



In collaboration with the international Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Foundation, Dr. Ong spearheaded T:>Works into a think-tank for rethinking Asian arts, their contexts, and their relationships with the world. Notable initiatives include Arts Network Asia, a networking and grant-giving body, which worked across borders in Asia to encourage the seeding of collaboration projects; The Continuum Asia Project which encouraged the heritage reclamation processes in Luang Prabang, Laos, with intergenerational arts engagement between youths and elders through traditional performance crafts; and The Flying Circus Project, a nomadic artist residency which travelled around Southeast Asia bringing international artists to engage with local contexts sensitively, and providing an alternative university of art and life for local participants to engage with the world.

### **CHARTING NEW DIRECTIONS BEYOND COVID-19**

Dr. Ong is returning to the company he has led since 1988, following a sabbatical as the founding director of the new Singapore International Festival of Arts in 2013 to 2017, and the completion of his Ph.D. He says, “I have been officially away from T:>Works for a decade and I am looking forward to charting the next chapter of the company’s direction as we focus on thought leadership in the arts. Coming back during the COVID-19 pandemic is a special challenge. However, I believe it galvanises our resolve to continue creating during these difficult times. We need to prepare for the new normal which we are about to encounter beyond COVID-19. This is not the time to take a hiatus.”

Dr. Ong adds, “Beyond COVID-19, we as a community of arts audiences and artists need to ask, ‘When is human intimacy necessary for us to make sense of our lives? When do we need to stand in front of a painting, when information from the web is no longer sufficient experience?’ At this crucial time, I am convinced that there is a relevant role for independent and alternative thinking and doing in Singapore – and that T:>Works as a pioneering thought leader in the global arts – will be able to crystallise some directions of how to create and live in the new world.”

### **NEW MISSION STATEMENT AND NEW VISUAL IDENTITY – T:>Works**

In accordance with its new direction, T:>Works will also update its mission statement, and visual identity. The new mission statement in the next decade is as follows:

- T:>Works’ mission is the pioneering of thought leadership in the arts focused on transdisciplinary, transcultural, and inclusive processes.
- There will be a strong educational perspective with research and discourse contextualising the histories, contemporary experiences, and art practices of South East Asia.

- T:>Works also serves to investigate the current urgencies of being located in Singapore through different creative expressions in the public sphere.

The new visual identity is designed by T:>Works' chairperson, Heman Chong. Chong is the first visual artist to chair T:>Works in its 35-year history. The visual identity is inspired by the DOS system and the early days of computation. It also refers to the current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic necessitating the digitalisation of performance. The visual identity hints that digitalisation is more than just about technology – the analogue, or the body, is still pertinent. Thus, the performance of the future will be about the considered integration of live presence, the body, and the virtual – what works, when and where.

Dr. Ong says, “**T:>Works is about the root drive T (TheatreWorks) which executes the programme Works. Our works have moved beyond theatre, into visual arts, films, choreographies, sound works, publishing, residencies, processes.** Finally, the new visual identity reminds us of the user of a system or our audiences. Early computation put the user and open access back into the centre.”

He continued, “In my 35 years of making performance, this is the first global disruption I have experienced in the arts and in life. 2020 is a big year for performance companies like T:>Works. What is performance in the new times? The new visual identity marks the impact of COVID-19 on the arts sector and our lives.”

## **UPCOMING PROGRAMMES**

From May to August 2020, T:>Works will:

- **Conduct the first Curators Training Course by an arts company in May – June.**
- **Create an all-new Virtual Festival of Women: N.O.W. 2020 from July – August.**

### *Curating No-thing*

In May 2020, T:>Works will start its virtual programme “Curating No-thing” in the form of a series of 4 separate lectures and a shared space on Zoom led by Dr. Ong Keng Sen for The

Curators Academy. Dr. Ong will be holding the lecture series for a wider public, together with consultations and clinics for a smaller group of participants.

