

The Substation

A Home for the Arts

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MEDIA RELEASE

Key Messages

- **The Substation will remain open.**
- **It will evolve from being an arts centre to become an arts company focused on developing original programming.**
- **Its core mission will remain the discovering, nurturing and supporting of new and diverse voices in the arts.**
- **A new team will lead Substation 2.0, comprising a core group of arts professionals and practitioners from diverse disciplines and age groups.**

Background

On 2 March 2021, The Substation Board had announced its decision to close The Substation permanently. [<https://www.substation.org/s/The-Substation-Media-Announcement.pdf>] This difficult decision had been made for a number of reasons, key amongst them The Substation's financial sustainability as an independent arts centre, arising from its obligation to leave its premises, and exacerbated by Covid-19, the decision of the National Arts Council (NAC) to turn 45 Armenian Street into a centre for multiple arts groups following its renovations, and the inability of The Substation to continue to serve as an independent arts centre at 45 Armenian Street after renovations.

On 6 March, The Substation organised a Town Hall meeting with the arts community to share its decision, during which many divergent views were

Patron
Tommy Koh

Founder
Kuo Pao Kun

Board of Directors
Chew Kheng Chuan (Chairman)
Paul Khoo
Annabelle Yip
Edmund Wee
Wahyuni Hadi
Tan Tarn How
Jean-Louis Morisot
Terence Chong
Jiarong Goh

Advisor
Ong Pang Boon

Artistic Director
Raka Maitra

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Charity Reg No: 1138

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Address
45 Armenian Street
Singapore 179936

Telephone
+ 65 6337 7535

Email
admin@substation.org

Website
www.substation.org

expressed [<https://www.substation.org/blog/subclosure-townhall>]. There were discussions during the Town Hall and over social media on initiatives and ideas to keep The Substation open as an organisation, including a membership model and a renewal of the Board.

On 18 March, the Board announced [<https://www.substation.org/blog/post-townhall>] that we were open to receiving proposals from the arts community for the continuation of The Substation. We had done so because we had heard the views of the community, and noted that a proportion of the arts community believed that The Substation should not be closed permanently even if it could not return to fully occupy 45 Armenian Street or to continue in its present form as an independent arts centre for multi-disciplinary experimental arts.

While the decision to close is one The Substation Board collectively made and believed was the right thing to do, we also acknowledged that many in the community felt otherwise and sought an opportunity to drive The Substation forward. We were heartened by this spirit of communal responsibility and initiative.

For transparency's sake, a set of terms of reference was published on The Substation website [<https://www.substation.org/blog/proposals>] providing guidance on what the proposal should cover. The deadline was set and later extended to 27 April at the request of members of the arts community.

For a plurality of views and expertise, the Board approached established members of the arts community with diverse backgrounds and organisational experience to help us evaluate the strength of the proposals. The Board wishes to express its sincere thanks and deep appreciation to Ute Meta Bauer, Founding Director, Centre for Contemporary Art, Singapore,

Nanyang Technological University; Tamares Goh, Head (Curatorial Programmes), National Gallery Singapore; Shaza Ishak, Managing Director, Teater Ekamatra; and Thirunalan Sasitharan, Co-founder and Director, Intercultural Theatre Institute for agreeing to be our advisors.

When the 27 April deadline for proposal submission arrived, we had received two proposals, one from Shaiful Risan, and the other from a group including Alvin Tan, Audrey Wong, Kok Heng Leun and Noorlinah Mohamed. The Board and our advisors met with the proposers on 8 May to discuss their proposals in detail. The proposers drew inspiration from their backgrounds in the punk movement and theatre, respectively. Their proposals reflected their passion for The Substation's history and its role in shaping the arts scene, underscored the critical importance of having an independent and multi-disciplinary arts centre in Singapore, and recognised that the areas of long-term growth, budgeting and fundraising remain key challenges that need to be addressed. We thank the proposers for participating in the submission process, for their effort and time spent in putting together their proposals, and meeting with the Board and advisors to discuss them.

