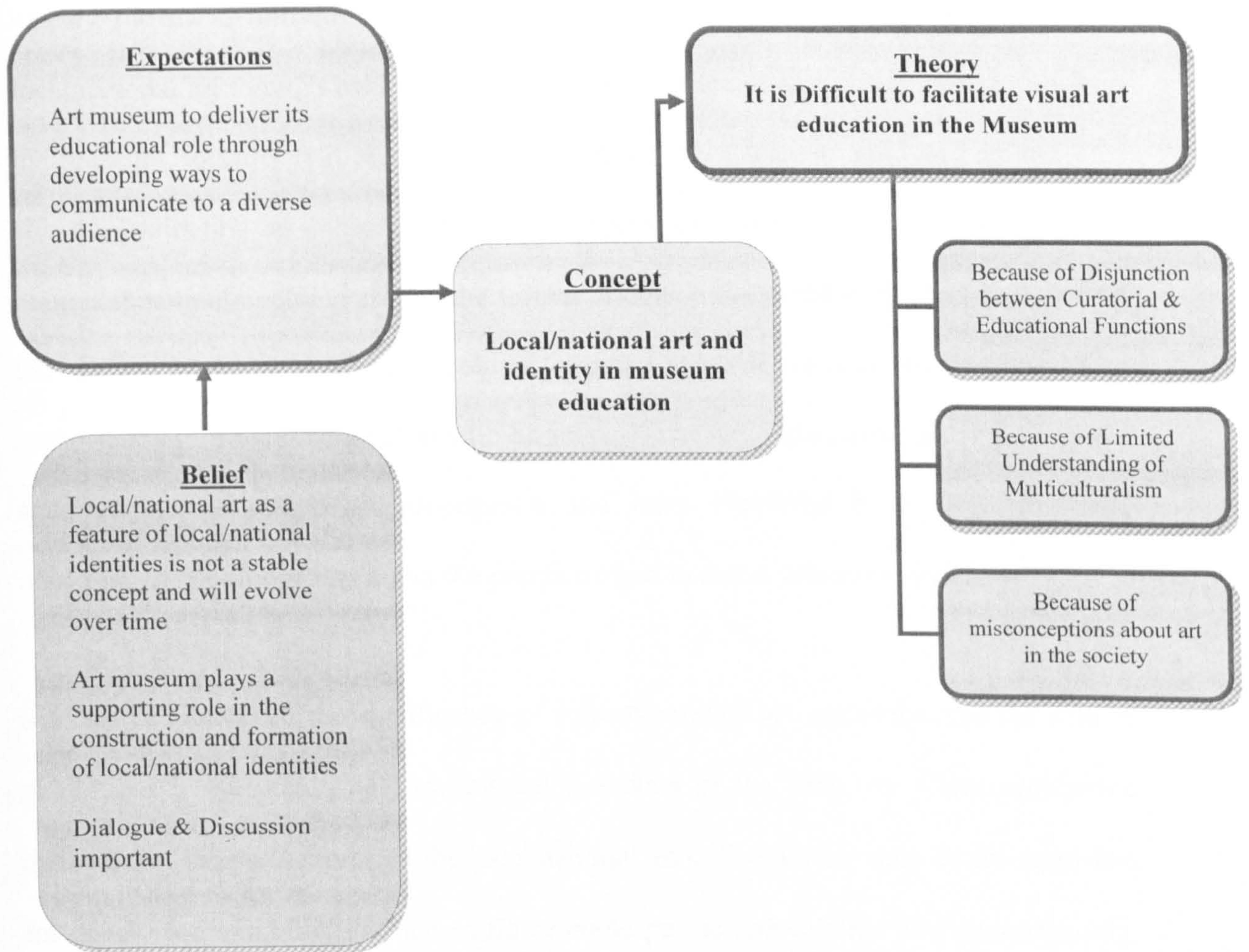


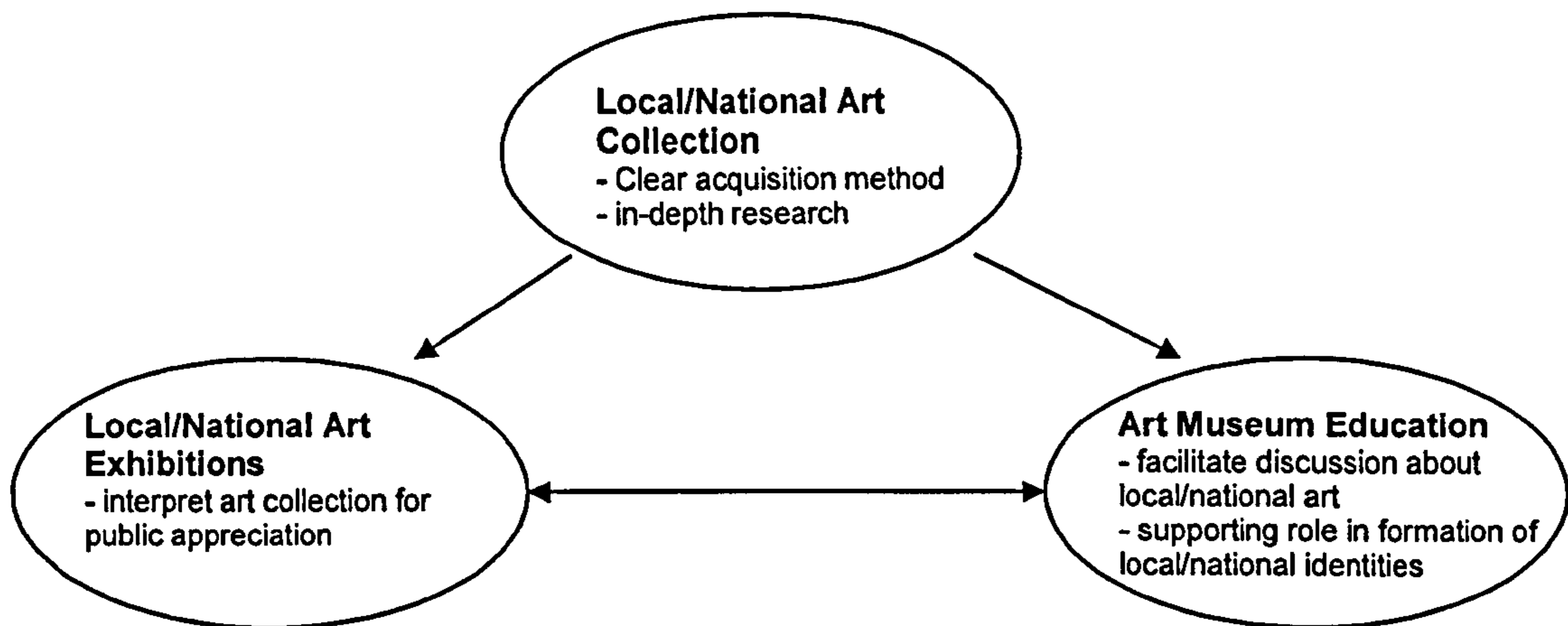
Fig. 5.3 Informants' theory about the difficulty in facilitating visual art education in the Museum



#### **5.4 Chapter Summary**

The three theories that emerged in the informants' discourse as presented in this chapter, namely the under-utilised local/national art collection, the limited representations of local/national art through exhibitions and difficulty in facilitating visual art education in the museum, together reinforced the belief that the Art museum could and should be a site for facilitating an understanding of Singapore art history. This coincides with the main assumption revolving around the formal discourse discussed in the previous chapter that the Art Museum could play a role in forging a sense of national identity through an understanding of local/national artistic heritage. However, informants are critical of the state engineered nationalist propaganda and have identified both facilitating and constraining conditions that affect the practice of art museum education in SAM.

Informants articulated the significance of a local/national art collection and the role of exhibitions in facilitating the educational functions of the Museum. Clear acquisition methods and proper research of the local/national art collection are seen as pre-requisites for developing exhibitions which could promote public appreciation and understanding. The interrelationships of art collection, exhibitions and education can be seen in the diagram below:



Although SAM professes its role in fostering a sense of local/national identity through its exhibition and educational programmes, informants point out the tensions that exist in the Museum's attempt to balance its identity at various levels: local/national, regional and global. On the whole, the expectations among informants that a local/national art narrative be communicated through exhibitions and publications have not been met by SAM's construction of a partial narrative, which is largely dominated by the Nanyang School and without the support of in-depth research.

From the informants' perspective, the communicative role of educational programmes is hampered by internal factors in SAM – namely the disjunction between curatorial and educational functions – as well as by constraints that existed in the wider context of the society, with reference to the misconceptions about the arts and limited understanding of multiculturalism.



