

Social Change and Contemporary Art in Singapore

By Marie-Pierre Mol



Parklife, by Chun Kai Feng

Since Singapore's independence in 1965, the urban landscape has completely changed. This metamorphosis was the result of a political and a social vision for the city state. Social housing programmes were conceived and implemented in order to improve the quality of life of its population. Through this transformation, a large part of Singapore's national heritage and its collective memory had to be destroyed to make room for new housing estates, while the traditional *kampung* (village) life disappeared. Communal values receded and individualism became more prominent.

Parklife, by Chun Kai Feng, an artwork showcased in the Learning Gallery 2 at the Singapore Art Museum attempts to address this particular issue. At first glance, the work looks like an architectural prototype, but in reality it belongs to a series of sculptures that represent iconic structures in Singapore. More specifically, *Parklife* represents a multi-storey building with a playground, and one could even say it looks like an architectural model of a Housing Development Board estate. Upon closer review, however, there seems to be something very disturbing about this sculpture. What's most surprising is the playground, which appears unfriendly and even dysfunctional in its design and function. Indeed the strings on the swings are too short and the slide also seems unusable. The fence around

the estate and the loudspeakers awkwardly allude to a scene from a prison or a concentration camp.

It is safe to say that there is a sharp social critique in Chun Kai Feng's *Parklife*. The work implies that what was built to improve the quality of life of Singapore's inhabitants actually resulted in creating a lifeless and even alienating environment. As depicted in *Parklife*, the genuine pleasures of community life seem to have disappeared, creating a sense of loneliness, monotony and ennui.

Chun Kai Feng is a young Singaporean artist. Born in 1982, he studied art at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, majoring in printmaking. He also has a Masters in Fine Arts from the Glasgow School of Art. Chun was the recipient of the Singapore National Art Council Bursary in 2009, the Singapore Art Exhibition Prize in 2009 and the Arts Creation Fund (2012).

Marie-Pierre Mol was the Executive Director of the French Business Association in Singapore from 1992 to 1996. In 2010 she co-founded Intersections, a nomadic art gallery.

Photo courtesy of the Singapore Art Museum