

the  
**SPIRITS** play

6 Movements in a Strange House



Written by Kuo Pao Kun  
Performance Conceived & Directed by Ong Keng Sen

A collaboration between cutting edge Japanese performance  
artists and veteran Singapore actors

Sponsor's Message	7
Playwright's Profile	8
Director's Profile	9
Director's Notes	10
Creative Team	14
Profile of Participating Artists	15
Production & Stage Management Team	19
TheatreWorks (S) Ltd	20
Acknowledgements / Coming Soon	22



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ザ・スピリッツ・プレイ



The General







The Man







The Poet



## Sponsor's Message

It is our pleasure to welcome you to *The Spirits Play*. OCBC Bank is proud to sponsor this local production by Theatreworks. Our sponsorship of *The Spirits Play* is a further reaffirmation of our commitment towards the continued development of the local arts scene.

Singapore's arts scene has grown discernibly more vibrant over the last few years, with homegrown groups attaining critical acclaim both locally and at international arts festivals. We are pleased to see fruition of our efforts, along with many others, to promote the arts in Singapore.

As a champion of the arts, OCBC Bank's primary objectives are to improve the quality of life and add further vigour to the arts scene in Singapore by supporting local arts groups and bringing in world-class acts. To this end, the Bank introduced the OCBC Arts Card in 1995. Through the Arts Card, the Bank has created an avenue for individual arts lovers and avid supporters to actively participate and contribute to the arts scene as a percentage of their spending is re-channelled towards sponsorship of the arts.

A vibrant arts scene will certainly make Singapore a much more interesting and stimulating place to both work and live in. We are very pleased to be immersed in this process.

On behalf of OCBC Bank, I wish all of you, patrons and supporters of the arts, a most enjoyable evening.

Peter Zheng  
Head, Credit Cards  
OCBC Bank

# Playwright's Profile

## Kuo Pao Kun, Artistic Director, The Theatre Practice

Kuo Pao Kun was born in Hebei province, China, in 1939. He came to Singapore in 1949 where he was educated in Mandarin and English. After school, he worked at radio stations in Singapore and later in Australia, maintaining his interest in drama by writing, performing, as well as watching Asian and Western plays staged in the two countries. He attended the National Institute for Dramatic Art (NIDA) in Sydney for two years from 1963 and worked for a while with a touring Arts Council theatre company before returning to Singapore.

In 1965 he set up the Practice Performing Arts School with his wife, Goh Lay Kuan, a dancer – choreographer who also trained in Australia, with the aim of creating a professional niche for the performing arts in Singapore. Over the next twenty years he actively wrote and directed plays in Mandarin and English, conducted countless drama, directing and stage lighting workshops, introduced local theatre practitioners to the new theatres of China, Taiwan and Hong Kong by inviting guest directors and actors and organized seminars and workshops. In 1990 he founded The Substation, Singapore first arts centre and was its artistic director till 1995.

Kuo Pao Kun is currently the artistic director of The Theatre Practice and Practice Performing Arts School, and is Adjunct Associate Professor in Drama & Performance at the Nanyang Technology University.

Kuo's major works include *The Coffin Is Too Big For The Hole* (1984), *The Silly Little Girl And The Funny Old Tree* (1987), *Mama Looking For Her Cat* (1988), *Lao Jiu* (1990), *02zero01* (1991), *The Evening Climb* (1992), *Descendents Of The Eunuch Admiral* (1995), *Geylang People In The Net* (1997), *The Spirit Play* (1998), *Sunset Rise* (1999) and *Red Hawk* (1999). His works have been translated into Malay, Tamil, German, Hindi, Japanese and Arabic, and produced and performed by many theatre companies in Singapore and overseas.

For his contributions to Singapore theatre, Kuo Pao Kun was awarded the Cultural Medallion (Drama) in 1989 and the ASEAN Award for the Performing Arts in 1993. In 1996, the French government conferred on him the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (Knighthood of Arts and Letters).



## Director's Profile

### ONG Keng Sen, Artistic Director

Keng Sen, Artistic Director of TheatreWorks (Singapore), has engaged in cross-cultural work with fellow Asian artists for 6 years. He is known for his rejection of authenticity and his embracing of multiple realities and hybridity within Asia. Although his training is in contemporary performance from New York University, he often brings the strength of traditional concepts into his work.

