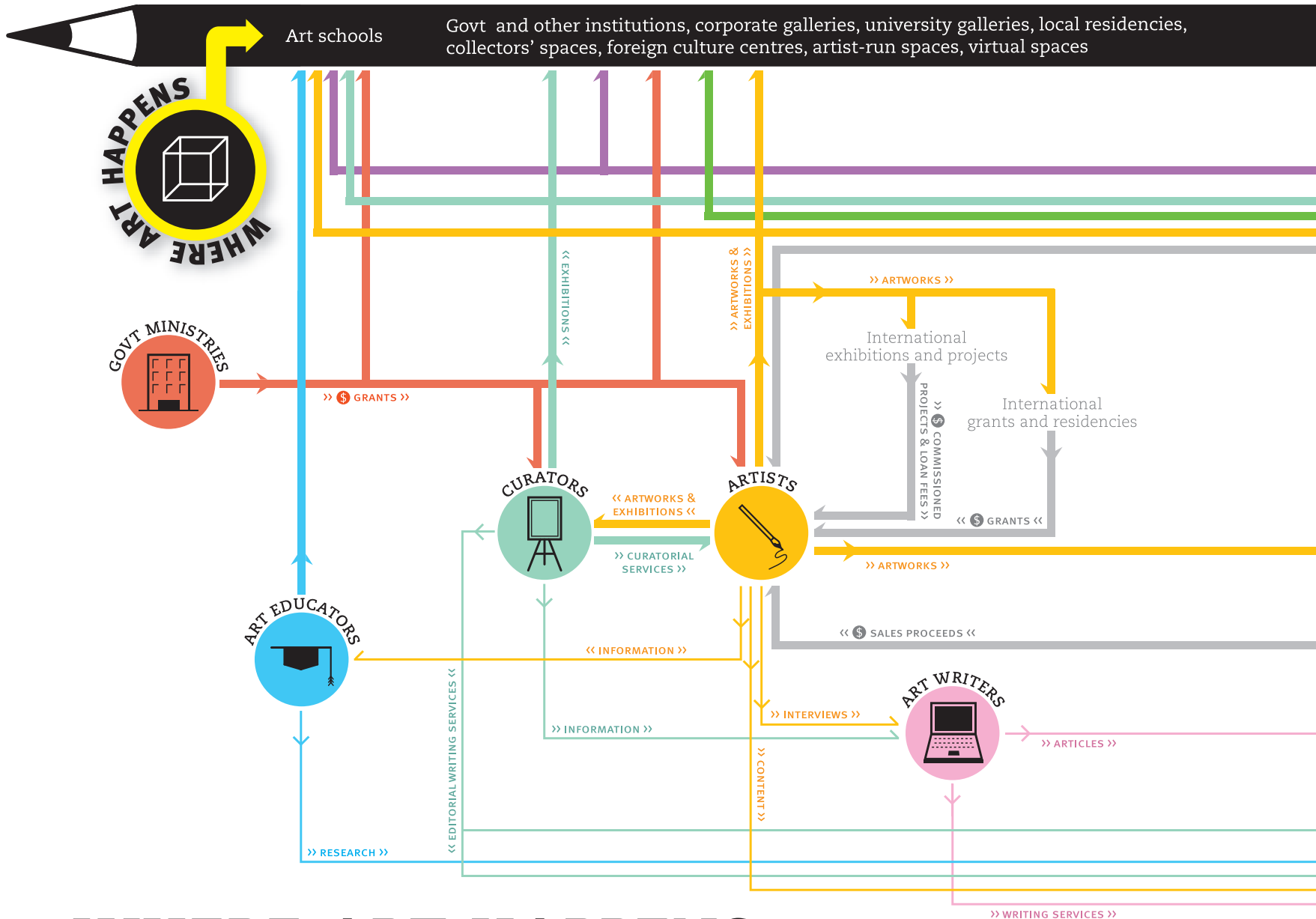


TALK



# WHERE ART HAPPENS

Bluff your way through with this first-ever map of the Malaysian art world



## SPACES

### Institutional

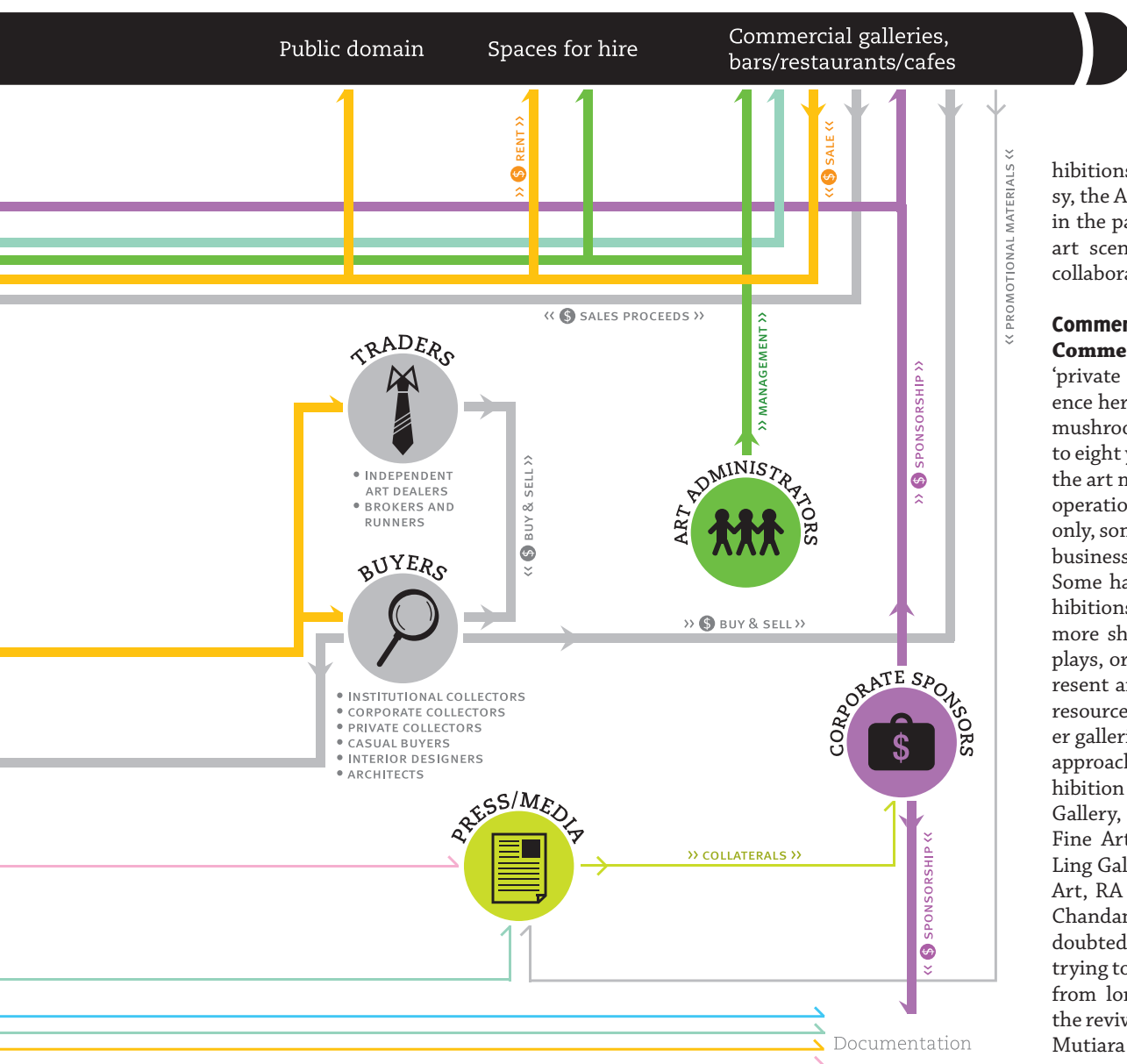
**Art schools** are the breeding ground for new generations of local talent (bearing in mind many Malaysian art students and artists also study or complete their training abroad). The first art schools to be established, in 1967, were the Faculty of Art & Design, Institut Teknologi Mara (now a university, UiTM with branches across several states), and the Malaysian Institute of Art. Today, UiTM, Unimas, USM and Lim Kok Wing University offer fine art degree courses, while visual art forms a part of the foundation for many design and multimedia courses. A number of smaller institutions offering diplomas dot the Klang Valley

and beyond, such as the Equator Academy of Art in Penang and New Era College in Kajang. Graduation shows are good opportunities for talent-scouting.

