Subjugated in the Creative Industries:
The Fine Arts in Singapore

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Abstract

The arts and culture are considered core in a creative industries strategy. But the promotion of the creative industries brings about revised notions of creativity. These revised notions are being applied to the arts. Creativity is now seen to be largely manageable. All individuals are made to believe that they can be creative. Not only that, creativity is seen to be a money spinner. Workers should tap into their creativity and bring about innovations in the work place. Pupils are taught to tap into their creativity and to think outside the box. Such views on creativity galvanize the public and enthuse many people into the creative industries. Such notions of creativity contrast against the fine arts. Regardless, as this paper examines the situation in Singapore, shows that fine artists in the city-state are finding themselves internalizing a market logic and have tied their art practices to economic value. Fine arts practices will not be as lucrative or popular as their counterparts in the other creative businesses; they will remain poor cousins in the creative industries. Essentially, the fine arts are being subjugated in the creative industries and the Singaporean art world is being changed.

Keywords: Cultural economy, arts in Singapore, creative economy, art world

Introduction

Richard Florida's concept of the 'creative class' and his theory that creativity is a major driver of economic development (Florida 2003) has in recent times gained increasing salience. Shortly after David Cameron was elected prime minister of the UK, he appointed Florida as his government's 'new guru' (*The Economist* 2010). The focus on the creative economy in the UK, which started more than a decade ago by the previous Labour government, remains a priority in the current coalition government. Other countries, ranging from China to Canada, have also followed suit and started pursuing similar creative industries strategies (e.g. see Hutton 2003; Tallon & Bromley 2004; Hesmondhalgh & Pratt 2005; Bayliss 2007; Tan 2008; Trueman, Cook, & Cornelius 2008). The UK Department for Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) has provided the seminal definition of the creative industries: 'those activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property' (Department of Culture, Media and Sports 2001: 5). This definition is now used by many researchers, policy makers and consultants around the world (e.g. Creative Metropoles; Cunningham 2002; Economic Review Committee-Services Subcommittee Workgroup on Creative Industries (ERC-CI) 2002; Uricchio 2004).

Despite the embrace of these ideas, what actually constitutes creativity remains ambiguous. The ambiguity has nonetheless spurred the imagination of politicians, the public and industry (Caves 2000; Leadbeater 2000; Howkins 2001). The pursuit of the so-called creative industries brings together seemingly disparate business enterprises (e.g. movies, architecture, museums, art auction), products (e.g. paintings, designer furniture, computer games, advertisements), occupations (e.g. interior designers, sculptors, video editors) and creative processes (e.g. experimental performances, creative writing, fashion creation) (see Caves 2000; Howkins 2001; Florida 2003; Gibson & Kong 2005; Hartley 2005; Galenson 2006; Handke 2007; Markusen, Wassall, DeNatale & Cohen 2008; Trüby, Rammer, & Müller 2008; Neelands & Choe 2010).

The myriad of differences are glossed over by the idea that creativity is the foundation of all these businesses. For example, if we take a pure economic perspective of the cultural industries (or the so-called arts and culture cluster), mass entertainment such as popular musicals and rock concerts have considerable commercial potential for 'wealth and job creation'. This is less true of the fine arts, which are often less profitable, and often needs to be supported by the state or subsidies and grants. Only a few contemporary fine artists, like Damien Hirst, Yue Minjun and Olafur Eliasson, are able to exploit their intellectual property and become famous and wealthy. The fine arts, for the most part, tend to generate small-scale productions that attract acolytes rather than the larger public. Commercialization and popularization are even frowned upon (Adorno & Horkheimer 1972; Goodall 1995; Abbing 2002; Cuno, de Montebello, Lowry, MacGregor,

Walsh & Wood 2006). In spite of this non-commercial propensity, the fine arts are still considered the epitome of creativity and a core sector in the creative economy (Howkins 2001; Robertson 2005; De Jong, Fris, & Stam 2007).