In 1994, Keng Sen conceptualised *The flying Circus Project*, a creative strategy laboratory which is a robust encounter between contemporary arts and traditional performance. This is an intercultural workshop amongst Asian artists which explores the fields of theatre, music, dance, visual arts and finally at the end of 2000, documentary film. 100 artists from countries such as India, Indonesia, Korea, Myanmar, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam have taken part thus far in 1996 and 1998. In December 2000, the most ambitious laboratory so far plans to explore religious performance and the urban artist with artists and ritualists from China, Japan, Philippines, Taiwan and Tibet. The key elements of The flying Circus Project are reinvention, juxtaposition and cultural negotiation.

Believing that it is important to represent on stage an Asia of today, Keng Sen directed *Lear* which premiered in Tokyo in 1997 and *Desdemona* which premiered in Adelaide in 2000.

Keng Sen's philosophy of making work with an international dimension and relevance has seen his productions being presented in major arts festivals and cultural institutions in Asia, Australia, Europe and the United States of America. However, his contribution to the evolution of Singapore theatre is undeniable. He developed The Writers' Laboratory, which over the years has developed into a power house for Singaporean writing.

He has lectured in London, Paris, Berlin, Sydney and Hong Kong (for The Asia Society of New York) about Asian performance. He is presently a member of an Asian-Europe network to look at exchange between new Asia and new Europe. He is the holder of several foundation fellowships including the Japan Foundation, British Council, Asian Cultural Council (New York) and is also a Fulbright Scholar, and Singapore Young Artist (Drama) 1993. Recently, he was awarded the National Youth Council Award for Drama. He has also directed film and television as well.

In 1999, he initiated a new network for Asian artists to dialogue and engage with each other, known as the Arts Networks Asia. He is also in the process of developing a series of personal biographies of South East Asian traditional artists on CD-ROM. In May 2000, he directed his first opera *Silver River* for The Spoleto Festival, USA. This production will perform in Philadelphia in April 2001 and return to Singapore in May 2001.



## Director's Notes    A letter to Japanese friends

Dear Hisano-san and Uchino-san,

Greetings from tropical Singapore. I have been negligent about replying about Spirits as I have been gripped by making the work and struggling with it, which is a good sign.

I am very happy that my Japanese friends are coming from Tokyo to be with us during this work. I am also very glad that between the two of you, you are able to see both versions. The Victoria Theatre version has turned out to be exciting as there is an emotional concentration. With the bunkers it is more the feel of the space which has a strong atmosphere.

Spirits is now subtitled 6 Movements in a Strange House (Movements as in music movements like in a symphony). It has a strong Jean Genet feel in that I have focussed on a series of individuals who are compelled to dress up and move into fantasy. Through these fantasies they play out fragments of characters from the war and they also constantly wash themselves. There is a scene in a bathhouse where they are trying to wash and clean themselves.

The four movements with the Singapore cast are:

- a scene thick with perversion and where we get the sense that they are prostitutes in a sex fantasy club
- the bathhouse sequence
- a sequence involving archival material which is created with Japanese sound artist Rtsushi Nishijima with records
- the sequence involving two opposing mythic animals where the ugliness of humanity is revealed: the ugliness which we try to clothe with layers of costume and fantasy; which we try to wash away.

There are two movements which involve purely the Japanese artists who are:

- Bubu, who has made an important work with avant garde company Dumb Type. This is still to be worked out as she arrives on Aug 9. She is an empowered sex worker in real life (but what is real anyway?) and it seems a good counterpoint to the comfort woman in the script who is a disempowered sex worker without choice. She will be joined by Yoshiko Shimada (who is arriving only on 10 Aug).
- Grinderman. Possibly a good counterpoint/extension to the Japanese soldier/subject.



*Spirits in Singapore* seems to reflect the host artists (in this case the Singaporeans) discovery of themselves in the psyche of the Japanese aggressor. The rise of nationalism over the individual human being seems to reflect certain trends in Singapore today.