Building on this process, two members of The Substation Board, Wahyuni Hadi and Jean-Louis Morisot, worked together to conceptualise a new Substation (Substation2.0) which sought to reconcile The Substation's historical artistic mission with the long term challenge of financial sustainability. The key common principle that underpins Substation 2.0 and the two proposals is the commitment for The Substation to remain an independent arts company. A number of the individuals behind both proposals will be invited to participate in various capacities in Substation 2.0, and we are happy that they have expressed support towards The Substation and its continued future.

Our Decision

Today, we are very happy to announce our decision to keep The Substation open.

We recognize the road ahead to be challenging. Substation 2.0 will have to streamline and restructure significantly in order to function effectively as an arts company, and create a future post 45 Armenian Street.

The months ahead will be a period of transition and challenge where The Substation will apply for funding support from the National Arts Council, in addition to using this time to recalibrate and plan. The new team will also begin the process of seeking private sector and community support in its new form.

Substation 2.0 will continue to have as its core mission the discovering, nurturing and supporting of new and diverse voices in the arts. The fundamental shift for The Substation is evolving from an arts centre to an arts company focused on developing original programming. The strategic vision of The Substation 2.0 is to create a path for emerging independent artists of all disciplines through incubation and mentorship; to be the *home for the arts* through meaningful engagement of the artistic community; and to create a regional presence in Southeast Asia through engaged partnerships and collaborations.

By the end of August, The Substation will be led by a new Board, comprising a group of arts professionals and practitioners from multiple disciplines and age groups to offer diversity in experiences and background. Their Bios can be found in the Annex. The Board is pleased to announce that Ms. Raka Maitra will be the Artistic Director with Ms. Serene Yap as General Manager.

The Substation remains committed to maintaining the high standards of corporate governance that have been the Substation's hallmark, and will implement structured term limits to embed board renewal as a fundamental principle.

"I am seriously glad that a way forward for the meaningful continuation of The Substation has been found. The Board had taken the difficult decision to close because we felt it was the right thing to do to protect The Substation's proud heritage. At the same time, we also felt the strength of desire of large parts of the arts community not to see it close. Substation 2.0 represents a necessary radical evolution of The Substation in order to be sustainable in the longer term. I am certain that the small committed team that has come together to lead Substation 2.0 forward will give it their all, and all of us on the current Substation Board have told them they can count on us to support them in any way we can." – Chew Kheng Chuan, Chairman

"The Substation will return to its roots and defining mission, realigning them to our new circumstances. The Substation's purpose over the next few years will be to re-establish and redefine The Substation as the home for independent artists in Singapore, *independent of our original building*, while expanding our collaborative partnerships locally and in the region. The Substation still has an important role to play in the Singapore arts scene, and we are grateful for this new beginning and the support the community has shown." - Wahyuni Hadi

"I am honoured to be given the opportunity to lead The Substation as its Artistic Director during this period of critical transformation for The Substation. The Substation has always championed independent artists and in doing so, has created a space for new kinds of art works in Singapore. We

remain committed to being an incubator of new talents and presenting works that inspire and create dialogue.” – Raka Maitra, Artistic Director

For more information, please contact:

Raka Maitra, Artistic Director: raka@substation.org

Aikes Loh, General Manager: aikes@substation.org

ANNEX: Names & bios of new board, team and advisors

1. BOARD

Chairperson:

Wahyuni Hadi

Wahyuni is a film curator and arts manager specializing in the management of film and art projects. She has spent a large part of her career promoting Singapore and Southeast Asian cinema and independent arts. Hadi headed the Singapore International Film Festival in 2009 and later from 2014 to 2019 as its Executive Director. She was formerly Co-director at Objectifs Centre for Photography & Filmmaking where she had started Objectifs Films and currently sits on the Board . In 2013, Hadi published the book *Behind the Camera* and co-produced the film *Ilo Ilo*.

Wahyuni was a former Programme Manager at The Substation overseeing film, music and literary arts programmes, and was Editor of the magazine Substance. Following that, she served as Commissioning Editor for MediaCorp's arts channel.

