

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Arts with a Purpose: NUS artists develop three projects that feature the stories of migrant workers and honour frontline workers.

During these unprecedented times, NUS students, staff and alumni rose to the challenge of inviting the wider community into their artistic processes. Their works span from recognising frontline workers to giving voice to groups affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Singapore, Wednesday 19 August 2020 – While we are all coping with the many challenges brought about by social distancing, students at the National University of Singapore have developed three artistic programmes designed to bring our community together.

Part of the annual HERE! Arts Carnival presented by NUS Centre For the Arts from 19 – 21 August, the three arts programmes are built around the theme “In the Space Between.” The theme aims to empower participants to traverse physical and cultural divides and also appreciate our frontline workers for their service to the community.

All three projects enable some form of collaborative art-making that embraces each artist’s or participant’s voice as a modular facet of a larger, cohesive presentation. The programmes are realised as a physical paper sculpture (*Return to the Fold*), a virtual art installation (*unMask: An Interactive AI-driven Online Audiovisual Installation*), and a series of artistic responses that connect migrant photographers with NUS artists (*Build-A-Bridge*). Each programme also carries a social purpose, from recognizing the contributions of frontline and essential workers, to connecting us with each other to reflect on our common experiences in this new normal.

Return to the Fold: recognizing frontline workers

Return to the Fold is the brainchild of NUS student, Choy Myn, a Year 2 undergraduate from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. The programme traces the construction of a phoenix paper sculpture, titled *Rebirth*, created to honour NUS heroes from the NUS community who have been actively contributing to the fight against COVID-19 and its repercussions.

“I wanted to give people an artistic and meaningful way of thanking our NUS Heroes,” shares Choy, “to recognize those who have been instrumental in keeping NUS running during the circuit breaker and in restarting society again.”

The sculpture is a modular structure assembled by joining approximately 250 origami pieces containing messages of appreciation for NUS heroes. The project is currently receiving messages that can be submitted online, or physically written, folded and mailed till August 31st. Thereafter, the phoenix paper sculpture, Rebirth, will be unveiled in September after the final construction.

unMask: connecting us as a community in times of social distancing

unMask is an audiovisual interactive art project envisioned by Christopher Johann Clarke Shirui, an adjunct lecturer at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music and developed in collaboration with the NUS School of Computing. The work is a rallying call for us to come together for a new tomorrow. Created from uploaded selfies, the evolving audiovisual online artwork reveals an unmasked, agglomerated face that represents our courage and unity in embracing “the new normal”.

“Unmask presents us with an interesting bifurcation in our perceptual experience of the world: we prepare our understanding of the impending landscape, and verify our relationship with the “masks” we equip to face various communities” explains Clarke. “This very intellection is what I hope will allow us to better survey our current surroundings, both of environment and milieu.”

The interactive platform imprints the participant’s selfie onto previous ones, as well as transforms the photograph into an artwork and short audio file that can be kept by participants for their use. Merged together, the ever changing audiovisual artwork is a morphing of the art-like portraits of the participants, accompanied by a unique electronic symphony strung together from the sound snippets. *unMask* will be open to the public on the HERE! Arts Carnival website from 19 August to 31 October 2020.

Build-A-Bridge: connecting people from different walks of life through art

Build-A-Bridge is an effort by Tricia Merican (Year 4, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, NUS) and Tara Teo (Year 2, NUS-Paris Institute of Political Science) to connect artists from the migrant worker community with NUS artists; in hopes of creating a space where understanding, appreciation and connection could be fostered through the arts.

The process was an involved one, where Tricia and Tara brought together artists from diverse backgrounds with support from partners like the Migrant Workers Photography Festival; Migrant Workers’ Centre; students from *Seeds of Good*, an initiative by NUS Office of Student Affairs; and student and alumni artists from NUS.

Drawing from submitted photos, NUS artists connected with migrant worker photographers over Zoom to understand the message behind a photo. “After speaking with Jean it was really enlightening because we could really see how [her photograph] was actually a really planned and well-timed shot which showed that she was a really passionate photographer.” shares Cheong Ka Weng from NUS Electronic Music Lab.

Cheong's group-mate, Tan E-Reng, adds, "The photograph entitled "Our Future" is about people from different walks of life coming together to build our future. No matter where we are from, no matter what language we speak, we are all living in one society, in one world."