The only way, we (as post-war babies) have been able to make sense of WWII has been by thinking of it as a madness in a moment in time which we can slip into again so easily. On the surface we subvert the war experience by setting it in a Jean Genet world but at the same time, I feel this has the contemporary relevance which I am seeking. In Singapore today if you ask a young person *"Do you think there will be war in Singapore in the next decade?"*, you may get a laugh in your face. War is unreal in Singapore now, it only happened to our predecessors who were probably *"uncool and too traditional, old fashioned"*.

Of course the post-war generation is also divided. Speaking of the generation in their thirties and twenties alone, I think that there is a vast difference. We can see this in the artists like Yoshiko (who feels guilt) and Grinderman (who sees the world through a lens of what is hip!).

We are also splicing in materials from the Singapore archives about the war, so it is not just the script of Kuo which has already been fragmented.

Overall, I am keen to make the work specific to the city that we perform in. In terms of working together, it is more like a curated show rather than a collaboration. However it gives some sense of where Japan and Singapore are today regarding this issue of individual, nation. Ultimately, in this global world for the young generation they are embracing the hip and fashionable without any memory of their fathers. The generation of the twenties and below will be joined despite the war of 1945. Whether or not this is a tragedy, I cannot say.

The difference between the two sites:

Bunkers is site specific where many of the Japanese artists are creating installations in the architecture. The performances in Victoria are fresh and original from the bunkers performance. There are many scenes which have not taken place in the bunkers performance.

Ultimately, the bunkers performance is more disparate and separate little experiences which the audience may choose to walk away from or stay with. The experience is not concentrated and tends to be cumulative after an hour. Performers seldom come together.

The main difference is that you would only see 1 of the movements in the bunkers performance as performed in the victoria theatre, ie the bathhouse. The other 3 movements are newly created for the victoria theatre. There are many other differences which we can talk more about when you come to Singapore. The archive material is differently treated and we also do not see the two mythic animals so directly in the bunkers. The auditorium experience is harder to integrate the Japanese performers but I have always seen the work as 6 separate movements/ moods anyway which have no evident correlation.

I have rambled on for too long. Hope to talk to you soon.

Warmly, Keng Sen



16 - 19 August

The Battle Box

Fort Canning Park

PART 1      Battle Box

Interval      15 mins

PART 2      Studio 1

Interval      5 mins

PART 3      Black Box

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25 - 26 August

Victoria Theatre

PART 1

Interval

PART 2

# the SPIRITS play

## 6 Movements in a Strange House

Written by Kuo Pao Kun (Singapore)

Performance conceived & directed by  
Ong Keng Sen (Singapore)

### Participating Artists

Jeremiah Choy (Singapore)

Janice Koh (Singapore)

Sharon Lim (Singapore)

Lok Meng Chue (Singapore)

Low Kee Hong (Singapore)

Karen Tan (Singapore)

### Curated Artists

Bubu (Japan)

Grinder Man (Japan)

Atsushi Nishijima (Japan)

Yoshiko Shimada (Japan)

### Visiting Artist

Helen Herbertson (Australia)

### Lighting Designer

Lea Shao (China)



## Profile of Artists

**Bubu** (Japan) Bubu is a female performance artist who believes in empowering fellow sex workers through her works. She graduated from Kyoto City University of Art and joined a performance group known as *Dumb Type*. A self-professed activist and teacher of safersex in the workplace, she conducts a sex lecture show *Pro Sex* in a club once a month. *Pro Sex* was also performed during International Congress on prostitute in Los Angeles. She is part of *The Biters*, a group of artists' unit formed by three sex workers whose works involved video, still photography, writing of essays and poetry. Bubu's exhibitions includes *Made in Occupation*, a collaboration with Yoshiko Shimada in Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo (1997); *Et Maintenant!* with The Biters at Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts (1998); *Whore on Holiday* with The Biters at Ota Fine Arts (1999); and *Love Studio* at Watari Museum of Fine Arts, Tokyo (2000).

