

Welcome to the Art Garden

By Maren Kraemer-Dreyer



Echoes-Infinity-The Forest by Shinji Ohmaki (2011-2012). Installation, felt, colour pigments and acrylic

With the annual Children's Season opening its doors for the third year, 8Q at the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) has been transformed into a space where children can play, explore and experience contemporary art. Ten artists from Singapore, France and Japan contributed 11 beautiful and educational artworks for young and also older children. Everyone is invited to participate in the exhibition's mostly interactive installations.

As visitors, you and your children can learn not only from the artworks on display, but also by watching some of the 20 child-friendly short films and animations in the Moving Images Gallery. Your children are also encouraged to create their own artworks by using a variety of materials in the six hands-on activities offered in the galleries.

Despite this being a museum, children are invited to play with art while learning about it.

For example, the little ones can enjoy a life-size, candy-coloured fantasy world titled *Dress Me Up*, created by renowned Singaporean artist Justin Lee. This popular exhibit from last year features an enormous three-tiered cake and giant dolls, which can be re-decorated and dressed up. Intended to encourage little ones to express themselves freely, it also reminds most adults of forgotten childhood games from the past.

The installation *Reactive Wall*, a collaborative artwork by the Singapore-based artist Mojoko and computer programmer Shang Liang, attracts a lot of attention from children of all ages. Showcasing projections of over 200 popular local and graphic icons on the wall of a dark gallery, children can change the appearance of the wall by making sounds through a microphone. Presenting a digital collage of contemporary graphics sampled from the everyday in a fun and interactive way, the artwork also reflects on our extensive use of digital media and our interaction with it in daily life.

The playful element of the exhibition is mostly visible in the artwork *Ping Pong Go-Round*, which is very popular with older children and adults alike. Lee Wen, one of Singapore's most internationally recognised contemporary artists, has transformed the table from a rectangle to a donut shape, thereby changing the rules and allowing more players to join the game. Traditional, competitive table tennis which can be thought of as a dialogue between two players, is extended to a discussion of multiple participants, as indicated by the large, round table often found in the conference rooms of corporations and public institutions. By inviting many players to the table it allows visitors to share their experience of the artwork in a very engaging and communicative way.



Reactive Wall by Mojoko & Shang Liang (2011-2012). Installation, microphone and projector

caring for a garden is diminishing, the artist's intention is to enable all visitors to grow a garden collectively. The installation materials used seem simple: a coloured PVC hose, fluorescent inked paper and tissue paper – yet placed together, they make an impressive installation.

Just as in Shinji Ohmaki's work, the involvement of visitors is crucial to the final creation of the artwork and its understanding. We as visitors are encouraged to create our own origami flowers to add to the garden. It will be wonderful to see how these two artworks will turn out by the time the Children's Season comes to an end in August. Until then, have a look, participate and share this wonderful experience of a community Art Garden.

The exhibition is as beautiful and educational as it is playful. And yes, it is also an art garden. You can literally step into it when you enter the gallery on the ground floor. Japanese artist Shinji Ohmaki has created *Echoes-Infinity-The Forest*, an installation work using beautiful and ephemeral floral patterns placed on the floor and on the pillars of the gallery. Over a period of ten days, the artist painstakingly stencilled pigmented materials onto the white felt covering the floor and walls. Carefully placed lighting ensures no shadows are cast in the gallery, adding a dream-like quality to the experience when one walks through the installation. When visitors can see the unprotected, fragile, floral patterns changing under their feet (*Echoes*), they understand the link to real flowers, forests and nature, as the artist intended. By walking over flower patterns, whose contours slowly wear away, we are also reminded of the transient nature of life. The protected and contrastingly unchanged flower patterns on the wall reflect the truism that life is reborn constantly and endlessly (*Infinity*).

Grow the Garden in the Dark is a very different art garden and it awaits us on the third floor. Created by well-known Singaporean artist Tay Bee Aye, it is as dark as Shinji Ohmaki's installation is light. Reflecting that having a garden in Singapore is rare and that knowledge about



Grow the Garden in the Dark by Tay Bee Aye (2012). Installation, PVC-hose, fluorescent inked paper and tissue paper; photo by Andra Leo

Maren Kraemer-Dreyer is a SAM docent and the SAM-FOM coordinator. She especially enjoys guiding students at SAM and talking about art appreciation with them.

Unless otherwise noted all photos courtesy of the Singapore Art Museum



Ping Pong Go-Round by Lee Wen (1998-2012). Installation, ping-pong table, ping-pong racquets and ping-pong balls