Defining the fine arts into a cluster within the creative industries also reflects the re-thinking of public support for the arts. In the age of 'neo-liberal globalisation' (McGuigan 2005), economic sustainability and independence are central even for public goods. Besides that, the advent of public private partnerships has led to a rhetoric of boundary-demolition; common interests and mutual benefits can be found in bringing together profit and not-for-profit organizations, public and private institutions (Remer 1996; Wetenhall 2003). The inclusion of the fine arts in the creative industries strategy encourages or pressures fine artists into changing their not-for-profit mentality. If businesses have taken on social responsibility and become more engaged in society in the name of corporate social responsibility, why should the fine artists not take on more economic responsibility to further their practice? There are however fears that many artists and cultural institutions will become less engaged in cultural development when they chase commercial success (van Aalst & Boogaarts 2002; Cuno, de Montebello, Lowry, MacGregor, Walsh & Wood 2006). Studies on public private partnership have also shown that public and non-commercial interests are more likely to be compromised as market logic overwhelms public goods (Wetenhall 2003). So, by framing the arts and culture into some kind of industry, there is a tendency for cultural policy focus to shift from cultural development to economic development (Wise 2002).

This paper looks at the categorizing of the fine arts into the creative industries in Singapore. Singapore follows the UK definition of creative industries, and has grouped the creative industries into the following clusters or domains:

> *Arts and Culture*: performing arts, visual arts, literary arts, photography, crafts, libraries, museums, galleries, archives, auctions, impresarios, heritage sites, performing arts sites, festivals and arts supporting enterprises.
>
> *Design*: advertising, architecture, web and software, graphics industrial product, fashion, communications, interior and environmental.
>
> *Media*: broadcast (including radio, television and cable), digital media (including software and computer services), film and video, recorded music and publishing. (ERC-CI 2002: iii)

The arts and culture are considered core to the creative industries. The Singaporean government maintains that the fine arts are important for the cultural development of the city-state. As will be shown later, the authorities are providing increasing support for the arts and culture, with state sponsorship for artists and art lovers continuing to rise. In fact, financial support for the arts in Singapore has never been more generous. But as this paper will show, the process of subsuming the fine arts into the creative industries has also resulted in its subjugation. When compared to other creative businesses, such as advertising, developing computer games and architecture, the fine arts community is inevitably pressed to become

more economically productive with their creativity. Using measurable indicators, the media and design creative clusters are shown to be lucrative and thus, it is argued, worthy of continued state support; in light of this, fine artists are made to feel the weight of having to 'quantify' their contributions to society. This can be a difficult challenge, as the the fine arts by its very nature, with its premise of high ideals, does not lend itself to empirical gauges of usefulness in simple bottom-line terms. But the official view is that the fine arts cannot be allowed its sacred cows where state investment is concerned; the arts must also be 'accountable' if it is to be given tax-payer money.

The case for fine arts is not helped by many prejudices that exist against the arts, as reflected in the general population in Singapore (Ooi 2010a). Parents are reluctant to encourage their children to pursue a professional arts career, the view being that art creation is not work and artistic integrity is secondary to social engineering programs. These contrast to the other creative businesses, which are perceived as more lucrative, tangibly valuable and not socially troublesome.

This study is part of the project, Creative Encounters, supported by the Danish Strategic Research Council. Data was collected from April 2007 through various means, including documents, media reports, observations and in-depth interviews with 66 stakeholders in the Singapore art world. The 66 respondents in Singapore include 35 practicing artists, 10 of which are also art teachers and another 10 have other jobs to supplement their income. 13 respondents are administrators, decision makers or curators in the public sector (state-supported agencies, museums and schools), 15 persons run private art spaces (galleries and art complexes) or write art reviews. Three are art collectors.

After this introductory section, I will review the literature on the politics entailed in creative industries policies and the underlining theoretical positions on the economics of creativity. This review will situate Singapore's creative industries strategy in the international context. The case of Singapore will then be presented. The case will highlight the efforts by the Singaporean authorities in promoting the arts and culture. With the emphasis on the fine arts – such as painting, sculpture-making, ballet and theatre – this paper shows how the fine arts are being compared with the other creative clusters. The final section summarizes the paper and concludes that the fine arts are being subjugated in the creative industries in Singapore.

Poetics and Politics of Creativity in the Creative Industries

As alluded to earlier, the advent of the creative industries embraces a neo-liberal economic position; even common public goods and services have economic value. If goods and services are valuable, these values must be articulated economically or at least quantitatively. The current glowing image associated to creativity and the creative industries stems from several areas, all embracing a neo-liberal economic view of value. In the case of the creative industries, creativity has economic worth. At the microscopic level, creativity is seen to be essential in creating

material wealth. Creativity can be monetized because creative ideas and processes can be protected and economically exploited through patents, copyrights and trademarks (Howkins 2001). A painting as a creative product, for example, can be sold and the image of it can be further monetized through copyrighted reproduction in the form of postcards and posters. At the macroscopic level, the creative industries also contribute to the general economy. For instance, Müller, Rammer and Trüby (2008) explain three ways on how the creative industries may become part of a country's innovation system. One, the creative industries are a major source of innovative ideas and contributes to an economy's innovative potential and the generation of new products and services. Two, creative industries offer services which are inputs to innovative activities of other enterprises and organizations. Three, creative industries are intensive users of technology and demand alterations and new developments of technology, spurring innovation impulses to technology producers. Likewise, artists for example, can help enterprises and organizations in their innovation by providing inspiration and ideas for new products and designs (see Throsby 2001; Towse 2003).