**Jeremiah Choy** (Singapore) A trained lawyer, Jeremiah went full time as an actor, director, writer since 1997. As an actor, he has done major works with TheatreWorks in productions such as *Broken Birds* (1995), *The Yang Family* (1996), *Destinies of Flowers in the Mirror* (1997). He was in the original cast of *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral* and toured Cairo with the production in 1996. He also toured with TheatreWorks to Japan with *Beauty World* (1992) and *Lear* (1997). As a director, Jeremiah has assisted in directing TheatreWorks' *Half Lives*. He writes, directs and produces his own works, mostly with educational and commercial institutions.

**Grinder-Man (1), (2), (3) & (4)** (Japan) Organised by several people who preferred to be known by numbers, *Grinder Man* is a Techno-Art-Group whose main concept is to "grind-oneself" through performances that incorporates music, video, sculpture, mixed media, fine art and performance art. Its characteristics include uniformity in costuming to signify anonymity and loss of individuality, with original techno music underscoring the group's organic, mechanical movements. In each performance, the music is composed with electronic instruments, so that the inorganic electronic tones provide an unrealistic world, a suitable acting field for *Grinder Man*. The performances on the stage are developed sometimes fiercely, comically and elegantly. The performances can be considered as a reintegrated result of personalities that is once disintegrated, and then filtrate through each member of the performer. The aims or intentions of the performances are transformed organically - it is as if *Grinder Man* is marching towards the different end of the world every time he performs. Since 1997, *Grinder Man* has performed publicly in numerous spaces in New York and Tokyo.

## Helen Herbertson

(Australia)

Helen Herbertson is a Melbourne choreographer, artistic advisor, teacher and performer with 30 years' experience in developing new performance works. As Artistic Director of Danceworks (1989-97), Herbertson choreographed 16 new works including award winning *Descansos...resting places* (1996). In the past decade, Helen has been active in the development of dance in Australia through involvement on the Board of Danceworks and the Green Mill Dance Project. She has undertaken an artistic advisor role for a range of fellow practitioners and is part of the Mentorship program of the Victorian College of the Arts. Helen's participation in *The Spirits Play* has been made possible through a grant from the Asialink Residency Program, funded by Arts Victoria and the Australia Council, the Commonwealth Government's Arts Funding and Advisory Body.

## Janice Koh

(Singapore)

Janice first studied Theatre Studies and Drama at Victoria Junior College before continuing to pursue an honours degree in Theatre Studies at the National University of Singapore. She went on to specialise in the area of arts policy and administration in Goldsmiths College, University of London, where she obtained her MA in Theatre Arts (Theatre Administration). Janice last performed with TheatreWorks in *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral* as part of the Festival of Asian Performing Arts in 1995. Previous shows in which she performed include *Broken Birds* (1995), *Scorpion Orchid* (1994), *Cefacea* (1993), *Under the Bed* (1993), *Sammy Won't Go to School* (1992), and *Theatre Carnival on the Hill* (1992). She has also acted for television including *Love of a Lifetime* produced by the Television Corporation of Singapore. Janice is currently with the National Arts Council.

## Sharon Lim

(Singapore)

Sharon is a familiar figure in many of Ong Keng Sen's productions, including *Scorpion Orchid* (1994), *Broken Birds* (1995), *The Yang Family* (1996), *Destinies of Flowers in The Mirror* (1997), *Workhorse Afloat* (1997) and *Lear* (1997). She also appears occasionally on television in local sitcoms and commercials. She sits on the board of TheatreWorks executive committee.



**Lok Meng Chue** (Singapore) Meng Chue has been involved in nearly all of TheatreWorks productions since the 1980s. These include not only performances on stage, both locally and overseas, but also backstage, as director, stage/production management, workshop coordinator and administrator; besides being a member in TheatreWorks board of executive committee. Her involvement in *The Spirits Play* marks her return to performance after a hiatus of 5 years.

**Low Kee Hong** (Singapore) Kee Hong, an original cast member of the critically acclaimed *Lear* (1997), was last seen in *Desdemona*, which premiered in the Adelaide Festival 2000. Trained as a dancer in ballet, modern dance, balinese dance and butoh, he was also a participant in TheatreWorks' Flying Circus Project in 1996 and 1998. Kee Hong was also a performer-collaborator with Ong Keng Sen on *Eat Me* which was presented at the Journey to the East Project, Hong Kong 1998. Together with another Singaporean actor, *Eat Me* was recently remounted at the Performance Studies International Conference 1999 in Aberystwyth, Wales. In Singapore, he is a seasoned performer in many of Keng Sen's cutting edge productions such as *Workhorse Afloat* (1997) and *Destinies of Flowers in the Mirror* (1997). Also an active scholar with a keen interest in cultural policy issues, he recently received his Masters in Sociology. He is currently researching a CD-ROM project with Keng Sen which aims to provide important and critical documentation on the continuum between traditional and contemporary South-East Asian performing arts and artists.