“This thought leadership programme looks at activating one’s communities through art and rethinking our relationships with money and production. Many artists, writers, producers and cultural workers are already curating in their daily work, but there is little reflection space for them to evaluate what is curating, how to curate, and for whom they should be curating for.” Dr. Ong says. The series will span topics such as Creating Worlds, Ethical Generosity, Rethinking Value, Small Actions and Listening, and will be conducted virtually on 19, 21, 26 and 28 May 2020. The clinics and consultation sessions scheduled for 9, 11, 16, 18 June 2020, will also be conducted virtually. Registration opens on 1 May 2020.

#### Virtual Festival of Women: N.O.W 2020

From 15 July to 2 August 2020, T:>Works will continue to present its second edition of the Festival of Women: N.O.W. 2020, helmed by the Festival’s Artistic Director – theatre artist and educator Noorlinah Mohamed. Created and developed completely by women, the Festival focuses on women creatives, change-makers, and thinkers, with an emphasis on socially conscious and engaged creations. This year’s edition will be an entirely digitalised performance festival. More information will be released in June 2020.

#### **TO GATHER IN TOUGH TIMES**

Dr. Ong concludes, “Live performance is about gathering: coming together to reflect, to emote, to experience, or to meditate in a shared space and time. However to gather according to the Cambridge English Dictionary is also ‘to put your arms around someone and hold or carry them in a careful or loving way.’ Now in this current urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is the time to sustain a different gathering of arts audiences and artists, to hold or carry them in a careful and loving way. Hence, we will be creating a free new festival in the virtual space, to encourage open access and circulation for all during these transitional challenges, and continuing to perform for future audiences.”

For registration details and more information on *Curating No-thing* and other T:>Works programmes please visit [www.theatreworkssg.wordpress.com](http://www.theatreworkssg.wordpress.com) or contact [mervyn.TWorks@gmail.com](mailto:mervyn.TWorks@gmail.com). Press materials can be accessed from this [link](#).

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### **About Dr. Ong Keng Sen**

Dr. Ong Keng Sen is the Artistic Director of T:>Works and the artspace 72-13 in Singapore. Apart from creating renown productions, Ong founded the Arts Network Asia, a micro-grant peer organisation, and the international Curators Academy focused on the synergy between contexts and curation. His seminal work was the nomadic artist residency, The Flying Circus Project, traveling international artists through Asia, sharing their contexts amongst themselves and young people in the local sites. Ong was the Founding Festival Director of the all-new Singapore International Festival of Arts (SIFA). He directed four editions of SIFA from 2014 to 2017. He was a Fulbright Scholar and was awarded the prestigious Fukuoka Asian Arts and Culture Prize in 2010 for his creations in Asian contemporary performance. He holds a Ph.D. in Performance Studies from Tisch School of the Arts, New York University.

### **About T:>Works**

Established in 1985, T:>Works is an independent and international performance company based in Singapore. It is an Institute of Public Character with charitable status. T:>Works is currently housed at 72-13, a heritage building that was once a rice warehouse on Mohamed Sultan Road and next to the Singapore River. T:>Works is a recipient of the National Arts Council Major Company Scheme for the period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2022.

### **About The Curators Academy**

T:>Works Curators Academy is founded by Artistic Director Ong Keng Sen in 2018. The Curators Academy, with its first 30 participants from South East Asia, is unique for its international mission to develop curatorial skills in performance as well as interdisciplinary work focused on sustainability, sharing processes, synergy between contexts and curation in Asia. In 2019, the Curators Academy was invited by Shermin Langhoff to the renown Gorki Theater Berlin. It opened as the Young Curators Academy where the focus was art and activism. 300 applications came from all over the world and 30 final participants were chosen ranging from Palestine to Senegal to China to Poland to America.

### **About Festival of Women: N.O.W. 2020**

The Festival of Women: N.O.W. 2020 - also known as not ordinary work - is a three-week interdisciplinary festival presented by T:>Works. It was initiated by theatre artist Noorlinah Mohamed in 2019. It focuses on women creatives, change-makers and thinkers, with an emphasis on socially conscious and engaged creations. Led by women, N.O.W. is an engagement event aimed to educate, generate awareness and encourage dialogue on matters of interest to and that affect women. In negotiating the limitations arising from COVID-19 pandemic, N.O.W. 2020 will be a first ever virtual performance festival, featuring performances, conversations and videos across different digital platforms in July.

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