In the formal discourse, the educational objectives of the Art Museum are viewed in terms of what they can offer to the nation building exercise and are also linked to the economic benefits that the arts industry could bring to Singapore. Local/national art or 'Singaporean art' is believed to be unique and a sense of continuity is established through the narration of a national art history in SAM. Informants on the other hand perceived that Singapore is still at the nascent stage of nation building and the notion of an artistic identity is not a stable concept but will evolve over time. The convergence and divergence of informants' beliefs and the formal discourse will be further addressed in the final analysis in the next chapter to throw light on the relationship between art museum education and local/national identities.

## CHAPTER 6 FINAL ANALYSIS

The purpose of this thesis as set out in Chapter 1 has been to use two key questions: Can collections and exhibitions in art museums function as markers of national identities? What role should art museum education play in contributing to the understanding of local/national artistic heritage, and hence to local/national identity? The purpose was to use these questions to understand the views/theories of the Singapore art community and national policy about if and how national policies of using SAM to operationalise the concept of national identity and to develop, through its educational function, national identity in its national audience. The purpose did not include analyzing the actual effect on audiences as this needs further research.

In order to clarify what the national policies might mean and how the key informants from the art community might be using concepts of education for national identity, in the literature review chapter, the theoretical perspectives about national identity and museum education were analysed to provide an understanding of the conceptualisations about the educational role of SAM in the formal discourse and informants' discourse discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. It is the aim of this chapter to present the final analysis through a comparison of the two discourses to come to an understanding about the relationships between art museum education and the construction of identities that emanate from this study. Areas for future research and implications for the role of art museum education will also be discussed.



## **6.1 Comparison of official discourse and informants' discourse**

This section will look at the convergence and divergence of thinking – beliefs and values – drawn from the analysis of the policies and practices in SAM and the elicited discourse of key informants. The aim is to throw light on the extent that the discourses are similar to and or different from the findings and interpretations of other researchers, which will contribute to a deeper understanding about the subject of the research. The discussion will be organised into three parts based on the common themes emerged from the data:

- Developing local/national art narrative through exhibitions
- The educational function of the Art Museum
- Local/National identity and Art Museum

### **6.1.1 Developing a local/national art narrative through exhibitions**

From the formal and informants' discourses, I discovered that 'local/national art' and 'narrative' are two concepts of central importance in relation to the role of art museum education. In both formal and informants' discourses, the notions of 'exclusivity' and 'boundary' underlie the definition of 'local/national art' as it is conceived as works made by artists who distinguish themselves from those who do not belong to their group. This idea aligns with the theories developed by Smith (1991) and Barth (1969) in highlighting the necessary demarcation or 'boundary' between values and traditions that belong to one group versus those of the 'others'.

In the official discourse, 'local/national art' or 'Singaporean art' is assumed to be unique and is a separate category from 'regional' and 'international' art forms. The informants'

definition coincides in general with SAM's official description of its local/national art component in the collection. However the conceptualisations about local/national art among informants are more layered. Informants viewed the idea of 'Singaporean' as not necessarily a stable category because national boundaries involve political negotiations and are historically forged. A dichotomy exists as the local/national art scene is not insular; therefore artists who 'belong' to Singapore will at the same time 'transcend' that boundary and are being connected to the rest of the world.

Both discourses considered local/national art narrative as one of the prerequisites for the formation of local/national identity in the museum context. The conceptualisation of a 'local/national art narrative' can be compared to the literature on 'the invention of tradition' (Hobsbawm, 1983) which makes possible the imagination of a national community (Anderson, 1991). It is evident that the Singapore government has attempted in policy making to put into operation the general principles discussed by researchers on national identity:

- Shared territory (political/geographical sphere)
- Shared culture and community (cultural/social sphere)
- Shared descent (ethnic sphere)

The local/national art narrative in this case can be seen as one of the 'never-ending stories' (Bennett, 1995) created by the State Museum to project sentiments of a shared past, present and future of the national community.



At the policy level, the purpose of preservation and presentation of the local/national art collection is seen as facilitating the role of education. The informants believed that the collection has to be made visible and interpreted to the public through exhibitions and publications. The visual and textual components of the local/national art narrative are also seen as essential for facilitating the educational function. Both views are connected to the belief that the museum collection is a knowledge base which could be developed for the benefit of the public, including helping the public to appreciate and understand about local/national art history. In this sense, then, we have a partial response to the first research question from the art community.

It is evident in the official discourse that part and parcel of the concept of local/national art collection is the constitution of a national identity. The underlying assumption that 'Singaporean art' is an entity parallels the constant reinforcement in the official discourse that Singapore is an entity, as a national group. Behind this theory is the emphasis on a shared artistic heritage and a sense of continuity in Singapore art established through the narration of a national art history in SAM.

However, informants believed that local/national art is not synonymous with political definitions of what is local/national. They remain critical about SAM offering a dominant narrative of Singapore art through the propagation of concepts of 'pioneer artists' and the Nanyang School. This supports the arguments by museum researchers that museums are not neutral sites but can be treated as instruments in defining self and nation (Duncan, 1991, 1995a; Forster-Hahn, 1995; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000b; S. MacDonald, 2003;

McLean, 2005). In particular, the notion about 'canon' as pointed out by informants, that the Art Museum plays a role in forging a mainstream in the representation of local/national artists by showcasing selected artists is a contentious one. This case enriches our understanding of the general theory that state-funded national museums have the power to make authoritative statements by creating 'master narratives' and are imbued with the complex function of fostering a sense of 'national identity' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000b, p. 25); and what we have seen is an attempt to do this in Singapore in the official discourse which is then criticised by the informants. This in turn suggests that the assertions of theorists such as Hooper-Greenhill need to be contextualised and perhaps re-assessed.

There also exists a paradox in the discussion of 'canon' because informants pointed out that the notion of a canon is a borrowed concept and is perhaps inappropriate in the context of SAM. The lack of sufficient research in the Singapore art collection implies that there is no real basis for the creation of a canon, and that general theories of the functions of museums which assume the presence of a canon may need some further reflection and modification if they are to apply in countries such as Singapore.

### **6.1.2 The Educational Function of the Art Museum**

The second theme focuses on the primacy of developing the educational function in the art museum context, and therefore on the second research question, an area that sees the convergence of thinking between the official discourse and the informants' views. The discourse about the educational role throws up the issue about a holistic understanding of



education in the museum context and whether it is integrated as a major mission as discussed by Hooper-Greenhill (1994) in the literature analysis chapter.

It is quite obvious from the official discourse that SAM is perceived by the government as instrumental to the socio-economic development of the nation, including nation-building, cultural tourism and promoting the arts industry.

The rational portrayal of an 'education for all' policy in the Museum can in turn be related to the process of the commodification of education addressed in the literature (McClellan, 2003; Worts, 2003). In the museum context, education is being used as part of the instrument for audience development. The emphasis on commercial values at the expense of aesthetic values is a caveat raised by researchers in the context of Singapore's quest to become a 'global city for the arts' (Kong, 2000; Chang, 2000; Wee, 2002). Informants are aware of the tensions that existed in policy making to balance the intrinsic values and the socio-economic benefits that the arts could bring to society.

While the formal discourse emphasised the Museum's provision of school and public programmes to fulfill its educational functions, informants are concerned about the effectiveness of such programmes in communicating to a diverse audience. They believed that there is still a distance to be traversed in promoting physical and intellectual access to the museum's collection – a repository of knowledge for the understanding of Singapore art. In particular, the notion of a 'general public' is deemed as too simplistic to capture the diverse interests and needs of the audience in practice.

While both formal and informants' discourses affirmed the scholarly function of the museum, with reference to developing in-depth research, the chasm that existed between curatorial and educative roles was recognised by the informants as hampering the development of the educational role. In the case of SAM, the informants' theory indicates that it is important to communicate scholarly research and make it accessible to the audience. From the perspective of the informants, there is an urgent need for SAM to develop methods to stimulate public discussion and dialogue and enable visitors' voices to be heard. After all, this has profound implications for SAM's assertion that it aims at promoting a 'local/national identity' through its educational programmes. Thus, this case study supports views in the literature about the possible inherent tension that exists between the aesthetic model and public art museum model.

### **6.1.3 National Identity and the Art Museum**

As seen in the above discussion, informants shared with the official discourse the concept of a causal relationship between local/national art narrative and the formation of local/national identity in their discourses, with education as the catalyst. Underlying the construction of local/national identity in the Art Museum context is a sense of 'temporal dimension' in both discourses. The concept that is brought out by informants is about the link of local/national identity with a long period of (local/national) history, i.e. the former is dependent on the latter; this is a theory the informants hold which is also apparent in the official discourse.