**Atsushi Nishijima** (Japan) A sound (installation) artist from Kyoto who graduated from Osaka University of Art. Trained in experimental and contemporary music, Atsushi treats each piece of art, be it installation, objects, paintings or performance, as a composition of a piece of music. For him, sound and environment and space exist as a mutual creative interaction and if a sound repeats it becomes music. His works have been exhibited and performed extensively in for instance, The New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York (*Citycircus* with Rolywholyover & Circus, 1994), Dohjidoi Gallery of Art in Kyoto (*Solo Exhibition*, 1998), Osaka Contemporary Art Center (*Solo Exhibition*, 1992), and Ashiya City Museum of Art & History, Hyogo (60's Avant Garde Music at Sogetsu-Kaikan Hall, 1998).

**Lea Shao** (China) A Shanghai Theater Academy graduate who majors in stage lighting, Lea has, since 1987, made a professional career in teaching and lighting design for stage performances. An award winning lighting designer, she was the lighting design director for plays in international festivals such as Cao Lu Sheng's play *The Story of White Snake* in the Singapore Arts Festival (1992), and *Split the Coffin* in Tokyo International Performance Arts Festival (1994). Other examples of her lighting design credits include Leslie Moon's *Pufana Moksha* in New York, USA (1995), Kuo Pao Kun's *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral* in Singapore (1995), Eugene O'Neill's *Long day Journey into Night* in Shanghai (1994) and Ma Yuan's *The Season of Love* in Shanghai (1991). In a decade of designing in the theatre scene, she has no less than 50 plays under her credits. *The Spirits Play* marks her first collaboration with TheatreWorks and Ong Keng Sen.

**Yoshiko Shimada** (Japan) Born in Tokyo in 1959 and graduated from Scripps College, Claremont, USA in 1982, Yoshiko is a female installation artist who has done a lot of work on feminist and war issues. Often taking a socio-political and historical perspective, she is more interested in how reality is constructed rather than depicting reality. She describes herself as "a feminist and art activist", and believes that art has the power to change people's perspectives, not in the sense of propaganda, but as something that make viewers re-think their own existence. A recipient of the Asian Cultural Council grant, with residency at P.S.1 International Studio Program (1998-1999), Yoshiko has had numerous solo exhibitions as well as group exhibition in different galleries round the world including Berlin, Tokyo, Manila, Hong Kong, New York. Her most recent group exhibition include *How to Use Women's Body* in Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo and 'Remembrance' in Galerie im Kernerpark, Berlin. Her various public collections can be seen at the New York Public Library, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Keio University Art Center, and Kyoto Seika University.

**Karen Tan** (Singapore) Karen has appeared in TheatreWorks productions such as *Mixed Signals* (1997), *Private Parts* (1992), *Broken Birds* (1995), and most recently *First Emperor's Last Days* (1998). Working in *The Spirits Play* marks a milestone in Karen's life, as she begins a new chapter in Singapore after spending 7 years in the UK as wife, mother and avid watcher of telly soaps.



## Production & Stage Management Team

Production Director	Tay Tong	Wardrobe	Elfa Leo
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Production Assistant	Vivian Lee	Marketing & Publicity	Traslin Ong
Asst. Stage Managers	Melissa Pang Annie Yim	Front-of House Managers	Janice Pono Audrey Sim
Stage Crew	Clair Allan Ng Huiling		
Technical Manager	Marc Andre Therrien		
Technical Team	Lennie Lee Roy Lee Roslan bin Mohammad Paul Birger Sørensen		

## THEATREWORKS

TheatreWorks (Singapore), established in 1985, is an international performance company based in Singapore. Since then, TheatreWorks has become known in Asia its reinvention of traditional performance through a juxtaposition of cultures.