**Government institutions:** Malaysia can boast one of the first national art institutions in the region. The National Art Gallery, or Balai Seni Lukis Negara (BSLN) was founded in 1958, and has built up a major collection of Malaysian art as well as holding retrospective exhibitions for seminal Malaysian artists, and key biennial events such as the Young Contemporaries competition and Salon Malaysia/Open Show, on its busy calendar. It also supports artists and projects through direct funding, eg travel and research. It is now an agency under the Ministry of Information,

Communication and Culture. A little-known fact is that most states also have an art gallery or museum which includes art in their display, the most active being Penang Museum and Art Gallery, and Sabah Art Gallery.

**University galleries** play an important complementary role in higher education – as a creative space, exploring subjects on the curriculum, collecting artefacts and materials for research. The Museum of Asian Art at UM boasts the country's earliest institutional collection of modern art from Asia as well as Asian artefacts; while Muzium & Galeri Tuanku Fauziah (which covers art and science) boasts an excellent collection of Malaysian modern art, now expanding its purview into the progressive area of new media art. It also has an



hibitions. Not a cultural centre but an embassy, the Australian High Commission has been in the past a key supporter of the Malaysian art scene through exhibitions, residencies, collaborations and funding.

### Commercial

**Commercial galleries**, more tastefully called 'private galleries', have had a sporadic existence here since the 1960s, but have certainly mushroomed in the capital over the past five to eight years, providing a strong backbone to the art market. Galleries have many different operational 'styles'. Some are by appointment only, some are open to the public, all are in the business of selling art for love and/or profit. Some have specially-designed spaces for exhibitions and projects, while others might be more shop-like with mixed, salon-style displays, or based in a home. Some actively represent artists, at times exclusively, spending resources promoting their careers, while other galleries might have a more casual or open approach. Veteran galleries with regular exhibition programmes include Pelita Hati, NN Gallery, Gallerie Taksu, and Valentine Willie Fine Art, while newer establishments Wei-Ling Gallery, PACE Gallery, Richard Koh Fine Art, RA Fine Arts and most recently, Galeri Chandan, are also very active. While KL is undoubtedly the market centre, Penang is also trying to resurrect its position as a hub. Aside from long-timers The Art Gallery, Penang, the revived Alpha Gallery and new Galeri Seni Mutiara have set up in the heritage district of town in the past few years.

ambitious exhibition, talks and workshop programme for students and the general public. UiTM's Museum and Art Gallery is meanwhile more focused on creating space for student showcases.

**Corporate art spaces** were originally a phenomenon of the late 80s and early 90s, when enlightened captains of industry and finance saw the collecting of art and encouragement of artists as part of the private sector's commitment to culture and society. Galeri Petronas, especially in the past three years, has led the way as a corporate gallery and beyond, setting high institutional standards for art programming, publishing and outreach, and becoming one of the central pillars of the Malaysian art world. Coming up on the horizon is a reinvented Bank Negara Malaysia Museum and Gallery, which will be partly dedicated to its art collection and art exhibitions, in a brand new

building. Meanwhile Galeri Tenaga was set up in 2005 to showcase TNB's pioneering collection of Malaysian art from the 1960s onwards, and now also hosts selected exhibitions.

**Other cultural institutions:** A number of museums and other institutional spaces, not exclusively specialising in visual art, also play host to art events and exhibitions, for example, the Islamic Arts Museum, and Badan Warisan.

**Foreign cultural centres** do not play as central a role in the visual arts in Kuala Lumpur, as they do, for example, in Bangkok. However, organisations such as the Japan Foundation, Goethe Institut, and to a lesser extent Alliance Francaise and the British Council, do initiate and facilitate art activities and events, often linked to their international or regional programmes, and often at external sites. Japan Foundation in Kuala Lumpur has a designated exhibition space, and Alliance Francaise in Penang has hosted art ex-

**Spaces for hire:** Before the boom in art galleries, hotel lobbies were a prime location for commercial art exhibitions. As the number of artists proliferates, there is still some demand for exhibition space. Exhibitions might now also be found at the newer, luxury shopping malls like Pavilion KL, especially when connected with a high-profile sponsor. Smaller outfits like The Red Bungalow Gallery & Space in Jalan Ampang and more recently 19 Jalan Berangan also offer exhibition opportunities, while some commercial and also institutional galleries may occasionally work on a rental basis. The most successful space for hire is The Annexe Gallery, Central Market, which really functions as an unofficial cultural centre, bringing together art exhibitions, performances, readings, music and other cultural events in a loose general programme.