At the formal level of discourse, the recurrent use of the terms 'artistic heritage' and 'old civilisations' point to the attempts by SAM to create historical roots since nations are defined by their history and where there is none, a history has to be invented as Hobsbawm (1983) and Anderson (1991) both pointed out in their work respectively. However, although informants' conceptualisation of the temporal dimension and the notion of local/national identity is apparent in their discourse, it appeared to be more nuanced. Art history is seen as important because of the belief that a narrative of local/national visual art needs to be constructed through research and interpretation. Informants also hold the view that 'local/national art identity' needs time to develop and is primarily a natural process in art:

When we talk about local art identity, it's not something you can identify overnight (...) I think for artists, you don't have to force it, it's naturally there, you grew up here, you naturally use the local subject matter and work on it (Interview 7, para. 50).

We are still in the early stages of developing an art identity, perhaps just passed the beginning stage. If you force it to happen, it's artificial (Interview 8, para. 16 and 18).

There is a prominent difference between the two discourses in their conceptualisation of the process of identity formation. Although the official discourse embraced the notion of history and that traditions could be traced back over a long time, the invention of national symbols are viewed by informants as 'contrived' and propangandistic, or what Hobsbawm (1983) would call 'invented'.

Beyond the reference to national identity, at the level of formal discourse, the political conception of roles available to the museums is made evident by positioning SAM as a regional art centre. The vision of SAM as a regional cultural site points to the national imperatives of investment in human capital and knowledge industry, and the need to justify such investment. The idea is that 'local/national' is related in the first instance to 'regionalisation' but that there will then be a next step of 'globalisation' of the workforce. With the increasing numbers of Singaporeans moving abroad to work, it is perceived that one of the tasks of the Museum is to ensure continuing ties to the local/national in both stages.

The Singaporean tension lies in its attempt to assert a sense of local/national identity (uniqueness and individuality) and the desire to gain parity with the West and to be part of the international art scene. The role of art exhibitions in defining local/national identities is problematised as the question about whose 'voice' is being represented in the museum could be posed. It foregrounds a larger issue of the power of the state in constructing a 'local heritage' in its visual arts development. As mentioned in 6.1.1, from the informants' perspective, there is a tendency for SAM to 'honour' selected local/national artists (for example, the Nanyang School) as a means to construct a sense of 'national art identity'. The question of why some local/national artists were chosen to present their works in the art museum over the others has yet to be addressed. In other words, informants' thinking coincides with the interpretation of Anderson's metaphor of museums as maps by Hooper-Greenhill (2000b, pp. 17-18) in constructing hierarchies of



values and producing relationships between people, nations and ideas through the selection and display of objects.

Informants attributed the difficulty for the art museum to facilitate an understanding about national identity to the impoverished views in the society pertaining to multiculturalism and values of arts education. This supports the observation by researchers that shared culture (arts cultural sphere) is not as clear as shared territory or shared descent (ethnic) in defining national identity (Parmenter, 1997).

The official discourse focused the discussion of identity under a single, ordered and rational framework, as exemplified by the government's definition of multiculturalism as fixed national-ethnic categories (Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others) whereas informants have a more open and fluid concept of identity formation. Informants acknowledged identity as changeable and not something one possesses; this can be seen in statement like:

Is there really such a thing? You keep saying: Singaporean, Singaporean, Singaporean, over and over again, you construct it, but really I suppose to get a handle on any kind of interesting knowledge or deep knowledge, you'll have to let go of the idea that you're a Singaporean to start with. You have to let go of it, I think (Interview 2, para. 22).

As pointed out by researchers, the notion of 'identity' is constructed through a dynamic interaction of personal, social and cultural factors and identities are rarely, if ever, pure and uncontaminated because they are usually fabricated from a mix of elements (Karp, 1992; Kwok, 1993). This can be seen in the art museum context, as informants

experience the construction of local/national identity as incomplete and limited. Yet, it is behind this theory that I uncover the paradoxical affirmation by informants of the potential that the art museum possesses as a site for developing the arts as a marker of Singapore art history.

This study began with two main research questions with the aim of understanding the relationship between the formation of local/national identities and the educational role of the art museum:

- (iv) Can collections and exhibitions in art museums function as markers of national identities?
- (v) What role should art museum education play in contributing to the understanding of national artistic heritage and thereby to national identity?

Through a comparison of the official and informants' discourses, the convergence of their beliefs affirmed that art museums could and should play a role in the formation of national identity. This is then an answer to the specific questions for Singapore.

Findings from this study also support the general theory in literature which presented the role of national art museums as a site that constitutes and constructs identities with the help of their educational role and function. However, it is also important to reflect upon the divergence in thinking within the two discourses. At the policy level, it is evident that the government attempts at constructing a national identity by weaving notions of artistic heritage and nationhood into the Museum's art historical narrative, mainly through exhibitions and educational programmes. The findings from the informants' discourse are instructive in highlighting the complexity of the identity formation process and the need



for reassessment and contextualisation of grand theories of museums in countries such as Singapore.

## **6.2 Future Research**

Arising from the present study are three areas of research that could be conducted in relation to the educational role of art museums and its relationship to the formation of identities.

One of the concepts that emerged from the data deals with the purpose of museum education in creating access to a diverse public. Merriman (1997) notes that the cultural context of museum visiting can be examined through the study of visitor experience as well as that of non-visitors. Hence, one of the research areas could be a collaborative study with museum professionals to investigate the main characteristics of SAM's visitors. The use of survey and focused interviews as possible methods of research will help to discover the interests, needs and concerns of different types of museum visitors as a theme of inquiry. For instance, a study of the difference in attendance patterns by age, social and educational background of its visitors could inform the practice of curators and educators in the design and planning of museum curriculum.

The present study could also be extended to investigate a different group of informants to understand their concepts about art museum education and national identity. In particular, school students' theory about local/national art and identity could be a focused area of

exploration to further understand the impact of the Museum's educational provisions for schools.

This case study highlights a need to continue examining the role of art museum education and the formation of identities. This could be done by replicating the present study in another site in Asia, for example Hong Kong. Research that stems from a different Asian context could throw up issues about challenges that contemporary art museums face in pursuing their classic goals – to collect, conserve and interpret art, for the education and enjoyment of the public while constantly rethinking their educational missions, ethics, roles and responsibilities. As British colonialism was involved in both cases, a dual-site case study of the Hong Kong Art Museum and the Singapore Art Museum offers an interesting comparison for the concept of 'national identity' in two different socio-political contexts. Unlike most erstwhile colonies, Hong Kong did not move towards independence but to reintegration with the People's Republic of China. The question of 'recolonisation' rather than 'decolonisation' has been raised by observers. In contrast, Singapore moved from colonial status to approximately 4 years of self-government, followed by less than 2 years as a Malaysian state, before finally attaining full sovereignty.<sup>5</sup>

The third area of research that could be pursued is to take a longitudinal approach to the study of the cultural policy development in Singapore. A review in 5 years' time will take into considerations the rapidly changing economic and global environment and the art

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<sup>5</sup> I collected data from Hong Kong in my initial thesis preparation stage but had to leave them out due to the eventual in-depth focus on Singapore as a site of study. I am planning to work on a comparative study of the two countries in a publication.



educational landscape. It will also take into account the opening of the National Art Gallery, targeted in 2013 to devote more space for the display of the permanent collection under SAM.

### **6.3 Conclusion and Implications**

This study has examined the discourses at the official policy level and that of informants with the aim of understanding the beliefs held in (a specific section of) society about the educational role of a public art museum in constructing national (and regional) identities. It is the grounded theory techniques that facilitated the collection of abstract and complex data by the informants to voice their beliefs in an open and critical manner. The data analysis not only revealed the experience of individuals but also provided insights into the reality factors that are at work which makes the formation of identities a challenging task for art museums in a plural society.

The relationship between theory and practice is further illuminated by the discourse about the two models of art museums which can be viewed as contradictory. However, this was not the case in practice as informants' beliefs showed that practice allows for a number of ideologies, even contradictory ones to function at the same time. This is seen in SAM's attempt to balance the public art museum functions and the aesthetic model of the museum. These findings have suggested that some of the theoretical assertions found in the literature need re-assessment as to their applicability in countries like Singapore.

By and large, informants' beliefs coincide with the official discourse about the relationship between local/national art and local/national identity but their theories are more nuanced and graduated. The findings reveal that informants believed that the arts infrastructure and current policies provided a facilitating framework for identity formation in the art museum. At the level of implementation and operationalisation, it will take a long time to achieve the aims outlined in the Renaissance report. It is perhaps critical that a balance needs to be achieved by moving away from the paternalistic role of government and the intrusive and exploitative approaches adopted by some private commercial interests.

