

# THE GIFT

collecting  
entanglements  
Embodied  
Histories

## A JOURNEY OF GIVING

### About this trail:

- Features **selected** artworks and guiding questions
- Suitable for ages 13 and above
- May be completed in 20 – 30 minutes

## WHAT'S IN A GIFT?

*THE GIFT* embodies more than an object of exchange. Its spirit extends to the meanings and stories behind brief encounters, poignant exchanges and tempting offers.

Read more to discover *THE GIFT*'s many forms.

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Before exploring this exhibition:

### THINK ABOUT:

THE SHAPE

THE SOUL

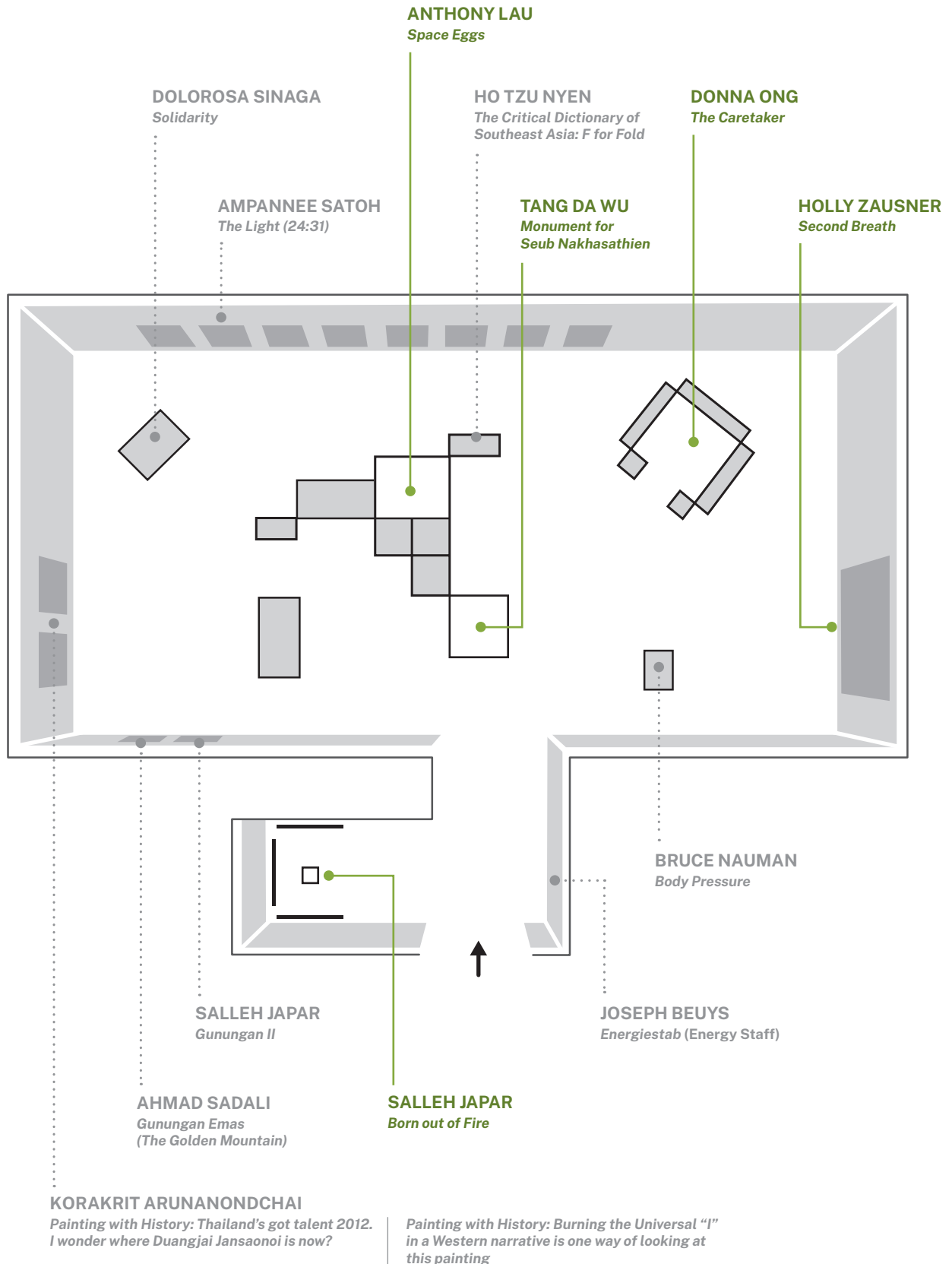
AND

THE SPIRIT OF A GIFT

# A JOURNEY OF GIVING

● Selected artworks in this trail in green

● We encourage you to also view the other works in this exhibition.