"I think this is the best way to make the locals migrants gain a strong relationship" says Jean Ragual, a migrant worker from The Philippines. "[The students] listen to your idea and they encourage you to talk. All the people in the Zoom meeting are the same. You are not different from them. That is the best for me."

Photographs from the migrant artists and the response videos from NUS artists will be premiered at the HERE! Arts Carnival on 19 August 2020. There will also be a livestream on 20 August at 8pm that showcases the journey taken by these artists and the student leaders, Tara and Tricia to create this collaborative narrative.

The three arts projects reflect the ethos of NUS to create a community that effects positive change in the world. Beyond the entertainment value of an artwork, the artists at the HERE! Arts Carnival strived for something bigger – to realise that even though we may be physically apart, we can still connect and create change, one person at a time.

For more information on the HERE! Arts Carnival, please visit cfa.nus.edu.sg/here (site goes live on 19 August, 6 PM). Please view synopses for all programmes in Annex D.

Visit cfa.nus.edu.sg/whats-on for more programmes by NUS Centre For the Arts

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Annex A: About NUS Centre For the Arts (CFA)

Established in 1993, NUS Centre For the Arts is a vibrant space for the appreciation of the arts and nurturing of the creative and inquiring spirit. We support student engagement with the arts and the integration of the arts into the life of the University.

CFA includes the NUS Museum, NUS Baba House and a Talent and Development arm that oversees 21 student arts excellence groups. Through our myriad of programmes, practices, exhibitions, workshops and outreach, such as NUS Arts Festival and the ExxonMobil Campus Concerts, we enrich the university experience and contribute to the building of knowledge and transformation of students.

We also manage facilities such as the University Cultural Centre, with its 1700-seat Hall and 425-seat Theatre, and rehearsal spaces in Runme Shaw CFA Studios and University Town.

For more information, visit cfa.nus.edu.sg

Annex B: About National University of Singapore (NUS)

A leading global university centred in Asia, the National University of Singapore is Singapore's flagship university, which offers a global approach to education and research, with a focus on Asian perspectives and expertise.

NUS has 17 faculties and schools across three campuses. Its transformative education includes a broad-based curriculum underscored by multidisciplinary courses and cross-faculty enrichment. Over 38,000 students from 100 countries enrich the community with their diverse social and cultural perspectives. NUS also strives to create a supportive and innovative environment to promote creative enterprise within its community.

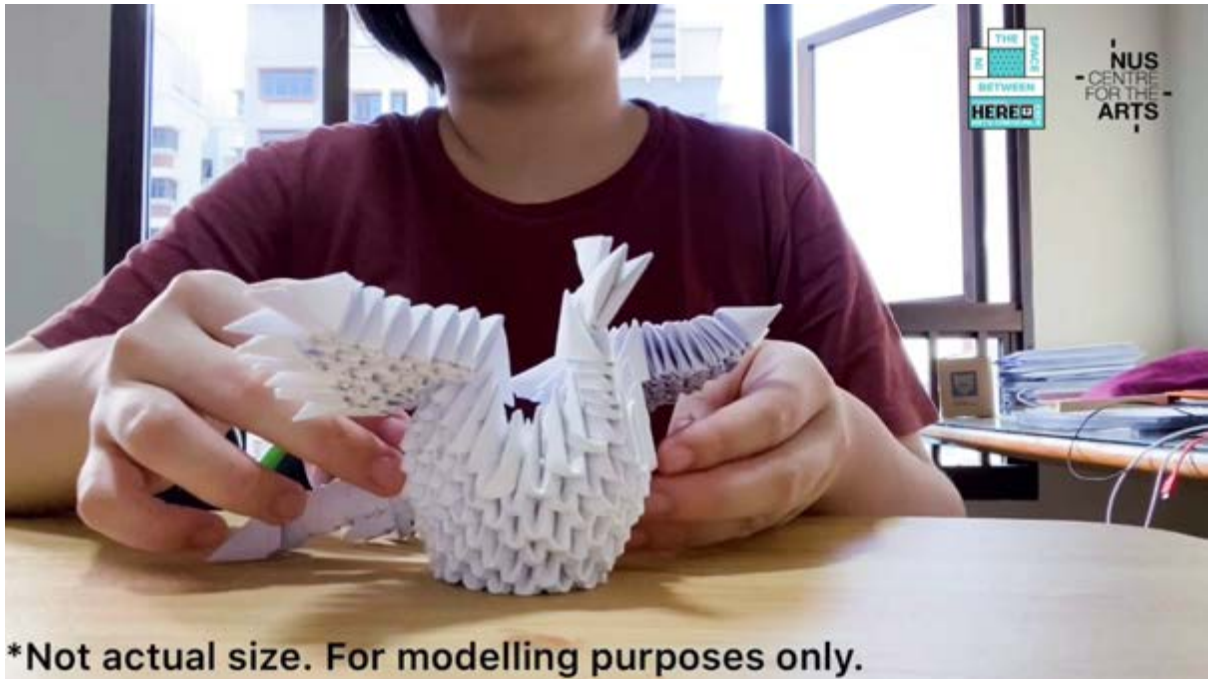
NUS takes an integrated and multidisciplinary approach to research, working with partners from industry, government and academia, to address crucial and complex issues relevant to Asia and the world. Researchers in NUS' Schools and Faculties, 30 university-level research institutes and centres, and Research Centres of Excellence cover a wide range of themes including: energy, environmental and urban sustainability; treatment and prevention of diseases common among Asians; active ageing; advanced materials; risk management and resilience of financial systems. The University's latest research focus is to use data science, operations research and cybersecurity to support Singapore's Smart Nation initiative.