Informants are aware that the official discourse from the government perspective is not a singular voice as they are cognizant of the 'reality factors' – the tensions between governmental policies and the aesthetic and educational mission of art museums – that have to be taken into account in this case.

Finally, in this study, I was able to obtain a deeper understanding of the complex and abstract concepts of local/national art identity. This will benefit my teaching as I am in a better position to articulate the role of art museums in facilitating the understanding about teaching and learning opportunities that could be created by art educators. Furthermore, through this research I came to understand the gap that exists between policy makers' perspectives and individual experiences and the underlying facilitating and constraining factors for the operationalisation of general principles about national identity. This will facilitate my future collaboration with museum professionals in the design and planning



of art education curriculum for schools. It will also help me to negotiate and improve my working relationships with museum educators having gained an insiders' view about the challenges they faced in delivering the educational functions.

In relation to the challenges that influence the role of museums in the contemporary society, SAM is regarded as a significant contribution to the cultural development of the nation. The government's authoritarian approach towards the development of the arts, however, remains a major concern. To a large extent, the analysis of the existing art educational practices in Singapore foregrounds the primacy of developing a 'critical policy' to inform museum practice in the globalised post-modern context. The power of Art Museum professionals as 'identity definers' could be mediated by engaging the audience to recognise museums as a site for negotiating meanings and significance of collections, and view their displays as provisional statements only. The following implications are drawn from this study and are key messages for museum educational policy makers at both national and international levels.

- A greater degree of artistic freedom and flexibility needs to be built in at all levels of the implementation of museum educational policy.
- To facilitate the educational function in promoting local/national art history and identity, the art museum has to develop methods to evaluate visitors' experience in both the short and long term. This has profound implication on the assertion that the art museum aims at promoting local/national art narrative through its educational programmes.

- 'Museum as a discursive site' is a possible way forward to developing the educational function. It must be emphasised that the ability to appreciate art can be acquired through active interaction and dialogue and that 'experiencing art' is not a mystical or solely individual process but can be facilitated through collaborative learning.
- The museum could be a platform for developing a network of communications among museum educators, teachers and visual arts professionals to raise the discourse about arts education in museums, in particular museum-school programmes. Although museums are responsible for making their resources available to the public, it is equally incumbent upon schools to see that students are prepared to utilise such resources. It is necessary for both parties to consider the needs within the school curriculum while maintaining a flexible and open environment for teaching and learning in a museum context.
- The multidimensional development of the individual should be a central concern in the development of museum educational programmes. The arts are multifaceted and can give museum audiences a far more realistic experience of making meanings in a complex world than other subjects that focus on 'arriving at the right answer'. This is of particular importance in the knowledge-based economy as individuals are constantly interpreting and translating 'information' as 'knowledge'.

The art museum as a seat for learning and as a space for cultural dialogue is crucial to the development of the nation. Singapore offers an exemplary case as to how an Asian society deals with museums that emerged at a time of expanding economic development. Whereas older nations and their museums may have had opportunity, in a period of grand



narratives and modernism, to create an unproblematic vision of national identity, the Singapore Art Museum is an illustration of the challenge that contemporary societies face in seeking unity amidst diversity

## AFTERWORD

*There is a sense in which anything new we learn changes us on a more personal level, and we are not always immediately aware of it... Every time your view of the world shifts, however slightly, you begin to see things you did not see before: the connection between such shifts and action might be obscure, but it is none the less there. (Craib, 1992, p. 250)*

Looking back, this research journey has been rewarding and fulfilling and contributed to my personal and professional development. It was the long and arduous research process that led to my deeper understanding of the values of discipline, perseverance and the importance of a genuine interest in the subject area in sustaining the pursuit.

This study has taught me to maintain humility so as to learn from the perspectives of informants by suspending my own assumptions and beliefs during the data collection and analysis stages. It is also important for me not to take for granted the time that they contributed to the study amidst their own commitments.

One of the biggest personal challenges in doing this research was the presentation of the theories of informants which are mainly expressed in deficit terms. I realised that my initial uneasiness in writing and presenting the informants' criticisms stemmed from my upbringing in an Asian society that taught us to be 'polite' and refrain from direct criticisms. The use of grounded theory proved to be very helpful to overcome my psychological barrier. As I began to focus on uncovering the underlying beliefs of informants, I learnt that the 'negative' criticisms actually point to a sense of agency that the informants believed in developing the scope of the Art Museum's educational functions.

My study has particularly illuminated the challenges of qualitative research as I come to understand that making good interpretation is based upon making connections between ideas and experience. The only way to learn about qualitative research is to be engaged in practice and no amount of reading could replace this experience.

Finally, the insights I gained from this study have helped me to be a better art educator in guiding student-teachers in exploring art museums as sites for promoting individual awareness and understanding of identities. By reflecting upon the role of the art museum in the broader cultural landscape, I hope to help teachers understand that it is the responsibility of all social partners to create a truly vibrant art scene. Learning is both participatory and individualistic and in the case of art education, neither schools nor museums can do it alone.

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**APPENDIX A: IMAGES OF THE SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM**



Singapore Art Museum (façade)



Courtyard



Corridor space (outside gallery)



SUGGESTED ROUTE

GROUND FLOOR

**Art of Our Time\***  
**Unyielding Passion:**  
**8 Masters of Singapore Art**  
Galleries 1.1 to 1.4 – Till 2008  
Gallery 2.8 (upper floor)

**Gao Xingjian EXPERIENCE\***  
Gallery 1.5 (link to Level 1) – Till 7 Feb 06  
Gallery 2.5 (link to Level 2)

UPPER FLOOR

**Art of Our Time\***  
**Of Tides and Times:**  
**Encounters with Southeast Asian Art**  
Galleries 2.1 to 2.4 – Till 2008

**The Times Collection\***  
Gallery 2.7 – Till 5 Feb 06

\*Chargeable Exhibitions.  
Please purchase tickets at the Frontdesk (Ground Fl)  
before entry. Thank You  
Adult \$3, Student/Senior \$1.50  
**No photography in the galleries**