Another positive aspect of the creative industries is the assumed 'democracy of involvement' (Neelands & Choe 2010: 288). Creativity is, as observed by Neelands and Choe in the UK, part of New Labour's 'social-market construction' (Neelands & Choe 2010: 293f). The rhetoric of creativity and the creative industry recognizes the poorer in society and encourages them to aspire and become more self-directed in their economic participation. Creativity is seen to be universal and everyone – privileged or not – can take a shot at becoming successful by being creative. Creativity then evens out the competition and levels the playing field. It is an individual resource that provides hope and possibilities for all individuals to excel economically.

The promotion of the creative industries also assumes the manageability of creativity (Bilton 2010). The idea that outcomes of creativity can be unpredictable and destructive has been replaced by the view that creativity can be harnessed and controlled. But creativity need not be an asset and can be destructive (Jacobs 2005). In many societies, artists are accepted for being quirky and even irreverent. Many assume a role as the conscience of their society and want to make social political commentaries through their works, often with messages that can be controversial and which may even promote anti-establishment ideas and behavior. There is, however, and in even greater abundance, a whole slew of sleek, popular and lucrative creative products such as glossy advertising campaigns, spectacular architectural designs and computer games in which the creative industries are seen to be simply harvesting creativity for mass consumption. In other words, creativity is manageable and can be exploited 'benignly' for wealth creation. The emphasis is on 'productive creativity', meaning that it is a 'more disciplined form of creativity with professionalism and purpose' (Jacobs 2005: 9). But many fine artists find it a compromise of principle to pander to a mass market, if it will mean

watering down their work into something less daring, controversial or polemic than they intend.

Taking a critical instead of a neo-liberal economic perspective, Poettschacher (2010) argues that the language of business is a Trojan horse in the promotion of the creative industries. The fulsome and enthusiastic proffering of the creative industries provides 'communicative camouflage' (Poettschacher 2010: 362), by disguising the risks, unpredictability and costs of dabbling in creative projects. The celebratory message on the creative industries introduces a language that respects the rules of economy, allowing creative individuals into the world of business, giving the impression that they could work within the realm of traditional economic rules. Individuals such as Richard Branson and Steve Jobs are celebrated as creative geniuses in business (Bilton 2010; Poettschacher 2010). Many artists in Singapore, as will be shown next, will find that they have to embrace the language of business and pursue the logic of the market, as policy makers measure their credibility through quantitative ways.

Cultural Policy in Singapore

In 2001, the Singaporean government set up the Economic Review Committee (ERC), consisting of seven subcommittees, with the aim of developing strategies to ensure the continuous economic prosperity of the city-state. The ERC Sub-Committee Workgroup on Creative Industries (ERC-CI) seeks ways to 'fuse arts, business and technology' (ERC-CI 2002: iii). The city-state must 'harness the multi-dimensional creativity of [its] people' for its 'new competitive advantage' (ERC-CI 2002: iii). This report includes specific plans to develop the arts and culture, media and design sectors. (ERC-CI 2002; Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts (MICA) 2008; National Arts Council (NAC) 2008). Unlike earlier cultural development strategies (Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts 1989, Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) 2000; Singapore Tourist Promotion Board 1996), the vision of making Singapore into a city for the arts in 2002 is framed within the creative industries context.

Policy 1: The Importance of the Arts in the Creative Industries

Cultural development first received policy attention in 1989 (Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts 1989; Lee 2007; Ooi 2010b). A number of other cultural policy incarnations have since been proposed. For instance, in 2000, the Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA, predecessor to MICA) envisaged Singapore as a 'Renaissance City' (MITA 2000; Tan 2007). In the Renaissance City report, it argues that 'the ability to imagine, conceive and realize something new, to create something meaningful and valuable that never existed before is the single most prized quality of a work of art. The highest creative achievements in endeavours like engineering, architecture and even science are described as being "state-of-

the-art"'(MITA 2000: 32). Singapore workers should have the creativity of artists. The then Deputy Prime Minister stated in the Renaissance City report that:

> Creativity cannot be confined to a small elite group of Singaporeans […] In today's rapidly changing world, the whole workforce needs problem-solving skills, so that every worker can continuously add value through his [sic] efforts. [… and] the arts […] can be a dynamic means of facilitating creative abilities. (MITA 2000: 32-3)

The arts are thus seen as central in inspiring and training the citizenry for the creative economy. The arts and culture are thus considered as being at the core of Singapore's creative economy.

