

Preview: OH! Open House 2013: The Happiness Index at Marina Bay



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[Around Town,](#)

As the imposing, glassy skyscrapers of Marina Bay get an avant garde makeover courtesy of this year's OH! Open House, **Gwen Pew** has five of the artists explain their works



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After invading the residential neighbourhoods of Niven Road, Marine Parade and Tiong Bahru the past three years, OH! Open House is back once again – with the theme 'happiness index'. Aptly enough, they will be targeting the very heart of our financial district, Marina Bay.

It's perhaps not the most conducive area for hosting the experimental art event – the idea behind it is to allow 13 artists to give selected private spaces a creative makeover, and then open their doors to the public – and indeed, it wasn't easy bringing art into some of the corporate spaces.

'The most straightforward difficulty, as you might imagine, is persuading corporates to put up art that is more challenging [than paintings on walls],' says Alan Oei, curator and co-founder of the art walkabout. 'But really, it is more than that. It's about how to put art inside these very singular spaces designed for very singular reasons – how does the artwork not fade into the background, how does it work with and against its environments?'

All of which makes the concept of OH! all the more pertinent for Marina Bay. ‘People like the voyeurism of OH! – to be able to enter a perfect stranger’s bedroom to see art. But we thought a different, more thoughtful encounter could also arise. Most of all, we want visitors to see the insides of Marina Bay and have a conversation about it,’ says Oei.

‘Marina Bay is representative of Singapore in many ways. It’s designed top-down and made to manifest our ambitions to be a “global city”. We think there are many different stories and encounters by which you can experience it. The artists hopefully can show you a different understanding [of the area].’ Here’s what some of the artists have in store:

Eeshaun

A self-taught artist influenced by Surrealism, illustrations and his love for improvisation, jazz music, dance and street art, Eeshuan has created artworks for international brands and Zouk. He was included in the ‘20/20 BASE’ exhibition at the Singapore Design Festival in 2007, which featured 20 rising creative local talents, and is currently teaching at the School of Technology for the Arts in Republic Polytechnic. His works have been shown recently at [The Orange Thimble](#) café (‘Chasing Dreams: The Remaking of Tiong Bahru’, 2012) and [The Substation](#) (‘Synaesthesia’, 2011).

For OH! ‘My piece is a giant, colourful abstract painting (1.2m by 2.4m) that’s up on the wall – the idea is for people to look at it and search for happiness inside and within themselves, since a part of the OH! theme related to the happiness index. As I’ll be working within a space inside the **Google office**. I think the idea of looking/searching for something is quite appropriate.

Mintio

Trained as a photographer, Mintio tries to incorporate elements of otherworldliness into her works. She was first featured at the 2010 Singapore International Photography Festival, where she was a finalist for the Portfolio Review, and has since exhibited at the [Singapore Art Museum](#), [2902 Gallery](#), [Valentine Willie Fine Art](#) and abroad.

For OH! ‘I’ll be building a light installation in the **DBS building** that is made up of photographs printed on transparent acrylic sheets and lit from behind and above to create something almost like a stained glass effect. The images will show Singapore River at night, charting the landscape from its start at Kim Seng Road to [Marina Barrage](#). I came up with the idea after spending some time with the other participating artists looking out at the river during on a recon trip for OH!. Several quirky facts and stories surrounding the topic of the Singapore River emerged [and it occurred to me] that the river, with its histories and significance, can be more than an icon – it’s also a repository for new memories.’

Sherman Ong

Award-winning artist, photographer and filmmaker Ong has shown his works at art biennales, film festivals and museums around the world. He is particularly interested in the human condition and relationships, as demonstrated by his acclaimed on-going project ‘Motherland’,

which consists of a series of videos showing urban dwellers speaking candidly about their lives and experiences as immigrants – migrating mostly from China – living in Singapore.

For OH! ‘I’ll be presenting a short film from my “Motherland” project at the **DBS building** entitled *Xiao Jing*, which is about a mainland Chinese woman who comes to Singapore to find a better life – and maybe love.’

Shubigi Rao

Rao moved to Singapore to obtain her Master’s degree in Fine Art at Lasalle in 2008, where she now lectures about art theory part-time. The award-winning artist’s wide range of interest includes archeology, literature, cultural histories, environmental issues and more; her drawings, etchings and hand-made books have featured in exhibitions at [Valentine Willie Fine Art](#) (‘Beyond LKF’, 2010) and the 2008 Singapore Biennale. ‘I find the process and result say a lot about destructive human tendencies and deliberate acts of violence – not just physical, but fiscal too, if you’ll pardon the pun,’ she says.

For OH! ‘My piece consists of books with text and drawings by me, which are then soaked in fountain pen ink so that most of their content dissolves in the very medium it was created with. The books function almost as place settings in the boardroom of **Deutsche Bank** – suggesting the unpalatable swallowing of uncomfortable facts [as a result of] the callousness and attitude of self-serving delusion that pervades the banking world. Also, I was quite tickled by posters in the pantry of overly-elaborate and rigid emphasis on place setting and meal serving. There was even a rigidly proscribed formal direction for serving muffins!’

Spell #7

Known for their use of multi-media, online technologies and music, this Singapore-based performance company was founded in 1997 by local lady Kaylene Tan and Paul Rae from the UK. They won the Life! Theatre Award for Best Script for their play *Balance* in 2003, and their works have since gone on to be performed at the Singapore Arts Festival and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. They are, however, no strangers to performing in quirkier spaces, having previously showcased their theatrical pieces in nightclubs, a converted convent and even an office.

For OH! ‘We’ll be holding surprise performances in **DBS’ Super Social Hub** where we burst out in song periodically. The piece deals with the loss of the Singapore River with the construction of the [Marina Barrage](#) and the Marina Bay offices. We’re also drawing from the invisible workers who work in the mega structures. We’ll be collaborating with a group of spunky seniors. Sing along if you know the words!’

The OH! Open House Marina Bay tours start at the DBS Auditorium (Level 3, Marina Bay Financial Centre) and goes to the offices of DBS Asia Central at Marina Bay Financial Centre Tower 3; Marina Bay Link Mall; Ann Tan & Associates at Far East Finance Building; Google at Asia Square; and Deutsche Bank at One Raffles Quay South Tower.

from 11am-5pm on 5 & 6, 12 & 13 & 19 & 20 Jan.