

Emerging talents in books, fashion and art

Committed to making the world a better place, 3 young women make their mark. **BY HELMI YUSOF**

Building the voices of young artists

BERNY TAN

Curator and Artist

BERNY Tan has a natural ability to work with artists, recognise the strength and quirks of their practices and personalities, and give them the space and/or guidance to produce their best work.

Since curating the hit exhibition *Maybe We Read Too Much Into Things* (2021), which assembled 6 young artists exploring the materiality of everyday things, Tan has been on the radar of many visual arts lovers.

At Singapore Art Week this year, she staged another well-received show, co-curated with Daniel Chong. Titled *Bad Imitation*, it looks at artistic attempts to replicate real-life objects – and comically failing.

Her collaborative spirit, wit and imagination earned her in February the Impart Art Prize for an emerging curator.

Tan, who is also a practising textile artist, says: "I don't think I could be the curator that I am without having been an artist first. My practice informs the way I communicate with and treat fellow artists. And because I see a kinship there, it makes me want to support them and advocate for them by curating the shows that I do."

She typically works with young artists, especially women and LGBTQ artists. "I don't deliberately look for them. I just happen to enjoy their practices and follow them on social media. And after admiring



Left: Berny Tan's exhibition titled *Bad Imitation* at Singapore Art Week 2022, co-curated with Daniel Chong.

their commitment to material explorations, and engagement – or even obsession – with certain ideas, it feels natural for me to have them in my shows."

The 31-year-old grew up in an arts-loving family who often went to the theatre, cinema and museum. She became interested in pursuing art after visiting various editions of the Singapore Biennale, and went on to obtain a Bachelor in Fine Arts at the School of Visual Arts in New York, and then a Master of Arts in Contemporary Art Theory at Goldsmiths, University of London.

One challenge of practising art in Singapore is that "we don't really have diverse funding avenues, and we're quite reliant on state funding – which, of course, comes with strings. And these often impose a certain kind of constraint or expectation on

the artist, which might, in some cases, deter them from innovation and experimentation.

"Of course, that's not to say constraints can't lead to interesting works too. But one does wish for more private avenues of funding, which, as it stands in Singapore, are few and far between."

She thinks appreciation of contemporary art is nascent in Singapore, but hopes it will grow in time: "In Singapore, everything is kind of systematic, everything has more or less clear answers.

"But with art, one needs to have patience, the ability to kind of sit with the work and contend with questions that don't have clear answers, and perhaps the humility to try and meet the artist halfway."

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PHOTOS: COLIN WAN/MARVIN TANG