**Cafes, bars, restaurants** are casual commercial venues where aspiring artists often

### Where Art Happens

INDEPENDENT ART CONSULTANCY RogueArt, supported by Yayasan Sime Darby, presents *Where Art Happens*, a series of public talks on Malaysia's art scene. It aims to introduce questions and open discussions of how art is presented to and supported by the larger community. Museum and gallery directors, corporate sponsors, art managers, art patrons, and artists, both in Malaysia and Southeast Asia, are welcome.

**June 13** *Art Spaces: Policies, Agendas, Ways Forward* investigates different kinds of spaces where art is presented, from national institutions to independent artist-run spaces. Speakers include Hasnul Jamal Saidon Director of Galeri & Muzium Tuanku Fauziah (Universiti Sains Malaysia); Ahmad bin Mashadi, Head of NUS Museum, Singapore; and Agung Hujatnikajennong of Selasar Sunaryo (Bandung, Indonesia).

**June 20** *Getting Out There: Art in the Community* looks at the way artists and artist collectives engage with the community through on-the-ground projects, such as Let Arts Move You, and the Contemporary Art In School project in 2008. Speakers include Amanda Heng from Singapore and arts and media innovator Mark Teh.

**June 27** *Feeding Creativity: Art Residencies and Grants* discusses different types of art residencies and funding available locally and in the region. These include Rimbun Dahan, RBS-Malihom AIR Programme, HOM (Matahati), and the Krishen Jit-ASTRO Fund Malaysian artists will also speak about their experiences on residency programmes in Malaysia and abroad.

*Where Art Happens* is open to the public, and admission is free. All talks are from 10.45am to 4pm. Seating is limited, however, so book early.

Details, (016) 266 7413, [contact@rogueart.asia](mailto:contact@rogueart.asia)

find their first outing and try to sell their art to establishment patrons. Not quite Paris Art Nouveau perhaps, but restaurant-owners do often want to encourage young artists and at the same time add a spark of creativity to their space – a win-win situation. Attempts have also been made from time to time to bring new media and experimental art into the clubbing scene. Zouk, for example, lists 'fringe art events' and exhibitions.

### & lain-lain

**Artist/collective-run spaces:** 'Alternative spaces' have generally had a short life-span locally, generally due to funding issues. These are almost always set up by artists or artist collectives, who want to create spaces for making and showing their art independent of commercial or institutional agendas, and are non-profit making. (We do not include here commercial galleries which happen to be owned by artists).

The House of Matahati holds exhibitions, workshops and talks, hosts its own residency programme and also organises exchanges, outside exhibitions and gives out selective grants. It is funded by the seminal artist collective, Matahati, and through sales of art works and other fundraising activities. Patisatu Studio is a separate initiative by ceramic artist Umi Baizura and her husband, Matahati member Ahmad Shukri Mohamad, to foster the development of ceramic art through studio collaborations and exhibitions.

Findars Space in The Annexe, Central Market is a multi-purpose art space founded by a group of young graphic designers, artists and musicians to encourage budding artists and designers, while SiCKL (Space in Cheras Kuala Lumpur) is a private studio hosting cross-disciplinary events from music, poetry, performance, film and the visual arts. Meanwhile Lost Generation Space, originally founded by visual artists in 2004, has found a new home in Taman Seputeh.

12 (Art Space), run by artist Susyilawati Sulaiman, is dedicated to documenting and exhibiting the works of key Malaysian artists who have been neglected by the mainstream.

**Local residencies:** Residency programmes create space, time and opportunities for artists to develop ideas and work. They also foster cultural exchange, introducing new creative personalities into new environments. The much-acclaimed Rimbun Dahan artists' residency programme was established by art patrons Hijjas and Angela Kasturi in 1994. This beautiful estate in Kuang hosts a Malaysian and an Australian artist through the course of each year, while also hosting Southeast Asian resident artists for shorter periods. The gallery at Rimbun Dahan also holds a yearly Art for Nature fundraising exhibition, one of the highlights of the art scene's calendar. In Penang, private and corporate forces have come together to create the RBS-Malihom AIR programme in 2006, which hosts two local and/or international artists for six months at a time in a hillside enclave in Balik Pulau. Both residencies also hold exhibitions for their main residents, which have given a number of artists a step up in their professional careers. Residency programmes are also conducted by artist-run spaces like House of Matahati, Patisatu and Lost Generation Space, as well as by private gallery, Gallerie Taksu.