**WHAT DO GIFTS  
LOOK LIKE?**

**ARE THEY  
CONFINED TO  
PACKAGES,**

**WRAPPED UP  
IN RIBBONS?**

**CAN THEY EXIST  
BEYOND BOXES?**



Installation view of Salleh Japar's *Born out of Fire*; Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum

## SALLEH JAPAR

### *BORN OUT OF FIRE*

1993  
Acrylic on canvas, plexiglass,  
lightbulb, wood and hunt paper  
Dimensions variable  
Collection of  
Singapore Art Museum

Salleh Japar's artworks invite discussion on identity and values. In *Born out of Fire*, three scorched canvases with a lightbulb in the middle reveal symbols drawn from the world around us.

An arrow, a bridge, a doorway, a mountain or a tree suggest direction, connection or life itself. These symbols are universal and familiar to people across different cultures and belief systems.

Yet, they can also be deeply personal when interpreted within the context of our own lives. For the artist, this elemental approach speaks to a profound, spiritual experience.

For example, the element of fire is used to evoke the power of transformation. This association was inspired by Salleh's time in Australia, where he encountered bushfires. While bushfires are considered destructive, they are a necessary part of the natural ecology in Australia, particularly for the regeneration and growth of gum trees.

SALLEH JAPAR  
BORN OUT OF FIRE



Installation view of Salleh Japar's *Born out of Fire*; Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum

- What could the symbols of an arrow, a bridge, a doorway, a mountain or a tree represent for you?
- Salleh Japar scorched the canvases to represent the element of fire. What other colours, textures or objects could represent fire?
- Is there a person in your life who comes to mind when you hear the phrase “born out of fire”? What are some of your memories of that person?
- Share with someone a time in your life when you underwent a transformation or were “born out of fire”.

**CAN THE SPIRIT  
OF A PERSON**

**THEIR VALUES  
AND MEMORIES**

**LIVE INSIDE  
OBJECTS?**





Installation view of Tang Da Wu's *Monument for Seub Nakhasathien*; Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum

## TANG DA WU

### MONUMENT FOR SEUB NAKHASATHIEN

1991  
Wood and plaster  
Dimensions variable  
Collection of  
Singapore Art Museum

*Monument for Seub Nakhasathien* explores issues of environment and ecology. Tang Da Wu created the work in memory of the Thai ecological conservationist, Seub Nakhasathien, making it a deeply empathetic and monumental piece.

Nakhasathien was a fervent activist and scholar who campaigned tirelessly for the protection of Cheow Lan Lake, Thungyai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary, and Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary. Nakhasathien faced an uphill battle, with a series of insurmountable challenges. He eventually took his own life at the age of 40.

Nakhasathien's admirable conservation work went on to inspire a generation of young forest patrol officers, ultimately leaving an enduring legacy. The Seub Nakhasathien Foundation was also established.

*Monument for Seub Nakhasathien* recalls Nakhasathien's brave and determined pursuit. The imagery of a fragile boat heading upstream incidentally references a Thai idiom that translates to pushing a heavy millstone up a hill alluding to a difficult or impossible task.



TANG DA WU  
MONUMENT FOR SEUB NAKHASATHIEN



Installation view of Tang Da Wu's *Monument for Seub Nakhasathien*; Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum

- Why do you think Tang Da Wu used these objects to remember Seub Nakhasathien?
- Think of someone you love and admire. If you had to create a piece of art to represent their spirit, what materials or objects would you choose?
- Tell a friend about a time when you faced a challenge and felt like a fragile boat, heading upstream. Why was that experience significant to you?



**ONE SMALL  
STEP FOR MAN,  
ONE GIANT LEAP  
FOR MANKIND**

**CAN A SMALL  
GIFT MEAN  
A GIANT LEAP?**



Installation view of Anthony Lau's *Space Eggs*; Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum

## ANTHONY LAU

### SPACE EGGS

1970  
Aluminium  
23 x 52 x 25 cm (each)  
Collection of  
National Gallery Singapore

In Anthony Lau's works, concept and subject are vividly brought to life through his precise use of forms and textures.

The circular ends and smooth texture *Space Eggs* reinforces its depiction of comets in space.

Lau's *Space Eggs* reflect the excitement and possibilities of human exploration and new frontiers, following the celebrated achievement of the first moonwalk in 1969 by American astronauts, Neil Armstrong and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin.



Installation view of Anthony Lau's *Space Eggs*; Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum

- What comes to your mind when you look at *Space Eggs*?
- In your opinion, how does the artwork's rounded shape and metallic surface reflect its connection to space?
- The artist created this work after the first moon landing. How does this context enhance its enigma and mystery?
- Discuss with a close friend – what otherworldly objects from space can you think of or create?