Wahyuni was awarded the Eisenhower Fellowship and the United Technologies Corporation Fellowship in 2016. In 2015, Hadi received the Honorary Award from the Singapore Short Film Awards in recognition for her contribution to the film industry. She was named one of Female Magazine's 50 Most Inspiring Women in 2010 and recognised as one of the Great Women of Our Time by Women's Weekly in 2014.

Members:

- i. Michelle Chang, Managing Partner, Mocha Chai Laboratories**

Michelle started her career in the arts as a Producer-Presenter of the National Arts Council's Passion Radio station promoting Singapore music, theatre and other art forms. Michelle spent over 20 years as a media executive as Business Development Director, Arts Central TV12, and Head of Content for English Audience Segment, MediaCorp, leading cross-platform teams - Radio, TV, OTT - to produce content. Her career also overlapped in the arts as Assistant Director, Marketing at the National Gallery; and Head of Marketing & Communications for NUS Centre for the Arts. As Managing Partner of Mocha Chai Laboratories (MCL), she pursues their commitment to Singapore and Asian media content and expanding their film & video content expertise. She is currently leading an international production for MCL commissioned by CJ Entertainment. Michelle started painting in 2002 and exhibits with Blue Lotus Fine Art, having had 3 solo shows. Her paintings are featured in the children's book *A Blue Cat's Tale* (2008) by Sangeetha Madhavan.

ii. Jean-Louis Morisot, Co-founder/ Director, Fondation la Roche Jacquelin

Based in Singapore since 1994, Jean-Louis is co-founder and director of Fondation la Roche Jacquelin, a non-profit foundation for the promotion of Southeast Asian art in Europe. Based in rural and historical Anjou, the foundation organises art residencies for Southeast Asian visual and performing artists and writers. From 2010 to 2018, Jean-Louis was chief operating officer and co-founder of Proa Partners Pte Ltd, an institutional long-only fund manager based in Singapore and investing in Asia ex-Japan equities on behalf of international endowments and foundations. As COO, Jean-Louis built the company's business, regulatory and technological infrastructure and was its head of investment research. Jean-Louis previously worked as a managing director in global investment

research, Goldman Sachs. Jean-Louis studied political philosophy in Canada and France. He currently sits on the board of iA Independent Archive, an arts resources space founded by Lee Wen built around a collection of archival material pertaining to ephemeral art in Singapore and the region. He joined The Substation board in 2016.

iii. Joe Ng, Musician/Composer

After an extensive career in the music industry in the 90s and fame as singer-songwriter of seminal rock outfit, The Padres, Joe remains prominent in Singapore's independent music scene as a music composer, promoter of alternative rock shows and producer of bands. Joe has worked on film and TV projects such as *The Maid* (2005) and *Unlucky Plaza* (2016) and most recently, HBO's award-winning series *Invisible Stories* (2019). With his heart in the arts, he also takes on numerous theatre and art projects such as Liquid Love Sound Meridians, the art Installation by Ujikaji's exhibition at MOCA Taipei (2020); and has collaborated with artists Joo Choon Lin, Joshua Yang and Ang Soo Koon on a number of multimedia art installations such as *Pears ' --- ' in Spring, XXII* and *Exorcize Me*. In 2021, he worked on the music & sound design for *The Bride Always Knocks Twice* by Theatre Practice under the direction of Kuo Jian Hong.

iv. Bryan Tan, Playwright and Director

Bryan Tan is a playwright and theatre director. He graduated from the National University of Singapore with a Bachelor of Laws degree in 1999, and is presently the regional privacy counsel of a biopharmaceutical solutions company. In TheatreWorks' 24-Hour Playwriting Competition, he won the First Prize in 2013 for *Strike*, the Second Prize in 2010 for *There Will Now Be A 15-Minute Interval*, and a Merit Prize in 1998 for *Snakeskin*. He also won the First Prize

in the Hewlett-Packard / Action Theatre 10-Minute Play Contest in 1996 for *Lizard In The Loo*. In 2013, One Player Short Ensemble presented *WiFi Lovers* at the Guling Street Avant-Garde Theatre in Taipei. In 2007, TheatreWorks presented *The Last Theatre State* as part of *120*. In 2004, Teater Ekamatra presented *Blissed*, and *Broomstick* as part of *Istana 2000*. He is a member of The Blue Statesmen, an independent collective of theatre artists. For their inaugural production, he conceived and directed *BluePrince*, which was presented by the collective and The Substation as part of SeptFest 2012 and the Kuo Pao Kun Festival 2012.