**Collectors' spaces:** Private collectors tend to stay private, meaning that much of the output of especially contemporary artists remains hidden from the public eye. There are generous exceptions, however. For example, leading collectors Pakhrudin and Fatimah Sulaiman have kept important works from their contemporary Malaysian collection on display at their own viewing gallery, Rupa, which can be visited by appointment. Collector Ng Seksan of Seksan Design also offers part of his workspace, 67 Tempinis Satu, to artists to hold ex-

hibitions, in between displaying works from his collection.

**Public domain:** Debate about 'public art' occurs in spurts, usually revolving around the contentious monkey-cup fountain in front of DBKL. However, art in the public domain can extend well beyond the concept of civic monuments lighting up our everyday. Public sculptures do exist in pockets – there is a dedicated sculpture park in the Lake Gardens, for example, and there have been various plans for larger-scale sculpture parks. Art in public or community spaces can be performative, interactive and even practical. Two important projects by artist groups have led the way – Let Arts Move You (Lamu) which brought video, karaoke and poetry to KTM commuters in 2007, and Contemporary Art in School which intervened with and enhanced the educational environment of Stella Maris School. With contemporary art so low on the public radar, such approaches help to break down barriers and create fruitful engagements between artists and communities.

**Virtual spaces:** Not all art 'happens' in a physical space. From 2004 to 2007, *Off The Edge* magazine ran a section called galleryW/Owalls, inviting artists to create art works in the magazine for their readership. The Internet has become a popular forum both for discussion and creative expression, much of it under the mainstream radar. Word has it that there is even a Malaysian Art Triennial in Second Life, 'Artifice 090603009794', that is set to open during the first week of August with some sort of physical presence at the Annexe. Not exactly a site, but rather an invaluable map of art sites, is Yap Sau Bin's (a member of artist collective Rumah Air Panas) work-in-progress, MappingKLArtSpace. Visit [mappingklart-space.blogspot.com](http://mappingklart-space.blogspot.com) for a comprehensive low-down on where art happens, and also where it has happened, in Kuala Lumpur.

### THE PLAYERS\*



**Artists** come in many shapes and sizes. By and large, these creative individuals do not like to be pigeon-holed or categorised. Most start at art school, and some go abroad to study or finish their studies. Some work exclusively with traditional media such as painting and sculpture, while others may take a more diverse approach to their practice, working with new and alternative media such as video, digital art and site-specific installation. The most successful painters and sculptors, and the odd non-painter, can survive on their profession, selling their work through exhibitions and the market, in general, and developing a following over the years. Artists working with broader approaches might be more likely to find funding and recognition for their work from international bodies and projects. The majority of practising artists



have to keep a day or at least casual job to stay afloat, and many choose to teach.

**Artist collectives** have played an important role in motivating independent initiatives in the artist community, such as alternative spaces, community projects, residencies and exchanges, as well as DIY exhibitions and events. The most established and active visual artist collectives are Matahati and Rumah Air Panas, among a number that have emerged over the years.



**Collectors** are a very important driving force for the Malaysian art world, with a strong and often passionate core sustaining a lively domestic art market.

Collectors have certainly grown in number since the 1960s, and also come in many forms and with different agendas – many focus on contemporary local art, with some branching out into regional art, while others prefer earlier pioneer artists or the work of modern Malaysian masters, or collect across different periods.

**Institutional and corporate collectors** in principle preserve our national art heritage for the generations to come, affording the general public access to important art works, enhancing the cultural life of our society. Major collections such as those of the National Art Gallery, UM, USM, Bank Negara and TNB, began as far back as the 1950s and 60s. Some of these have lost pace, while the Petronas collection, for example, has fast caught up, with its broad range of key pioneer, modern and contemporary works.