Policy 2: Cultural Development in Singapore

The vision of Singapore as a city for the arts is being realized. In the 2011 budget, the arts were allocated S$365 million (€183 million) every year up to 2015, a doubling of resources from previous years. From that sum, S$40 million (€20 million) will go to promoting the arts in the heartlands of Singapore (Chia 2011). In September 2010, the government set up a 19-member group to develop a new strategy to enhance the arts and culture in Singapore. Previous strategies have invested heavily in institutions and infrastructure. For example, the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music was set up at the National University of Singapore in 2001, local art schools – the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and the LASALLE College of the Arts – have been expanded and their profiles increased. The School of the Arts, a dedicated pre-tertiary arts school, opened in 2008. In the mid-1990s, the Singapore Art Museum, Asian Civilisations Museum and the National Museum of Singapore opened. The National Art Gallery will open in 2013. Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, which opened in 2002 has become a lively art venue. The newly formed Arts and Culture Strategic Review steering committee will concentrate on the 'softer' aspects of the cultural industry. The aim is that by 2025, 80% of residents will attend at least one arts and cultural event a year; it is, at present, only 40% . The intention is to make Singapore the most livable city in Asia and for the arts and culture to be embraced by all Singaporeans (Chia 2010a). There are already a number of cultural festivals, including the Singapore Biennale, Singapore Arts Festival, Singapore Writers Festival and Singapore Film Festival. Arts festivals and performances have not only become more abundant but have become more accessible; for instance, the Esplanade offers hundreds of free concerts annually.

The Relative Position of the Arts in the Creative Industries

While there is no doubt that the arts are getting attention in Singapore, the inclusion of the arts and culture into the creative industries in 2002 has exerted various pressures on the fine arts community, leading in turn to various tendencies. These include getting fine artists and the fine arts community to become more economically productive, to start measuring and quantifying their contribution to society

and to avoid 'disruptive' creativity. In creative businesses that are less cerebral and more aesthetic, for example the manufacturing of designer furniture, controversies in the creative content are rare as the creative expression seldom incorporates any message that may threaten the social political order; professionals in these areas are relatively well-paid and, more significantly, better regarded. Let me elaborate.

Tendency 1: Pressure Towards Productive Creativity in the Arts

Using the infant industry argument, the Singaporean government supports the different sectors in the creative industries. For instance, the Prime Minister announced in September 2010 that his government will spend about S$3.2 billion (€1.6 billion) annually on R&D for the next five years. The sum is about 1% of Singapore's GDP (Chua & Chua 2010). The sum indicates Singapore's commitment to become a 'knowledge-based, innovation-driven economy' (Chua & Chua 2010). The design and media clusters are seen as lucrative and are generously supported by the government. For instance, the Economic and Development Board (EDB) has allocated S$500 million (€250 million) to develop the digital media industry for 2006 and 2010 (Balakrishnan 2005). Subsequently, another S$500 million (€250 million) is intended to be made available for the period from 2011 to 2015. Media production companies, such as Electronic Arts (makers of the computer game *The Sims*) have already set up studios in Singapore. EDB has a joint venture with LucasFilm and consequently an increasing amount of production work on George Lucas's movies, television programs and games will be done in Singapore (Tham 2010). In April 2010, the Minister of MICA announced a new initiative to attract animation projects to Singapore, with the government willing to fund up to S$5 million (€2.5 million) for each project. The project must however er have a local Singapore partner (Tan, W. 2010). In contrast, between 2003 and 2009, the Singaporean government has increased its funding to the arts via the National Arts Council, the Esplanade and the School of the Arts from S$55 million (€28 million) to S$99 million (€50 million) (MICA 2010: 41). Generally, the arts receive less support than the other creative clusters. The other creative clusters are more deserving because they are more lucrative. In fact, workers in the arts and culture cluster are less economically productive. The Singapore Department of Statistics compared the relative 'productive creativity' of the three creative sectors, in terms of value-added per employee (DesignSingapore Council 2008; see Table 1).