Under the Artistic Directorship of Mr Ong Keng Sen, TheatreWorks' concerns goes beyond that of Singapore. It sees a strong synergy between nationalism and internationalism. This philosophy informs the company's work and outlook. With this philosophy, TheatreWorks has performed in the cultural capitals of Asia and Europe since 1992 in major festivals and cultural institutions.

Theatreworks asks, "What is indigenous in Asia today in this age of globalisation, internationalization, modernisation and urbanisation?" It exists on the tension between modernisation and tradition; local and global. It hopes to rethink what is Western, what is Eastern, what is first world and what is third world: "Do these dichotomies continue to make sense in the new millennium?" Representing the continuum between tradition and contemporary, the work is unafraid to be exotic and yet conceptual. The Theatreworks' aesthetics project the hybrid identity of the modern Asian and embrace the multiple realities of Asia today. The processes and productions of Theatreworks question critical cultural issues without forsaking both emotional potency and artistry.

One of the significant projects of the company is *The Flying Circus Project*, a brainchild of Keng Sen's. This laboratory, the first with such extensive scope and continuity in Asia, looks at the different creative strategies of individual artists, through the recognition of difference between the many Asian cultures. *The Flying Circus Project* was established in 1995. It is divided into three phases linked by a spirit of investigation and inquiry. The focal point is cultural negotiation through a clash of cultures, a clash of time/space through the dynamic interaction between traditional and contemporary performers and a clash of disciplines.

Over the course a decade, TheatreWorks has undergone numerous phases, always in response to its surrounds, both international and national. For instance, the company's developmental programme for writers, *The Writers' Lab*, envisages a goal to cultivate writers commenting powerfully and controversially on the social condition in Singapore. It has developed numerous playwrights currently working in Singapore. Other past programmes aimed at developing theatre practice includes the Directors' Lab; Resident Artists Scheme; Associate Artist Scheme; and the Springboard Series.

In 1999, TheatreWorks initiated the *Arts Network Asia* that encourages and supports regional artistic collaboration. This Network is motivated by the philosophy of meaningful collaboration, distinguished by mutual respect. The creation of this Network, with funding from the Ford Foundation and managed by TheatreWorks, is run by a panel of Asian artists to make grants to assist regional collaborations. The panel of artists, including TheatreWorks, is not allowed to apply for funds from this Network.



Apart from intercultural concerns, Theatreworks' recent works have challenged accepted history through a genre of docu-performance. Such works ultimately question the process of documentation itself. It points to the slippage when translation occurs: linguistic translation, translation from fact into history into myth into performance. These works deal with the realm of myth making in modern societies.

TheatreWorks works primarily through a process of collaboration, dialogue and engagement with other artists from other cultures. The company has become increasingly concerned with the urgent need for Asia to engage with Europe, America and Australia on new territories and with a new vocabulary. Ultimately, TheatreWorks is dedicated to the development of contemporary arts in Singapore, and to the evolution of an Asian identity and aesthetics for the 21st Century through a culture of difference.

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Production / Stage Manager	Valerie Oliveira

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Fax: (+65) 338-8297

E-mail: [tworke@singnet.com.sg](mailto:tworke@singnet.com.sg)

Website: [www.theatreworks.org.sg](http://www.theatreworks.org.sg)

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And all others who have provided kind assistance in one form or another but whose names we have had to leave out due to print deadlines.

## Coming Soon: the Flying Circus Project Festival 1 - 21 December 2000

Into our third phase and as part of our outreach program, master artists from China, Yunan, Tibet, Taiwan, Philippines and Japan will share with us their art forms in demonstration workshops and dialogue sessions as part of this exciting festival! So watch out for it!

### The Flying Circus Project

#### - Taking Asian Traditional Arts into the Next Millenium

Established in 1994 by Ong Keng Sen, Artistic Director of TheatreWorks Singapore, The Flying Circus Project is a major program exploring Asian traditional arts for the 21st Century. This multi-disciplinary, long-termed research and development program in theatre, dance and music will run for six years, with laboratories consisting of workshops and seminars, and innovative new productions. It looks at the different creative strategies of individual artists, through the recognition of differences between the many Asian cultures. The focal point is about cultural negotiation, as it looks at the different creative strategies of individual artists through the recognition of differences between the many Asian cultures.