**HOW DOES  
A GIFT EVOLVE?**

**DOES A GIFT STAY  
FROZEN IN TIME?**

**AS A SNAPSHOT**

**OF A MOMENT'S  
SINCERITY?**

**CAN ITS MEANING  
FADE AWAY?**





Installation view of Donna Ong's *The Caretaker*; Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum

## DONNA ONG

### THE CARETAKER

2008  
Multimedia installation  
8 x 5 x 2.7 m  
Collection of  
Singapore Art Museum

*The Caretaker* is Donna Ong's reimagination of the dolls from the *Friendship Doll Project*, a project initiated by American missionary Reverend Sidney Gulick.

Started as a response to the 1924 Immigration Act by the United States Congress, the project involved an exchange of dolls between the U.S. and Japan as a signal of goodwill. It began with the gifting of blue-eyed dolls to Japan by the U.S. and a reciprocation of lavishly adorned kimono-clad dolls to America by the Japanese.

Unfortunately, the subsequent bombing of Pearl Harbour and World War II caused relations between the countries to sour.

Consequently, the dolls, which were seen as ambassadors and representatives of their respective countries, were burnt and defaced. Many dolls were destroyed, removed from museum collections, or stored out of sight.

In Ong's return to this historical moment, a caretaker appears to be watching over the memory of the dolls. This scene also incorporates videos where time is seen to pass in a rising and setting light.

Time bears witness to their existence, as the dolls are reimagined to finally meet in peace.



Installation view of Donna Ong's *The Caretaker*; Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum

- The friendship dolls were given as a gesture of goodwill between the U.S. and Japan. How does gift giving strengthen the bond between countries, or with the people around us?
- **Recall the gifts you have given.**  
What were the intentions behind the act of gifting?  
Have their meanings and significance stayed the same?
- **Recall the gifts you have received.**  
Which gift was the most memorable?  
If you received it again today, would you feel any different?



**THE SPACES  
AROUND US**

**AND THE HISTORIES  
WITHIN THEM,**

**HOW DO  
THEY SHAPE**

**THE GIFT OF  
WHO WE  
ARE TODAY?**





Installation view of Holly Zausner's *Second Breath*; Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum

## HOLLY ZAUSNER

### SECOND BREATH

2005  
Super 16 mm film, digitised,  
colour and sound (stereo), 10:16 min  
Collection of Staatliche Museen  
zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie  
2005 purchased by the  
Freunde der Nationalgalerie



Watch a trailer  
of *Second Breath*  
by scanning the  
QR code

Or click [HERE](#)  
to watch

Holly Zausner presents an interpretation of Berlin's long and complicated history through her performance art piece *Second Breath*.

Inspired by her time living and working in the city in the 1990s, Zausner created a series of three outsized figures made from rubber silicon and knitted material.

This film features Zausner interacting with these figures at key landmarks in the city, including the Potsdamer Platz, Neue Nationalgalerie, Spree River, and the now demolished Palast der Republik.

In every scene, the weight of the figures obstructs her actions, reflecting an abstract struggle with the hefty weight of Berlin's history.

As Zausner wrestles with the figures throughout the city, she influences and shapes the viewer's perspective of the various environments. She treats the city as her stage, implicating different objects and bodies of Berlin in her video.

Her choreography brings new light and dimensions to the familiar sites, changing the ways the spaces are conventionally seen and used.



Installation view of Holly Zausner's *Second Breath*; Image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum

- In three words, describe the sensations that the artist invokes as she moves with the sculptures.
- How does her movement make you feel?  
Can you think of other things that move like her?
- Look closely at the colours and textures of the sculptures, comparing them against the city's buildings.  
What do you notice?

# FEEDBACK

Have you enjoyed or benefited from this resource?

Let us know your thoughts by scanning the QR code or click [HERE](#) for the link



It will greatly help us improve our programmes.

Thank You!



# THE GIFT: COLLECTING ENTANGLEMENTS AND EMBODIED HISTORIES

Presented by Singapore Art Museum showing at  
National Gallery Singapore from 20 August — 7 Nov 2021

The exhibition, *THE GIFT*, is part of a broader project titled *Collecting Entanglements and Embodied Histories* that is developed as a dialogue between collections of four museums: Singapore Art Museum, Galeri Nasional Indonesia, MAM Contemporary Art Museum, and Nationalgalerie – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, initiated by the Goethe-Institut. Emerging from this dialogue are four related exhibitions presented in Singapore, Germany, Indonesia and Thailand, curated by June Yap with Anna-Catharina Gebbers, Grace Samboh and Gridthiya Gaweewong.



Brought to you by Singapore Art Museum



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