Arts	S$ 40 000 (€20 000)
Design	S$ 67 000 (€34 000)
Media	S$ 81 000 (€41 000)

Table 1: Services Value-Added per Employee (2005)
(Source: DesignSingapore Council 2008: 56)

Thus in comparison, the cultural sector is not generating as much revenue as the other creative sectors, it is also not receiving as much in grants. The economic 'laggards' in the cultural cluster are found in the fine arts; members in the fine art community know that they are not as economically productive as those producing rock concerts and auctioning antiques. But being part of the creative industries means the fine arts will inevitably be compared to the other creative enterprises. Members in the fine arts community have to constantly remind themselves that they are in the business of cultural development, not economic development. In the Renaissance City 2.0 report, which integrates the arts into the creative industries, it is stated that Singapore must:

> maximize the potential of the existing and new arts infrastructure by developing our software [human skills] and enhancing the level of integration with the business and people sectors. At the same time, [MICA] agencies must shift away from the 'arts for arts' sake' mindset, to look at the development of arts from a holistic perspective, to contribute towards the development of the creative industries as well as our nation's social development. (ERC-CI 2002: 14)

The Singaporean authorities acknowledge the importance of the arts in Singapore and in their contribution to the creative industries but they also want artists to move away from their 'arts for arts' sake' mentality. In other words, fine artists should learn from the design and media sectors, that is, to exploit their creativity enough to make money.

Tendency 2: Visibility and Quantification of the Value of Art

The arts and cultural scene in Singapore is getting more vibrant, according to some measures. For example, between 2003 and 2009, ticketed attendance of performing arts events increased from 1 million to 1.4 million (MICA 2010: 16). Non-ticketed attendances increased from 11 million in 2006 to 19 million in 2009 (MICA 2010: 18). The number of visitors visiting museums in Singapore tripled from 2 million in 2003 to 6.7 million in 2009 (MICA 2010: 19). While the number of visitors to museums have increased, many officials working in public art and history museums lament during interviews and discussions that they are facing increasing pressure to attract even more visitors (see also Ng 2011). Increasing the number of visitors to the museums is a quantitative measure of the museums.

As mentioned in the last section, the fine arts are being encouraged to become more economically sustainable; if they can achieve this, they will receive greater approval from the authorities and the public. This encouragement can be rather coercive. For example, in 2008, organizers of the Singapore Arts Festival were lambasted because ticket sales were meager; only 22 000 tickets were sold, as compared to about 35 000 tickets in previous years (Chia 2008b). The dismal result was said to be a combination of programming and pricier tickets (Chia 2008a; Ong 2008). The then minister of MICA, Lee Boon Yang, defended the S$7 million (€3.5 million) spent on the festival, stating that the 2008 edition of the festival

was not a failure. The tickets sales were lower but the standard was high and many shows were sold out (Goh 2008). In 2009, however, the Singapore Arts Festival saw a 180-degree turn-around. Average attendance at ticketed events crossed the 90% mark, as compared to less than 75% in 2008 (Chia 2009). NAC chief Lee Suan Hiang explained that the success was due to a number of factors, including cheaper tickets, timing and also a change in the direction of the programming; the 2009 edition 'took a more crowd-pleasing slant' (Chia 2009). The last point is instructive, as the extent to which it is considered a triumph of populist taste over the more recherché fine arts will arguably influence future policy.

Policy makers do acknowledge, however, the special needs of the fine arts. They are explicit with this understanding in my interviews with them. The arts will always need a helping hand. So for instance, since 2005, in an attempt to make the arts relevant in business and in public spaces, many buildings in Singapore have incorporated art works. The mushrooming of permanent art installations in buildings in the city is a consequence of a scheme by the Urban Renewal Authority (URA). Under the scheme, developers are able to increase the Gross Floor Area or built-up area on a piece of land (URA 2009). As a result, some local artists have benefited from the scheme, for instance, Victor Tan has his stainless steel wire sculptures incorporated into the landscaped rooftop of Orchard Central, a premier shopping mall. Individuals and companies can also enjoy tax benefits if they donate art works to an approved public institution (e.g. Singapore Art Museum, National Park Board, Land Transport Authority) or adopt a public work of art (National Heritage Board 2010). New subway stations in Singapore are well endowed with art installations. Such schemes not only help the art community but also make art works visible to the public.