**Gallerists, dealers, brokers, runners:** The merchants of the art world keep art works and artists in currency, both answering to and helping to create demand

for art. Gallerists who have established a name for themselves and actively promote their artists do exert a certain influence on what is seen and what is popular in the market. Galleries generally work on a consignment basis, supporting artists by bearing exhibition and promotion costs, while pure dealers might work more regularly in the secondary market, either on commission, or buying and selling art. Runners and brokers, sometimes only loosely connected to the art world, help to find the odd treasure in a forgotten collection, or act as ad hoc go-betweens between would-be buyers and sellers.

**Interior designers and other consultants:** Housing booms and a growing awareness of local artistic talent, as well as architects and designers who are naturally inclined to support art practice, have meant a developing practice of consultancy for new homes and offices as part of an interior designers' role. Professional art consultancy for collections is not as yet a common practice in Malaysia, though not unheard of.

**Institutional heads** are tasked with the

## THEATRE



## Cuckoo Birds

THIS COLLABORATION BETWEEN Malaysian arts collective Five Arts Centre and Singapore's Cake Theatrical Productions, *Cuckoo Birds* is a wild contemporary epic in search of serenity in an often mad and brutal modern world.

Directed by Natalie Hennedige, the Artistic Director of Cake Theatrical Productions, and devised with and performed by Anne James, Elaine Pedley, Jo Kukathas and Mohd Fared Jainal.

Catch *Cuckoo Birds* at Central Market's Annexe Gallery from June 18 to 20 at 8:30pm, with additional shows at 3pm on June 20 and 21. Entry is by donation of RM20; RM10 for students and senior citizens.

Details, (03) 7725 4858, [fivearts@tm.net.my](mailto:fivearts@tm.net.my), [www.fiveartscentre.org](http://www.fiveartscentre.org)

serious mission of leading the way for the Malaysian art world. Directing the policies and management of art institutions, they help set the agenda for what artworks are to be collected, and the types of exhibitions and projects that will be offered to the public. Their responsibility is not only to the current community – their actions are crucial to the legacy of an institution and its impact on the community.



**Curators:** Independent, or attached to institutions or galleries, these are generally speaking individuals who conceptualise and put together exhibitions.

In the institutional context, a curator would also strategise and manage a collection. The curator is often seen as the arbiter between the artist/s and the viewing public, helping to present and make sense of a body or collection of art works. They will also usually write for exhibition publications.



**Art writers, critics and, yes, bloggers:** We may constantly complain about the dearth of art criticism in Malaysia, but in fact the number of writers and articulate commentators on art is growing. We have unfortunately lost the newspaper columns on artists, art history and exhibitions by once stalwart art writers like Wong Hoy Cheong, J Anu, Ooi Kok Chuen and the late, great Redza Piyadasa, but a number of especially younger critics, writers and bloggers have taken to the Internet. Art writers also contribute to the magazine press – *Off The Edge* provides good coverage of art events and issues, and *Sentap* is an artist-run bimonthly publication dedicated to the visual arts. Art writers might also produce essays for exhibition catalogues.

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These are not specific designations, but terms which might describe those individuals who pull together exhibitions and projects, run galleries, source funding, host international visitors, get the right people together and run the show behind the scenes – gallery and residency managers, curators-cum-project-managers, spokesmen for collectives, and other animals.

**Art educators, academics:**

The art world in general does not see much of what goes on in art schools and academic research, unless the educators or academics in question happen to be institutional heads, or high-profile practicing artists. They are nonetheless guardians of the future, nurturing new generations of Malaysian artists and pushing forward research and documentation in the field. ■ *RogueArt 2009*

*\*It is important to bear in mind that, with the Malaysian art world being so small, very little arts management training being available, and art-related work being sporadic and often modestly paid (because we work for love and passion), an art world player often wears many hats. A number of artists, for example, are also key facilitators, curators and writers. Many are educators. Curators will write, facilitate, project-manage, and often collect art too. At the extreme, one might even find a gallerist who is also an artist, curator, writer, researcher and collector.*

## Rogue art

Where Art Happens is made possible with the kind support of Yayasan Sime Darby (Sime Darby Foundation)

Yayasan Sime Darby sponsors initiatives to strengthen arts institutions, develop cultural knowledge and resources, and encourage contributions of artists to the quality of life in a multi-cultural society. It aims to instill appreciation of the rich cultural heritage and legacy that is uniquely Malaysian.

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