Museum Tours

**Mondays**  
2.00pm (English)

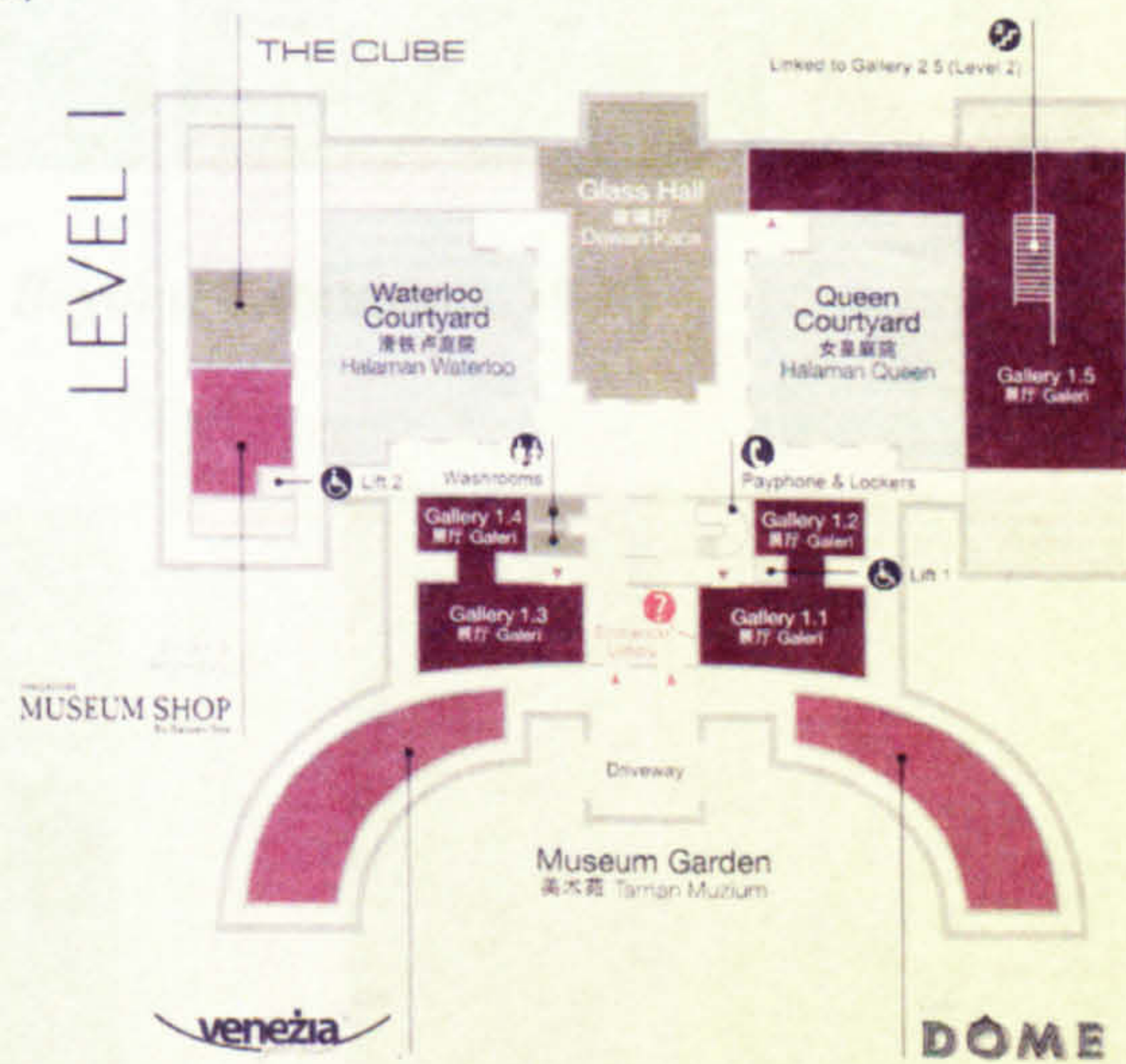
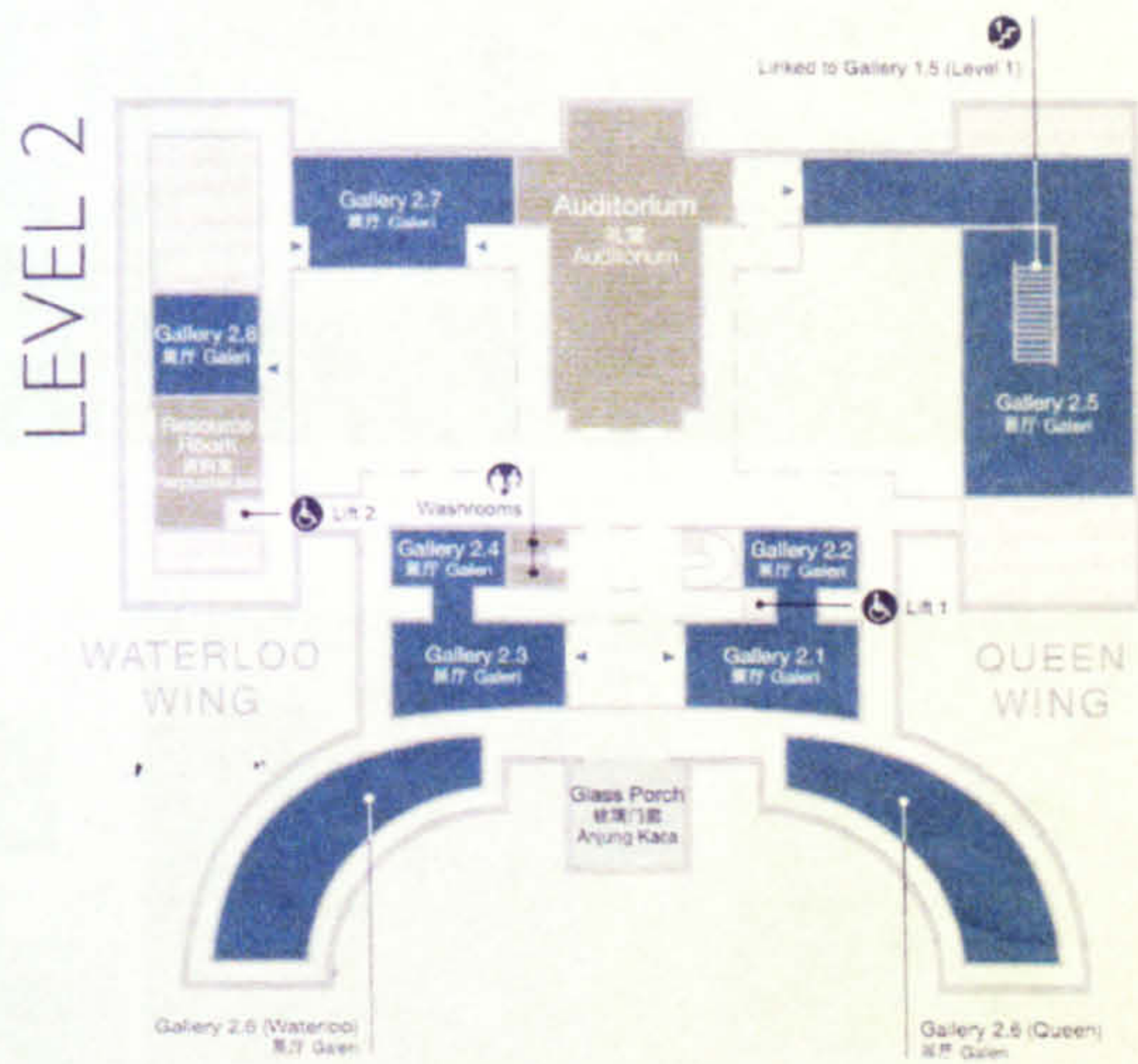
**Tuesdays to Thursdays**  
10.30am (Japanese)  
11.00am & 2.00pm (English)

**Fridays**  
10.30am (Japanese)  
11.00am & 2.00pm (English)  
7.30pm (Mandarin)

**Saturdays & Sundays**  
11.00am, 2.00pm & 3.30pm (English)

No Tours on Public Holidays

<p><b>MUSEUM SHOP</b> By Roman Eye</p> <p>10% Off Merchandise (excluding books, jewellery and consignment items)</p> <p>* Only valid at the Singapore Art Museum</p>	<p>10% Off (regular menu price)</p>
<p>10% Off Merchandise (excluding books, jewellery and consignment items)</p> <p>* Only valid at the Singapore Art Museum</p>	<p>10% Off (regular menu price)</p>

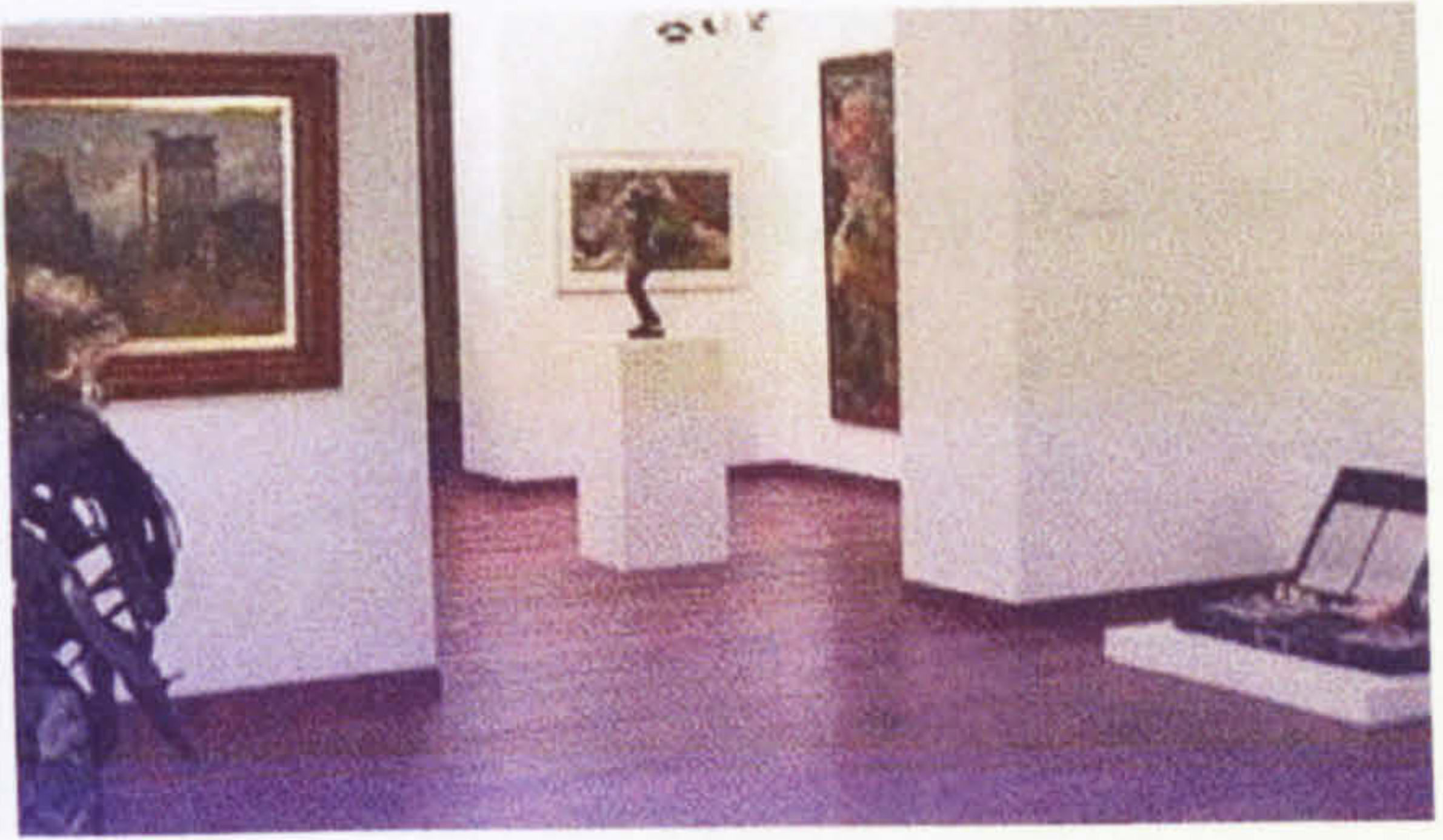


11, Bras Basah Road, Singapore 259569, Republic of Singapore www.singaporeartmuseum.com

muzium seni singapura 新加坡美术馆 சிங்கப்பூர்கலை அருங்கோட்டறையம் AN INSTITUTION OF THE NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD

Singapore Art Museum: Floor Plan





*Modernity and Beyond* Exhibition. 1996



*Art of Our Time* Exhibition, Gallery view and Educational Corner, 2005 – 2006



## **APPENDIX B: DOCUMENTARY INFORMATION FOR ANALYSIS OF THE OFFICIAL DISCOURSE**

### Government publications and Archival materials:

- MICA. (2004). Annual Report. Singapore: Ministry of Information Communication and the Arts.
- MITA. (1996). Speech by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, at the Official Opening of the Singapore Art Museum at the Old St. Joseph's Institution on Saturday, 20 January 1996 at 7:00 p.m. Singapore: Ministry of Information and the Arts.
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- MITA. (2000). *Renaissance City Report: Culture and the Arts in Renaissance Singapore*. Singapore: Ministry of Information and the Arts.
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- STPB. (1995). *Singapore: Global City for the Arts*. Singapore: Tourist Promotion Board and Ministry of Information and the Arts.

### National Heritage Board (NHB) Annual Reports

- NHB. (1996). Annual Report 1995/1996. Singapore: National Heritage Board.
- NHB. (1997). Annual Report 1996/1997. Singapore: National Heritage Board.
- NHB. (1998). *Annual Report 1997/1998*. Singapore: National Heritage Board.
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NHB. (2004). *Annual Report 2003/2004*. Singapore: National Heritage Board.

NHB. (2006). *Living Heritage: Annual Report 2005/2006*. Singapore: National Heritage Board.

#### SAM catalogues and educational publications

Kwok, K. C. (1996b). *Channels and Confluences: A History of Singapore Art*. Singapore: Singapore Art Museum.

SAM. (2003). C.A.S.T. Convergences of Art, Science and Technology, An Art Education Gallery Exhibition, 9 Sept 2004-Sept 2004. Singapore: Singapore Art Museum.

Sabapathy, T. K. (Ed.). (1996). *Modernity and Beyond: themes in Southeast Asian Art*. Singapore: Singapore Art Museum.

SAM. (2005). *Art of Our Time*, exhibition pamphlet. Singapore: Singapore Art Museum.

#### Websites

Singapore Art Museum collections:

<http://www.nhb.gov.sg/SAM/Collections/> Access: 9 Feb 2006

Singapore Art Museum history and profile:

<http://www.museum.org.sg/SAMprofile/facilities.htm> Access: 6 February 2006)

Singapore Art Museum press releases:

<http://www.nhb.gov.sg/SAM/Information/Newsroom/> Access: 9 Feb 2006



Ministry of Education – Total Defence programme

<http://intranet.moe.gov.sg/ne/events/tdd.htm> Access: December 10 2005

Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts:

[http://www.mica.gov.sg/mica\\_business/b\\_heritage.html](http://www.mica.gov.sg/mica_business/b_heritage.html) Access: 26 June 2008

<http://app.mica.gov.sg/internet/report/2008/index.html> Access: December 18 2008

### Newspaper clippings

Reports on ‘The Renaissance City’:

*The Straits Times*, 21 January 1996

*The Straits Times*, Sept. 26, 1999

*The Straits Times*, 10 March 2000

‘A New Singapore Icon Roars to Life’ – The dancing Singapore Lion as the new national icon. *The Straits Times*, January 24 2005

## **APPENDIX C: GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS**

### **General Orientation Questions:**

1. To what extent do you think that the Singapore Art Museum has been fulfilling its mission?
2. Over the years, do you think SAM helps you/public understand the visual arts development in Singapore through the exhibitions?

### **Questions on Local/National Art:**

3. What are your views about the permanent collection in SAM? Do you think there are sufficient works in the SAM collection to represent contemporary local artists?
4. Do you have any comments about the exhibitions held in SAM (with reference to Singapore art and contemporary Southeast Asian art)?
5. To what extent do you think that SAM's programmes 'promote' local arts successfully reach out to public?  
e.g. Community & Outreach programme, traveling exhibitions, projects with local libraries, Nokia Singapore Art, Venice Biennale

### **Questions on education services:**

6. Could you comment on the variety and sufficiency of educational programmes offered by SAM to schools/public in the area of Singapore contemporary art?  
\*What is the strategy of SAM in terms of art educational programmes? i.e. any 3-year plan or 5 yr plan etc.
7. What role should SAM play in creating awareness among school children & the public about the local/national art in Singapore?

### **Question on the specific identity concept:**

8. Do you think SAM propagate a particular notion about Singapore's national / local identity'?

### **Question on future roles:**

9. What do you think should be the future directions for SAM in the promotion of local art?



## APPENDIX D: EXCERPTS OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Number of Interview : 4  
Interviewer : Researcher  
Interviewee : S4

1. Interviewer To what extent do you think that the Singapore Art Museum has been fulfilling its mission?
2. S4 To answer this question, I'll have to refer to the 'impression' that is left by SAM, or in a way, my own perception ... whether it has been successful in its mission because it's impossible to quantify... unless you have an index of clear performance indicators and each part of the mission statement is held up against those indicators. So I'll have to bear these contexts in mind.
3. Interviewer I understand that.
4. S4 In that case, I'll start with a few 'more quantifiable' areas before getting to more critical aspects.
5. Interviewer Yes.
6. S4 I think that SAM has pursued an acquisitions and exhibitions programme that is rooted in its mission statement to a considerable extent, which is... if we look at numbers and ostensible policies and decisions. In more pragmatic or quantifiable terms, SAM has been managing budgets or resources that it has expended towards those ends, like developing a Southeast Asian collection.
7. Interviewer Are you referring to the number of exhibitions so far?
8. S4 Well, in terms of the scale or volume of exhibitions, it has executed the numbers commendably. This is especially so if we compared with its parallel museums or larger galleries, where sometimes only 3 to 4 major shows are held a year – and SAM has an average of like, 10 to 15 exhibitions annually? ...at one point, I think, though I'm not sure what the average numbers are like currently.

Number of Interview: 6

Interviewer: Researcher

Informant: S6

1. Interviewer In SAM's mission statement, it stated its role in facilitating visual art education through public educational programmes. To what extent do you think the Museum has been successful in promoting awareness of Singapore art to the public?
2. S6 When we talk about education for the public...the 'public' itself is not homogenous, in fact, you know, its diversity is greater than one would imagine, in terms of interest and needs; and the levels that individuals enter the Museum... I mean, as a member of the public is quite differentiated. So any institution or body could only be covering a fair number of grounds.  
It could be in our case, the question is: do we have enough bodies or organizations or institutions or even NGOs that's catering to or addressing these various needs? Or are we expecting one or two institutions to do that? Because so far these institutions are government sponsored or government linked...and private enterprise or initiatives have not quite matched the extent of what the government is capable of or can do.
3. Interviewer I see.
4. S6 When you compare to countries like Japan, there are so many museums, so many kinds of private initiatives, from a single or group of artists organizing a small café just doing videos (these are small private enterprise), to big museums, so many of them, all over the place until they have to compete and differentiate themselves. Whether or not there's high level planning, it's just a kind of ....you know, so many variety to choose from and competition as well...it's competition for attention, for accreditation, whatever that is, but we don't have that here.
5. Interviewer Do you think there's a high expectation for SAM to deliver the role of art education as it's the only state funded contemporary art museum?
6. S6 I don't think there is high expectation. I think the expectation is there for it to deliver because it says that it will... and it's