v. Kirsten Tan, Filmmaker

Filmmaker Kirsten Tan's debut feature, POP AYE, premiered as the Opening Night film of Sundance 2017's World Dramatic Category. It received a Special Jury Prize at Sundance, the Big Screen Award at Rotterdam Film Festival and the Best International Film Award at Zurich Film Festival. POP AYE was also invited to represent Singapore in the Best Foreign Film Category at the Oscars. Additionally, Kirsten is a Sundance institute and Cinereach Film Fellow who has served as a jury member of the Macao International Film Festival, the Hamburg Kurz Film Festival, and the Singapore International Film Festival.

Kirsten was accorded the Young Artist Award by the National Arts Council, named a Top 10 mover and shaker in the arts by the annual Life Power List, and nominated as a Singaporean of the Year by The Straits Times. Other personal honours include Her World's Young Woman Achiever of the Year Award and a Great Woman of Our Time nomination by Women's Weekly.

Kirsten's award-winning short films have been shown at film festivals all over the world, but she presented her very first works while she was still a student filmmaker at The Substation. In 2014, things came full circle when Kirsten was invited to be a pre-selection juror of the Singapore Short Film Awards, presented by The Substation's Moving Images film programme. In 2016, Kirsten also participated in Armenian Clinic, an on-call art programme presented by The Substation.

vi. Cyril Wong, Poet/ Writer

Cyril Wong has been described by *The Oxford Companion to Modern Poetry in English* as Singapore's leading confessional poet, based mainly on "a barely submerged anxiety over the fragility of human connection and a relentless self-querying". His most recent book is *Infinity Diary*, published by Seagull Books in 2020.

A past recipient of the National Arts Council's Young Artist Award and two Singapore Literature Prizes, he completed a doctoral degree in English Literature at the National University of Singapore in 2012. His poems have been translated into Bengali, Japanese, Italian, Turkish and German. His writings have also appeared in international magazines as well as anthologies by W. W. Norton and Everyman's Library. A featured poet at the Edinburgh International Book Festival, the Hong Kong International Literary Festival, the Sydney Writers' Festival, and the Singapore Writers' Festival, he founded Singapore's longest-running international poetry webjournal, *SOFTBLOW*. In other roles within the arts, he was a book and performing arts reviewer for The Straits Times.

2. TEAM

i. Raka Maitra, Artistic Director

Raka Maitra is a dancer who defies the conventional dichotomy of 'classical' and 'contemporary'. She is a dancer simpliciter, exploring the notion of 'Asian culture' through her own language of contemporary dance. The basis of her movement is classical Indian dance and martial arts. Raka is a recipient of the Shringarmani, a national award for Odissi. She was an associate artist with The Substation from 2007–2011. On top of her role as Artistic Director of Chowk Productions, which she founded in 2014 with the support of the National Arts Council's Seed Grant, Her works have been regularly commissioned by the Esplanade and have travelled extensively internationally. Raka's notable works include *The Hungry Stones*, *The Blind Age*, *The Second Sunrise*, *from: The Platform* and the *Pallavi Series*. In the words of Dance Europe, "Maitra is without doubt a dancer of the 21st century". Raka was appointed Co-Artistic Director of The Substation in 2020 and will continue as Artistic Director from August 2021.

ii. Serene Yap, General Manager

Serene has two decades of experience in arts and culture management in both non-profit and commercial organisations. She was first trained as a sculptor before pursuing a career in arts management. Serene has been with Earl Lu Gallery (now Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts), Alliance Française de Singapour; and in senior management positions at the Asian Civilisation Museum and Art Stage Singapore. Under Grain Projects, she was involved in several projects including National Youth Film

Awards and the Singapore International Film Festival, and as well as festival management for Asian Marketing Effectiveness and Strategy Awards in her own capacity. Serene is also an Adjunct Lecturer at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. She holds a Master of Arts in Art History from LASALLE College of the Arts.

