





"This is a complete studio," he tells me. "I don't want it to be a famous space where everyone comes. Once you run a gallery, you have to run a programme; the place becomes a machine, you have to keep feeding it with stuff whether it's good or bad. I want this to be a space for us, for me, for an artist to progress."

He and fellow artist Dennis Tan spent six months refurbishing the site by hand, hiring a truck at night, picking up scrap wood from construction site rubbish tips, plucking out the nails and sawing them to create the upstairs extension. ("At first it was like, this is so cool, I'm recycling and all that," he says. "And after that I realised it was a lot of work, man. But doing this it forces you to think about other things. Craft is not just a mindless thing, a mindless activity.")

Now that it's finished, it's a cosy but decidedly niche-interest studio, far from the glitz of the city. Outside, there's an unpolished wooden stepladder; you go up and Charles unlocks the trap door for the loft. There's about 5 m<sup>2</sup> of free space amidst the furniture, and a foot away there's a 3m vertical drop at the parapet with the squash court below, no railings. "Dangerous," I comment. "Who cares?" he laughs. "It's not for audience."

There are no toilets, he adds. Male visitors go in the bushes, women visitors go at the nearby tennis school.



## Charles Lim @ 72-13 OFFSITE By Ng Yi-Sheng

There's an abandoned squash court off Winchester Road. If you look it up on government records, it's listed under Lot 359 – itemised not as a building, but as the land on which it's built.

Artist and CIR Charles Lim discovered the space in 2006 while wandering around Kent Ridge Park, one of those early suburbs of Singapore, full of black-and-white colonial bungalows and secondary rainforest. After a bit of digging around, he managed to get the permission to rent the place last year (the landlord, it turns out, is a former tennis player who represented Canada in the Davis Cup).

Now, the space functions as 72-13 OFFSITE, an artists' studio sponsored by 72-13/TheatreWorks to allow for processing of long-term projects. Charles explains his agenda to me as we sit on paint buckets in the upstairs loft/computer room/workshop.

Yes: despite his best efforts, there are occasional visitors. Dennis did a happening called Open Studio: System Collapse: he'd been toying with floorboards, rummaged from a bankrupt firm in Brunei; he'd stacked them like a house of cards, documenting their rise and collapse, the internal tension, gravity holding them together and breaking them apart. (Visitors began building their own mini-Towers of Babel of their own accord.)

Charles, meanwhile, is doing lower-profile work here. For years he's been developing his project Sea States, a five-part series looking at Singapore's history/geography as an entity both dependent and divorced from its ocean. He shares stories from his research: old sea carnivals on the coastline, islands vanished under the sand of reclamation efforts, one last house in the middle of the sea owned by an ancient Jewish family.

He's long been wary of instant success – he became the local artist who exhibited at Documenta when he was 29, and was thrust into the international art world when he was still too naïve to understand how to work within it. Now he's trying to be a little savvy, slowing himself down, doing fewer pieces (though he recently also exhibited at Manifesta following an encounter with curators RAQS Media Collective at Flying Circus Project 2007).

72-13 OFFSITE, he says, can change what's become the dominant form of art practice for many artists here: writing proposal after proposal for grant money and rushing mediocre work that's seen briefly at a group show and then never heard of again.

"You don't have time to have any relationship with the work," he observes. "Most of the time when I see my work it's the same time when the audience sees the work. What I'm going to emphasise in my own practice is this idea of working in private. Fruitfully doing the project, thinking about what it does, and then when it's ready, the work can be shown anywhere."

An artist, he believes, must create a space for himself. A space where he can experiment, fail, retreat, and, ultimately, grow.

More information about 72-13 OFFSITE at <http://www.artsquash.org>



*"This is one direction which I'm taking with my own art practice, to create a space where the artist becomes the audience, encountering for the first time, re-encountering from different perspectives his own art practice, realizations, thinking, work. This encounter can be public, private or both. Moving the idea of work in progress away from the gallery, art show format into something else. Aims to resist against artist feeding art and servicing spaces, institutions."*

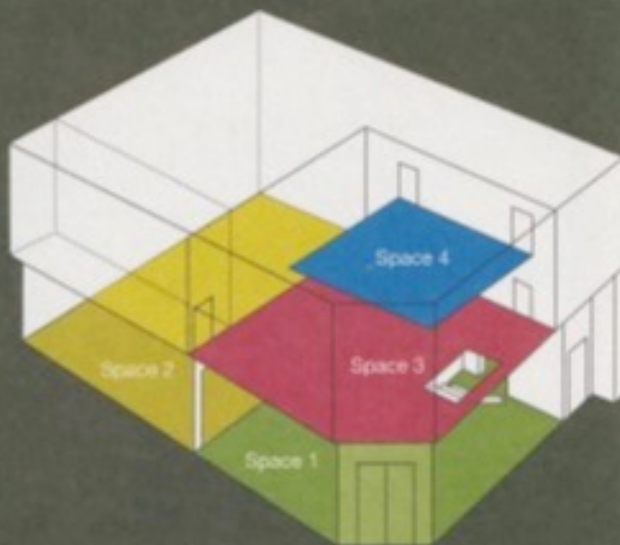
*By Charles Lim*

## About 72-13

A converted rice warehouse, 72-13 is the home of TheatreWorks ([www.theatreworks.org.sg](http://www.theatreworks.org.sg)). The space is flexible enough to be a gallery, a cinema and a theatre. Its primary purpose, through SCAN (Singapore Creative Arts Nucleus) and the ICAA (International Centre of Asian Arts), is to foster collaborations, house residencies from creatives around the world and to encourage hybrid expressions from young Singaporeans. TheatreWorks, responding to the needs of contemporary Asia, has consciously created 72-13 to have a wider and a more inclusive agenda.

## Open Call

72-13 invites creatives to apply to hold once-off non-profit events in the space. TheatreWorks will provide the space free of charge barring technical charges. Please write to Tay Tong at [tworks@singnet.com.sg](mailto:tworks@singnet.com.sg) - curation process will apply.



**THEATREWORKS**

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