More direct help is also provided to the art community, in terms of grants for art projects and art housing. Since resources are limited, competition arises in the community and it can turn ugly. For example, art housing is a major problem in Singapore because of high rental prices in the city-state. Many art groups and artists do get assistance from the NAC under the art housing scheme. The scheme is being revamped because some artists are not perceived as using their cheap spaces productively by fellow artists and the NAC (Nanda 2010). When one visits the Telok Kurau Studios, a government-supported art complex, for instance, the place is often quiet. Artists often lament that their colleagues use their studios as store rooms. They also complain that there was hardly any interaction to enliven the artist community in the complex. The bickering amongst artists in the complex has led to the NAC to rethink its art housing programme. As a result, artists are concerned that the authorities will want to see more tangible results from artists enjoying state-sponsored art housing (Neo 2010). To the authorities, there must be more accountability. The revised art housing scheme is being finalized and is likely to include these elements: Artists who are in the profession for a longer period may not receive priority in obtaining a space; artists will be asked to pay rent at

'market prices' but will be given a cash subsidy to help offset the higher rents. The NAC wants to evaluate individual artists more quantitatively and maintain control over who use the spaces. Under the new system, artists are encouraged to become more commercial-minded, being mindful that their practices should pay for themselves. Artists should wean themselves away from state support. Their creativity should become more 'productive' over time. To many fine artists I interviewed, the NAC should be more concerned with cultural development; the NAC's gauge of success, as pegged to length of time in the profession and economic viability, does not bode well for the future of the fine arts in Singapore. Good art does not necessarily translate into economic success, however long one may be in the profession. Such quantification is problematic in measuring the worth of an artist.

Attendance numbers, commercial success and visibility of art works are quantitative or at least more tangible measures. Improvement in these measures will be welcomed. As a result, fine artists are under pressure to be creative enough to be popular and make money too. Most of them find jobs to supplement their income. For cultural institutions, they organize events, exhibitions and festivals that are more popular and commercial. The fine arts are being treated as, and becoming more like, the many businesses in the other creative clusters where commercial success and popularity is essential. If success cannot be counted monetarily, it does not count. Effectively, the fine arts community is inadvertently absorbing the economic logic of making computer games, advertising campaigns and the like. For computer games and advertising campaigns, their activities are primarily profit-oriented; for many artists I interviewed, they similarly now see their practice along profit-oriented lines. Their worth is tied to commercial success (besides aesthetic growth).

Tendency 3: 'Disruptive' Creativity is Still Unwelcomed

Designer lamps, popular, g-rated animation movies and most other media and design products do not usually engage in making strong local political and social statements (Ooi 2010b). Controversies from artists and art works are however part of a maturing arts scene. Cultural products, ranging from paintings to literature, can be insidiously political (Zipes 1991; Bell, Haas & Sells 1995). But pushing the social political limits in artistic expression has its limits in Singapore. In attempting to attract tourists and foreign professionals to Singapore, the city-state has allowed bar-top dancing, tolerated homosexuality (although homosexual acts are still criminalised in Singapore) and opened two casinos (Ooi 2010b). While some Singaporeans are concerned with the liberalization of the social spaces in Singapore, the authorities see it as necessary. Singapore should not be a nanny-state. Citizens should be allowed to experiment and take risks (Lee 2007; Ooi 2010b). There are now more spaces for social and political expression in Singapore. But this is only part of the story.

The then-Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, maintained that the government is willing to listen to different views from 'responsible people' but the government will have to 'maintain the integrity and security of the State' (Chua 2008). The Singapore government is 'hypersensitive to any threats against our racial and religious harmony' (Chua 2008). This hypersensitivity is extensively felt in the arts community. For fear of disruption to the stable environment in Singapore, the government continues to control the mainstream media and is wary of social political activism (Lee 2007; Tan 2007; Ooi 2010b). Some artists make social and political statements that are not flattering to the authorities. Their works may be censored or banned. In 2010, there were a few incidents of artists rubbing up the wrong side of the authorities. For instance, a local drama group, Drama Box, in using a forum theatre format, wanted to stage three short plays in public spaces, in its attempt to engage the community with important social issues, including homosexuality, sex education and religious radicalization. Drama Box did not get the licence to perform outdoors from the Media Development Authority (MDA). The forum theatre format encourages audience members to interject and act in an ever emerging play (Tan, C. 2010). The topics were considered sensitive and since the endings of the plays remain open, the MDA stated that the plays should only be staged indoors. Most artists disagree with the decision and felt that theatre groups should be allowed to reach out to the community.