3. ADVISORS

i. **Kok Heng Leun, Co-Artistic Director, Drama Box**

Heng Leun is a theatre director, playwright, dramaturg and educator. Some notable directorial works include *Drift*, *Trick or Threat*, *Manifesto* and *Underclass*. His explorations with multi-disciplinary engaged arts has produced works like *Project Mending Sky* a series on environmental issues and *Both Sides, Now*, a multi-year art project on living and dying with dignity. Heng Leun's contributions to the arts have landed him awards from the National Arts Council – the Young Artist Award in 2000 and Cultural Fellowship in 2014. He also served as a Nominated Member of Parliament from 2016 to 2018, representing the arts sector.

ii. **Ezzam Rahman, Multi-disciplinary Artist**

Ezzam Rahman is a multi-disciplinary artist who has performed and exhibited both regionally and internationally. Ezzam had curated an exhibition entitled Pulau (Island) for the Stockholm Pride 2012 in Sweden at the Kulturhuset. His miniature artist's skin sculptures were commissioned by the Singapore Art Museum and showcased in an exhibition entitled Unearthed in 2014. He presented an installation art cum performance artwork at SingaPlural, an anchor event for the Singapore Design Week 2015.

He was awarded a joint winner of the Grand Prize for the President's Young Talents 2015; the People's Choice Award by the Singapore Art Museum; the Goh Chok Tong Youth Promise Award 2016 by Yayasan Mendaki; and the prestigious Young Artist Award by the National Arts Council, Singapore.

Ezzam is the President of the Artist Village and has been an educator in the arts for over a decade at schools LASALLE College of the Arts and NAFA. Ezzam graduated with a MA Fine Arts from Goldsmiths University of London in 2017; Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Fine Arts from the University of Huddersfield in 2010; and was formally trained as a sculptor from LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts.

iii. Audrey Wong, Programme Leader, MA Arts and Cultural Leadership programme, LASALLE College of the Arts

Audrey Wong is a cultural policy expert, civil society advocate, arts and cultural scholar and the first Nominated Member of Parliament for the Arts in Singapore. Prior to joining LASALLE in 2010, Audrey was Artistic Co-director of The Substation from 2000 till 2009 together with Lee Weng Choy. They launched The Substation's Associate Artists programme in 2003 to support local artists in sustaining their practice. Before her tenure as Artistic Co-director, Audrey started The Substation's Moving Images Film Programme in 1997. At The Substation, she worked across both the performing and visual arts, reflecting The Substation's multi-disciplinary programming and approach. Among the projects she spearheaded was the HAO Summit - the brainchild of artist-curator Khairuddin Hori, this was a networking and mentoring platform for arts managers, curators and artists from Singapore and the region.

Audrey has served on various boards and committees. She was a board member of the Singapore Art Museum and a council member of the National Arts Council. She is currently the chair of the board of theatre company Nine Years Theatre. She holds an MA in Arts

Administration and Cultural Policy from Goldsmiths, University of London.

iv. Annabelle Yip, Senior Consultant, WongPartnership LLP

Annabelle YIP is a Senior Consultant at WongPartnership LLP and Joint Head of the Corporate Governance & Compliance Practice. Her expertise also covers Mergers & Acquisitions, Business Establishment and Employment.

Annabelle is a fellow of the Singapore Institute of Directors. She was previously Vice President (Corporate Services) and Head of Legal and Risk Management of Singapore Airport Terminal Services Limited (now known as SATS Limited), a portfolio company of Temasek Holdings (Private) Limited listed on the Mainboard of the Singapore Exchange.

Annabelle sits on the board of directors of Checkpoint Theatre Limited AND AIA Financial Advisers Private Limited. She also serves on the current board of The Substation Ltd and will be stepping down from the board in August.