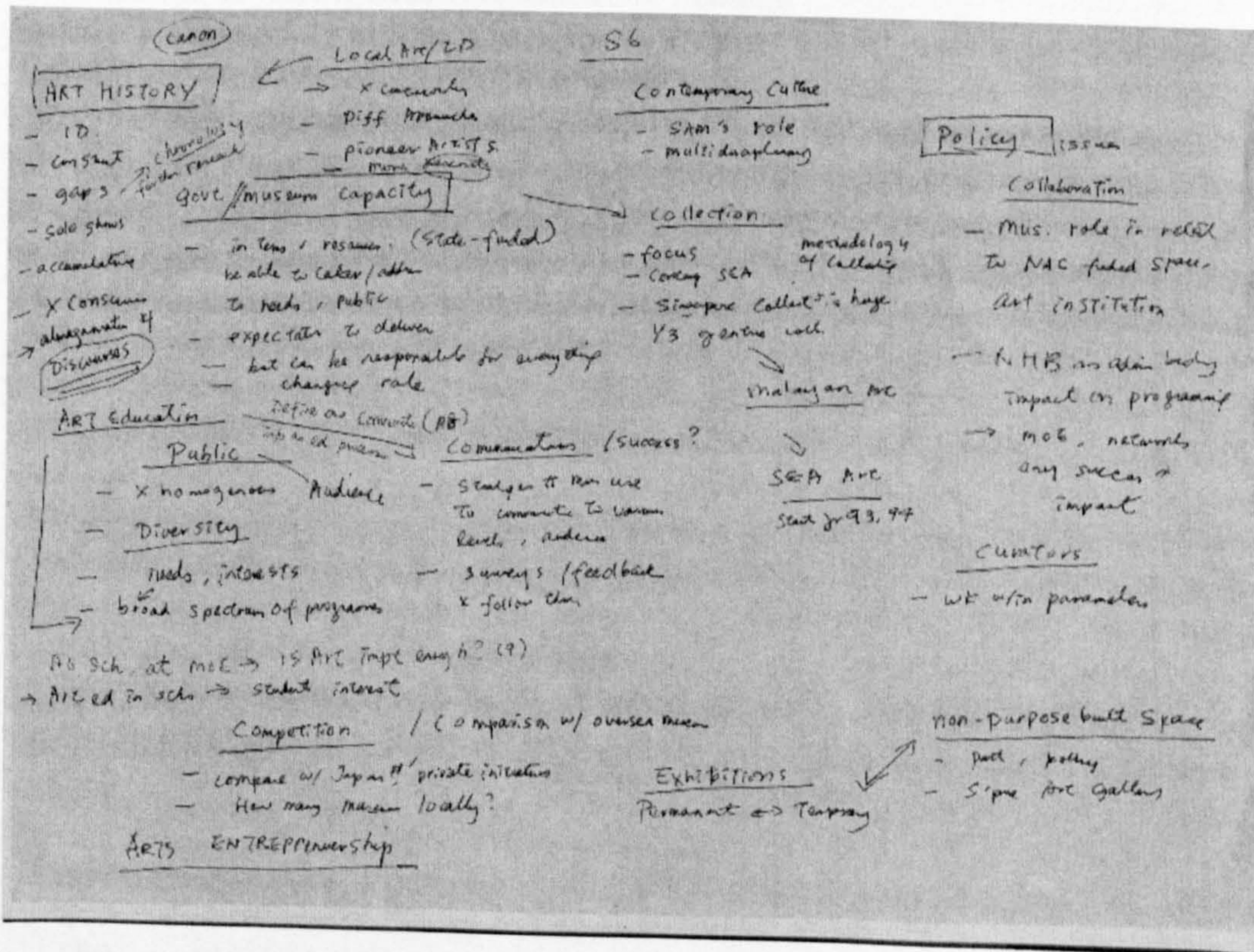
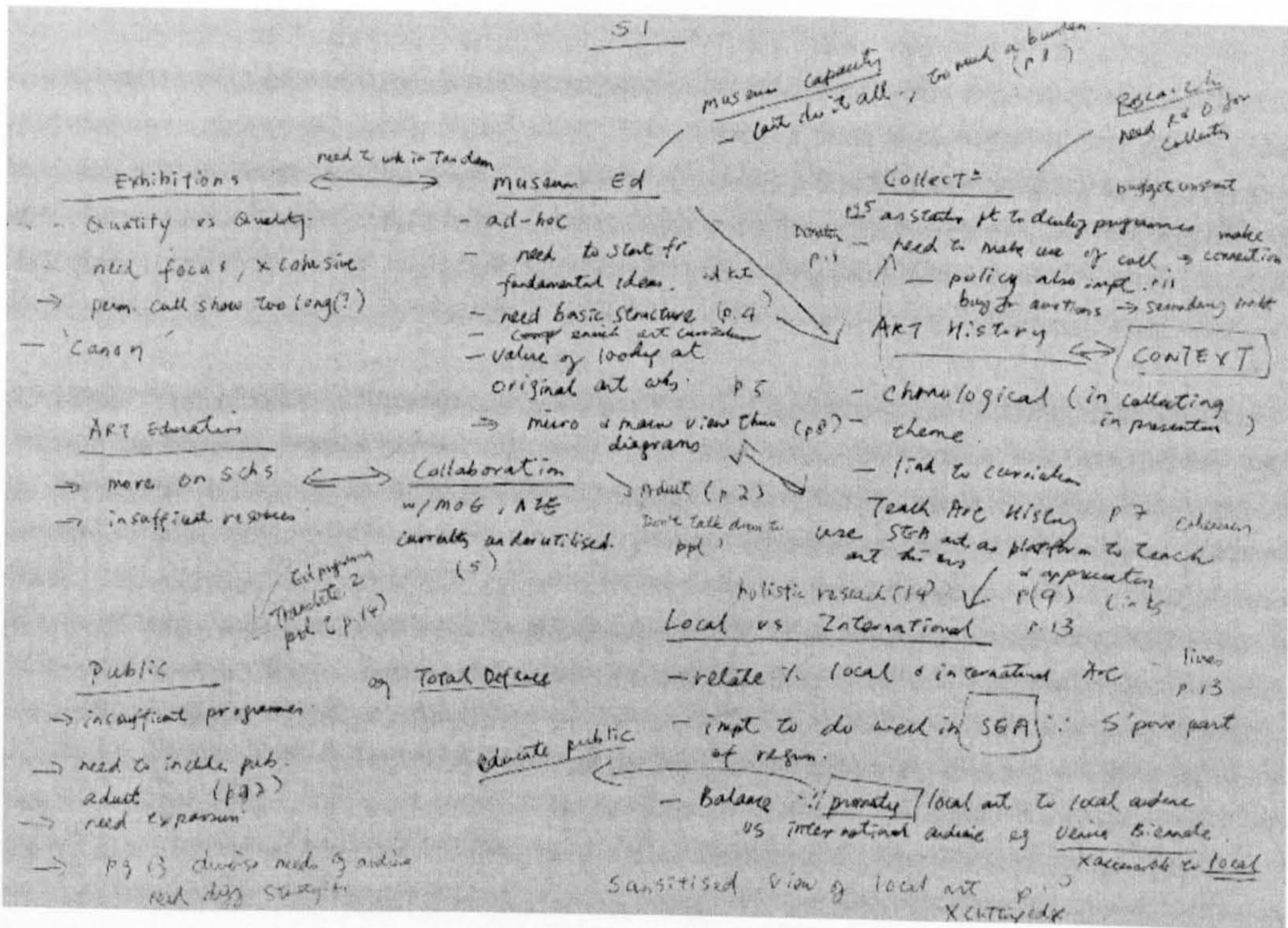
not just academics such as yourself who are doing research, people who are engaged in museum or art-historical fields, but the kind of expectations, say, okay, you are a museum, you should be doing this. Whatever it is, it could be the conventions of public expectations of what museums should be in comparison with what other museums in the world do. You could have such diverging views, for example wall text, no wall text, the work should speak for itself; too much wall text, too simple wall text, too complicated wall text, so where do you stand your ground?

Of course, as a museum addressing its public art educational role, we produced a number or range of programmes within the parameters of art and identity and then tiered according to different entry points...the issue is how does the museum communicate that to a member of the target group in the public. As to whether the museum has done that successfully, that has to be assessed, I think that's the critical issue for assessment. Has it communicated its different programmes properly so that as a member of the public... you can access a talk, an exhibition, a catalogue and say, look, I know what to expect and I'll learn, like having an entry point, so one's not confused. The question then is: has the museum been very successful in its communicating strategies? Maybe it hasn't.

7. Interviewer Has the museum gathered formal feedback?
8. S6 I think there have been some surveys done, like sampling, in which you asked someone on the streets about their impression of the Museum, not questions dealing with research or programmes, but essentially surveys used as a marketing tool, which is useful in a kind of branding exercise.