Another theatre group, Wild Rice, saw its funding from the NAC cut by more than ten percent in 2010. Wild Rice is known to make social and political commentaries that criticize the Singaporean government on issues of race, religion, homosexuality, censorship and media regulation. The cut came about because the NAC would not support 'projects which are incompatible with the core values promoted by the Government and society or disparage the Government' (Chia 2010b). A group of theatre practitioners petitioned the authorities, stating that: 'NAC's priority should be directed towards developing Singapore's potential as a world-class city for the arts, and not towards developing the potential of a statutory board [NAC] – entrusted with public money – as an organ of social control.' (Chia 2010b). When asked about the case, Elaine Ng, Director of Arts Development at NAC said, 'given the limited pool of resources, we have to prioritize our funds to areas and arts groups which need greater support from us'. NAC chief Benson Puah admitted that the cut in Wild Rice's funding was based on the theatre group's actions over the years and NAC wanted to send a message. He said

> The cut could have been much more severe, but it was just a gentle message to be sent that the conditions have to be complied with. The difference [compared to the past], of course, was that we didn't fudge it [i.e. being transparent and open], which was probably the first time such a clear statement was made, explaining the reasons for the cut […]. (Chia 2010a)

As a consequence, many artists continue to exercise self-censorship (Gomez 2002; Ooi 2010a; Ooi 2010b). Creative expressions in the media and design clus-

ters tend towards commercial gain; in the arts, expressing the emotional concerns of the people is considered more important. But such expressions can disparage the authorities. From the view of the authorities, such forms of creativity are disruptive and unproductive. Despite the attempts at promoting the arts and culture, part of its growth is stunted because of the political regime. Many artists do not want their creativity to be dictated by commercial success or political expediency. But in Singapore, many artists have to work within a regime that is narrower than many more democratic countries. There is an explicit push for them to be less 'disruptive' in their creative practices.

So paradoxically, the government wants the fine arts to prosper like the other creative clusters but at the same time, the authorities are wary of allowing the fine arts to mature and engage with society. In other words, there is an explicit attempt at advancing the arts and culture but only in terms of its economic independence and popularity. Art practice that may resonate with the public through social and political messages are discouraged. The promotion of the arts is therefore only half-hearted, and in effect, a form of selective grooming.

Tendency 4: An Increasing Respect for the Arts but with Still a Long Way to go

With increased resources given to the arts and more publicity given to celebrated artists, the status of artists in general is improving. Over the years, my respondents have observed that family, friends and the public increasingly accept that being an artist can be a proper profession. One artist recalled that when she wanted to be an artist some twenty years ago, her mother threatened to commit suicide. The artist took up her art practice only after a successful career in advertising. The relatively low status of the arts in Singapore has a social historical context.

One, there is an apparent disregard for, or at least uncertainty on how to appreciate and handle, the intellectual property of artists in Singapore. Many artist respondents find that they are competing with mass produced ornaments and paintings, those sold in IKEA, for instance. Artists and gallery executives recall stories of visitors or potential customers who are surprised with the prices of the works of art and many of those visitors frequently draw comparisons to cheap decorative works. Visual art works are largely appreciated for its decorative value, not its aesthetics. In 2007, a furor broke out in Singapore when public art installations were destroyed during building renovations and renewals of public spaces. An iconic mural depicting aspects of Singapore along Orchard Road, Singapore's main shopping street, was destroyed without any consultation with the artist (Chew 2007). Similarly, Singapore Power, a statutory board that provides public utilities, removed four of six stoneware water features, an art installation by Delia Prvacki, from its headquarters. Art works are treated as ornaments, not as embodiments of the intellectual property of artists. Attitudes began to change after the 2007 furor, but the ornamental view of art works is still prevalent.

Two, the ability and intelligence of artists are questioned in the Singaporean education system. It does not encourage pupils to become professional fine artists. For instance, pupils who perform better in school are streamed into the sciences. Taking art as a subject, on the other hand, is often considered a 'soft option', a term used by an Art teacher in a secondary school interviewed by me, for weaker pupils (Ooi 2010a). Doing arts and cultural activities in school is often considered a peripheral, extracurricular activity. The non-core view of the arts is also reflected in the two tertiary-level arts schools in Singapore: LASALLE College of the Arts (popularly known as LASALLE) and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA). NAFA was founded in 1938 and offers programs in fine art, music, dance, interior design, fashion design, video production, 3D design, advertising, animation and interactive media, amongst others. LASALLE was set up in 1984, with the aim of providing contemporary art education in fine art, design, media and performing arts. All students in these arts schools will start with a common foundation year. There is a tendency for those who excel in their first year to continue with the more commercially-oriented creative industries programs, such as animation, graphic design and fashion. The fine arts are a 'residual' program for students who do not qualify for the others (Ooi 2010a).

