



ARTS & DISABILITY FORUM 2020 TO DISCUSS MORE WAYS OF CULTIVATING COLLABORATIONS AND INCREASING ACCESS IN THE ARTS

- *More than 10 esteemed speakers from Australia, India, Malaysia, Singapore and the United Kingdom shared diverse experiences and best practices*
- *Three-day virtual event attended by some 300 international, regional and Singapore delegates, bringing together social sector professionals, artists and policy makers*

The Arts & Disability Forum (ADF) returned for its 4th edition between **7 to 9 October 2020**, with a focus on greater inclusion in the arts through increased access and collaborations to provide arts programmes for and by people across all abilities. Jointly organised by the National Arts Council (NAC) and Very Special Arts Singapore [VSA(S)], partnered by Singapore International Foundation (SIF) and supported by British Council (BC), ADF2020 brought together more than 10 speakers from Australia, India, Malaysia, Singapore and the United Kingdom to share their diverse experiences and best practices. The forum provided space for learning and reflection on arts access best practices, as well as encouraged more collaborations amongst the arts practitioners, social sector professionals and public agencies. With Singapore International Foundation as a programme partner and supported by the British Council, ADF2020 was held virtually for the first time due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with more than 300 delegates from Singapore and overseas participating and exchanging ideas on advancing inclusivity in the arts.

Presenting a global outlook over arts and disability

The theme for 2020 - "Cultivating Collaborations, Increasing Access" - was timely given the growing diversity and range of programmes and partners invested in accessible arts. ADF2020 addressed the salient topics through keynote presentations, panel discussions, breakout sessions and workshops by industry's leaders of varied backgrounds from Singapore and overseas.

The two keynote speakers for this year's Forum were British disability arts veteran **Ruth Fabby**, MBE, DL, Artistic Director of Disability Arts Cymru, who shared her experience of producing work defined within disability remits and in pushing boundaries for greater inclusivity, and Australian performance artist and choreographer **Caroline Bowditch**, Chief Executive Officer of Arts Access Victoria, discussed the concept of aesthetic access, and its place in this transformative digital age.

The Forum also presented dialogues and hands-on learning activities led by experts such as Malaysian social entrepreneur **Stevens Chan**, who founded the social enterprise Dialogue in the Dark Malaysia and the inaugural Art Includes Festival 2019 in Kuala Lumpur; Indian photographer **Partho Bhowmick**, who founded Blind With Camera initiative to promote the art of photography to the visually impaired; and Singaporean social advocate **Jean Loo**, who co-founded ground-up inclusive arts movement Superhero Me that empowers children from diverse backgrounds through the arts, social mixing and purposeful programming. Participants were guided and empowered to collaborate and co-create with people across diverse abilities and learn how to integrate access from the beginning to the end.

Rising traction of inclusivity in Singapore's arts

Since ADF's inception in 2015, there have been encouraging shifts observed in the arts and disability scene in Singapore. Beyond the rise in number of newly invested players like the Access Arts Hub, inclusive practices in the arts have also gained traction with cultural institutions and the wider arts community. For example, The Esplanade presents sensory-friendly *PLAYtime!* performances for children with special needs to ensure a relaxing and calm space for children and families to enjoy the arts. National Gallery Singapore also worked with Disabled People's Association (DPA) and Levelfield Consultants to produce an online Access Guide for visitors with disabilities to plan their visit. With the strong support and buy-in from the various stakeholders, people across all abilities can appreciate and participate in enriching arts programmes in accessible environments.

Dr Alvin Tan, Director of Engagement & Participation at the National Arts Council, said, "Over the years, the successful efforts in the area of arts and disability have laid a good foundation for greater inclusivity in Singapore and around the world. I am heartened to see leaders in the arts community actively strengthening their programmes and capacities to create an inclusive environment in and through the arts. The Arts & Disability Forum 2020 is a wonderful opportunity for them to engage with other private, public and people sector leaders to see how, together, we can continue building fruitful collaborations through the arts. It is especially appropriate during this time of the pandemic, as we rebuild and reshape the world as we know it, to promote and embrace accessibility for persons with disabilities as a norm."

Ms Maureen Goh, Executive Director at Very Special Arts Singapore [VSA(S)] added, "Arts & Disability Forum is one of the key drivers of change to advance disability and inclusive arts in Singapore, and as a platform to discuss and share best practices. As co-organisers with the National Arts Council, we are most delighted to continue this Forum virtually, with Singapore International Foundation as a programme partner and supported by the British Council. In these trying times, VSA(S) remains committed to transforming lives and ensuring access through the arts and we warmly welcome delegates from Singapore and beyond to join us at ADF2020 to explore new and meaningful collaborations together. As a community, we must continue to incorporate accessibility in the work that we do and remove any form of barriers to empower people with disabilities."