# APPENDIX E: Examples of Interview Mindmaps





## APPENDIX F: LIST OF ART EXHIBITIONS BY CATEGORIES IN THE SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

### Singapore Art Museum: Exhibitions (1996-2008)

Year	Exhibition Title	SE Asia	Category Singapore	International
1996	Modernity and Beyond	1		
1996	A Century of Singapore Art		1	
1996	Unyielding Materials		1	
1996	Artists in Education/Education in Art		1	
1996	Voyage to the South Seas		1	
1996	Singapore Youth Festival		1	
1996	Rapport	1		
1996	Carl Milles			1
1996	Beyond Visible Reality	1		
1996	Toko Shinoda -- Visual Poetry			1
1996	Masterpieces from the Guggenheim Museum			1
1996	Tradition and Innovation: 20th century Chinese Painting			1
1996	Fantastic Voyage of Arthur Tress			1
1997	Thomas Yeo: A Retrospective		1	
1997	Chang Dai-Chien			1
1997	Shi Xiangtuo's World of Art		1	
1997	Georgette Chen		1	
1997	The Cult of the Head: Sculptures by Sorel Etrog			1
1997	Quotation Marks: Chinese Contemporary Paintings			1
1997	The Weight of Tradition: A Permanent Coll. Exhibition	1		
1997	German Art: 1960s-1990s			1
1997	"Voices...Teenagers Speak" AEP programme		1	
1997	Art & Electronics: Video Sculptures in Germany since 1963			1
1997	Liu Kang		1	
1997	Tryst with Destiny: Art from Modern India	1		
1997	Leonardo da Vinci: Scientist, Inventor, Artist			1
1998	ASEAN Art Awards	1		
1998	Alternatives (A SAFRA Photographers Exhibition)		1	
1998	From There to Now: Malaysian Art from SAM coll.	1		
1998	Roy Lichtenstein: Landscapes in Chinese style			1
1998	Fan Chang Tien: His Art and His Passion		1	
1998	Imaging Selves: Part 1	1		
1998	The Origins of Modern Art in France			1
1998	Fascinating Landscapes: The Art of Lim Tze Peng		1	
1998	Passages: Selected works of Chen Chong Swee		1	
1998	Singapore Youth Festival		1	
1998	Imprints on Singapore Art: NAFA artists		1	
1998	Monumental Moments		1	
1998	ARX 5 Processes			1
1998	Wind of Spirit: A Retrospective of Brother Joseph McNally		1	
1998	Trimuti and Ten Years After		1	
1999	Imaging Selves - Part 2	1		
1999	Monet to Moore			1
1999	Power & Poetry: monuments & meditations in Chinese ink Painting		1	
1999	Jewellery by Artists in Italy			1

1999	Soul Ties: Modern Art in Indonesia	1		
1999	Crisp		1	
1999	Handmade: Shifting Paradigms			1
1999	Diobok-Obok. Continuities & Contingencies SE Asian Art Today	1		
1999	Imaging the Century: SAM coll. Exhibition series	1		
1999	Boundary of Aesthetics			1
1999	Nokia Singapore Art		1	
1999	Kim Lim: A Retrospective		1	
1999	The Herd: Manashe Kadishman			1
1999	Invisible Musicians			1
2000	Unmasking Vollard			1
2000	Rose Crossing: Contemporary Art in Australia			1
2000	Original or Copy: How to Authenticate Chinese Paintings			1
2000	Inspirit Crossing: The Making of First Nations and Inuit Art			1
2000	Food in Art	1		
2000	Chen Wen Hsi		1	
2000	Landscapes in Southeast Asian Art	1		
2000	ASEAN Art Awards 2000: Philip Morris Group of Companies	1		
2000	Recent Acquisitions	1		
2000	Millennium Sculpture		1	
2001	Art Connects (The AEP Exhibition)		1	
2001	Huang Yao Retrospective	1		
2001	China Art Now!			1
2001	President's Young Artists Exhibition		1	
2001	Inscribing Life: The Art of Tran Trung Tin	1		
2001	Nokia Singapore Art 2001		1	
2001	Impression To Form: Selected Works from SAM's Tyler Art Coll			1
2002	Liu Kang: Drawn From Life		1	
2002	Naked Perfection	1		
2002	Rodin: A Magnificent Obsession			1
2002	Sixties NOW!		1	
2002	Singapore Modern: Art in the 1970s		1	
2002	Hiroshi Sugimoto: Portraits	1		
2003	20th Century Chinese Paintings from Singapore Collections	1		
2003	The President's Young Talents Exhibition 2003		1	
2003	Highlights from the SAM permanent coll.	1		
2003	Telling Stories: Works from the SAM Permanent Coll.	1		
2003	Science Fictions			1
2003	Interrupt	1		
2003	Ideas and Idealisations: AEP Exhibition 2003		1	
2003	Photographica Australis			1
2003	Beyond the Surface: Japanese Style of Making Things			1
2003	Convergences of Art, Science and Technology (C.A.S.T)		1	
2003	swedenmade design 4stories			1
2003	Tze Peng (Zi Ping)		1	
2003	An Invitation to Nature - Exhibition on works by Bro. Joseph McNally		1	
2004	Twilight Tomorrow	1		
2004	Beautiful Dragon			1
2004	Ju Ming 2004			1
2004	Botero in Singapore			1
2004	Fascination with Nature: Finger Paintings by Wu Tsai Yen		1	
2004	Seni Singapore 2004	1		
2004	Embracing Infinity: Works by Tan Swie Hian		1	



2005	A Heroic Decade: Singapore Art 1955-1965		1	
2005	Tapies			1
2005	AEP Exhibition 2005		1	
2005	President's Young Talents 2005		1	
2005	Russell Wong: Photographs (1980-2005)		1	
2005	Art of Our Time	1	1	
2006	From Zush to Evru			1
2006	All the Best. The Deutsche Bank Collection and Zaha Hadid			1
2006	"Telah Terbit" (Out Now): Southeast Asian Contemporary Art Practices During the 1970s		1	
2006	The 21st Asian International Art Exhibition 2006			1
2006	Singapore Young Photographer Award Exhibition	1		
2006	Cubism in Asia : Unbounded Dialogues			1
2006	The Inoyama Donation : A Tale of Two Artists	1	1	
2006	Beneath the Pavement: Discovering the City	1	1	
2006	Narrative Sculptures		1	
2006	Fiction@Love			1
2006	Gao Xingjian Experience			1
2006	Art of Our Time	1	1	
2006	Blink!	1	1	
2007	W.S. Hoong's Art of Seal-Carving – Kong Chow Wui Koon Donation	1		
2007	Convergences: Chen Wen Hsi Centennial Exhibition	1		
2007	Widayat Between Worlds: A Retrospective		1	
2007	Engraving the world: A Selection from the Chalcography Collection of the Louvre Museum			1
2007	From Words to Pictures: Art during the Emergency	1		
2007	Re-Woven: Featuring the Works of Benny Ong	1		
2007	Zeng Fanzhi - Idealism			1
2007	Wong Keen: A Singapore Abstract Expressionist:	1		
2007	Art of Our Time	1	1	
2007	The Big Picture Show	1	1	
2007	Affandi: A Painter of Genius		1	
2007	From Everyday to the imagined: An exhibition of Indian Art		1	
2007	M1 Fringe Fest	1		
2007	Between, Beside, Beyond: Daniel Libeskind's Reflections and Key Works, 1989-2014			1
2007	Building Conversations: Michael Lee and Nadiah Bamadhaj	1		
2008	Art of Our Time	1	1	
2008	Seeing. Feeling. Being. : Alberto Giacometti			1
2008	Primary Colours: Feng Zhengjie			1
2008	APB Foundation: Singapore Art Prize	1		
2008	Vietnam Festival		1	
2008	Xu Beihong in Nanyang			1
2008	Alain Fleischer: Time Exposures			1
2008	The Artists' Village: 20 years	1		
2008	APAD: Tradition, Innovation and Continuity	1		
2008	Transcendence: Modernity and Beyond in Korean Art			1
2008	Japan Media Arts Festival			1
2008	is it tomorrow yet?			1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>51</b>



**APPENDIX G: A NEW SINGAPORE ICON ROARS TO LIFE**



PHOTO: LAU FOOK KONG

**FRIENDLY FELINE:** PM Lee pats the hybrid dancing lion, which blends elements of Chinese, Malay and Indian culture to symbolise Singapore, while Dr Khor and Mr Ang look on.

## A new Singapore icon roars to life

‘A New Singapore Icon Roars to Life’ –  
The dancing Singapore Lion as the new national icon

*The Straits Times, January 24 2005*