Three, there is a tacit view that art practice is for the economically desperate. The fear that artists are 'free-riders' is institutionalized in the Singapore system. While Singapore promotes the free-market economy, it is not willing to do so for street performers, for instance. In the last two decades or so, the Singapore government has been changing its regulations on street performances or busking. When it was first allowed in 1992, performers must obtain a licence, belong to a cultural institution, perform only in a handful of selected places at allocated times and all proceeds must be donated to charity (Pang 1994). The strict regulations arose from the fear that busking would become a form of 'disguised begging'. The restrictions have been loosened since but a licence is still required. The licence can only be obtained after vetting by the NAC. Performances are allowed only in selected spots. The fear that busking is a form of begging is still central in the popular mindset (Pang 1994; Dhaliwal 1997; Koh 1998; Tan 2009). It is believed that anyone who is desperate can turn to performing in public to get money. Similarly, as reflected in the education system, people go into the arts only as a last option.

In spite of the attempts at promoting the arts in Singapore, fine artists are still struggling to get recognition for their profession and products. The Singaporean system does not encourage creative individuals to go into the arts and the public are not educated to appreciate artists and their works.

Consequences and Conclusion

Cultural development in Singapore is a long and slow process. The goal however is not one of a freewheeling experimental space for artists and art lovers to generate a vibrant creative scene. Instead, the authorities have devised an increasingly

nuanced scheme to manage the fine arts within the established economic, social and political scheme in the current regime. As elaborated earlier, there are a number of tendencies under the current situation of grouping the fine arts into the creative industries. Firstly, there is pressure for the fine arts community to become more economically productive with their creativity. Secondly, accountability of value in the arts is mandatory in receiving state-support. Visitor numbers, visibility in public, ticket sales and the like are used to evaluate artists. Such quantifications are meant to account for the usefulness and productivity of the arts. Such quantifications also tend to ignore the universal and innate value of the arts and that aesthetic quality cannot be quantified (Kavolis 1964; Carey 2005; Cuno, de Montebello, Lowry, MacGregor, Walsh & Wood 2006). Thirdly, with the increased funding from the authorities, the authorities have now a bigger economic tool to control the arts community, in terms of deciding what projects and who to support. This financial tool complements the earlier blunt mechanism of censorship and public chiding of wayward artists in Singapore. Finally, the arts are getting more recognition but challenges remain. This is the view expressed by many artist respondents. Most parents remain apprehensive of encouraging their children into an arts career. Doing art is still seen as an activity for leisure and fun, not for making money.

The invention of the creative industries, as highlighted earlier, brings about revised notions of creativity. These revised notions are being applied to the arts when the arts are grouped into the creative industries. Creativity is now seen to be largely manageable. All individuals are made to believe that they can be creative. Not only that, creativity is seen to be a money spinner today and in the future. Creativity is productive and lucrative. Creativity is to be celebrated and in the rhetoric of the creative industries, creativity can be harvested and managed. Workers should tap into their creativity and bring about innovations in the work place. Pupils are taught to tap into their creativity and to think outside the box. Such views on creativity galvanize the public and enthuse many people into the creative industries (Ooi 2010b). Such a rosy picture of creativity and the creative industries ignores the fact that many creative ideas did not succeed. Successful businesses need more than ideas to work, e.g. financial support, a viable business strategy and good marketing.

In the context of the fine arts, many artists do not see their practices as businesses. If they do, these artists and their works may lose credibility in the eyes of their peers and public! To many, commercial and popular works do not constitute quality art. But by assessing the fine arts with the same instruments in evaluating the media and design-for-profit creative clusters, aesthetic values are contrasted against commercial value. Many members of the fine arts community still celebrate their works in aesthetic terms, but as they become subsumed into the creative industries, these members have also inadvertently or otherwise found themselves internalizing a market logic and have tied their art practices to economic

value. Many fine artists will find that their practices will not be as lucrative as their counterparts in the other creative businesses; they will remain poor cousins in the creative industries. The fine arts are being subjugated in the creative industries when the fine arts have to 'compete' with the other creative clusters on economic and popularity terms.

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