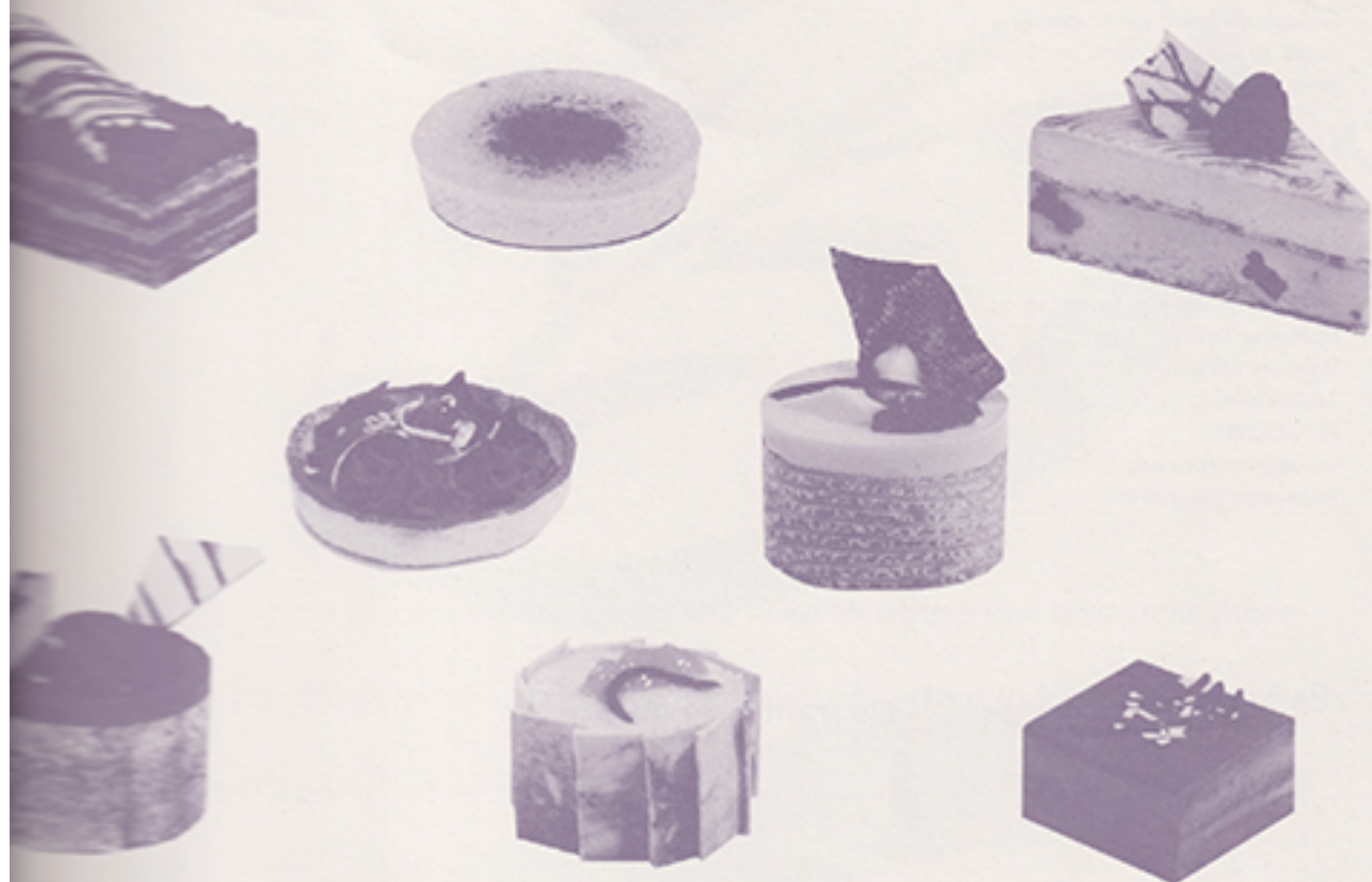



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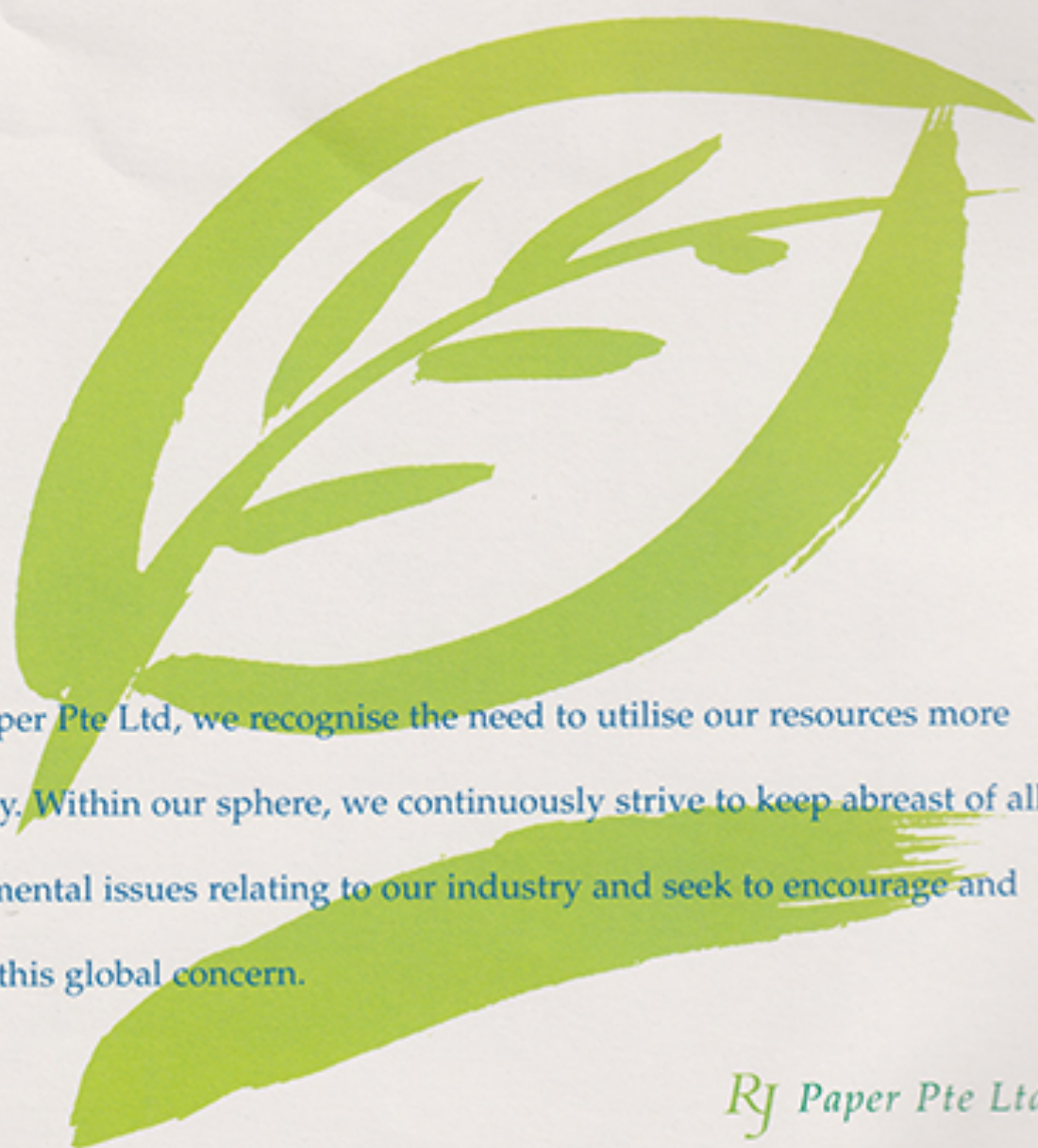
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This year's ASEAN Art Awards final, one of the most exciting forums for art and artists in all of Southeast Asia, returns to its birthplace in Singapore in November. The exhibition of works by the ASEAN finalists promises to reveal a wide-range of two-dimensional art.



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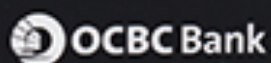
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