For more information on NUS, please visit nus.edu.sg

Annex C: Photographs of the projects



Caption: Choy Myn calling out to the NUS community to join her in building the phoenix, "Rebirth".



***Not actual size. For modelling purposes only.**

Caption: A model of the phoenix “Rebirth” constructed by Choy Myn.



Caption: unMask: an ever changing audiovisual artwork is a morphing of the art-like portraits of the participants, accompanied by a unique electronic symphony.



Caption: Students of NUS Dance Blast! respond to a photo submitted by Ana Rohana from Indonesia, in their piece titled "Reminisce".



Caption: Jean Ragual shares about her photo with students from NUS Electronic Music Lab.



Caption: Christie Png Wen Hui, Tan E-Reng and Cheong Ka Weng from NUS Electronic Music Lab share about their experience in creating their response piece "Hand-in-Hand".

Annex D: Events at the HERE! Arts Carnival 2020

Virtual Opening Show

All Day, Premiere 19 August 7 PM



The Virtual Opening Show is THE performance to kick off the 2020 HERE! Arts Carnival. Close to 200 students from all 21 CFA groups will showcase their talents in a performance of “When You Believe”, from the animated musical, The Prince of Egypt. Through a montage of synchronized videos, the students unite to remind us that together as one, we can overcome and emerge even stronger.

Virtual Tours

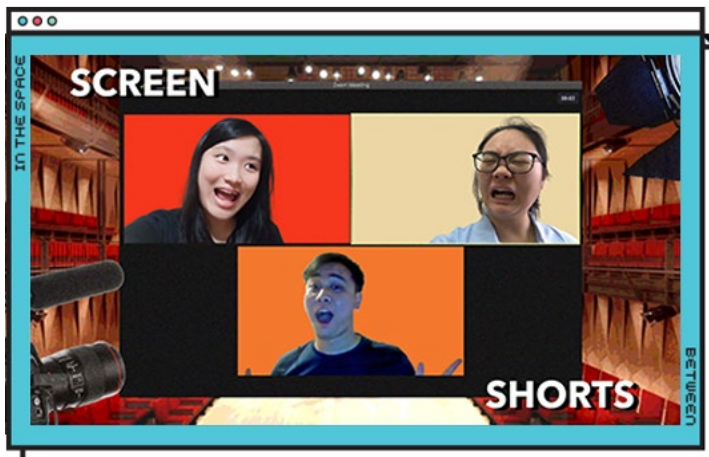
19-21 Aug | 7:00-7:30PM



Explore the University Cultural Centre (UCC), NUS Museum and NUS Baba House, straight from your home! Join us over the three evenings for a peek behind-the-scenes at UCC, and hear the stories behind the exhibits at the NUS Museum and NUS Baba House.

Screen Shorts

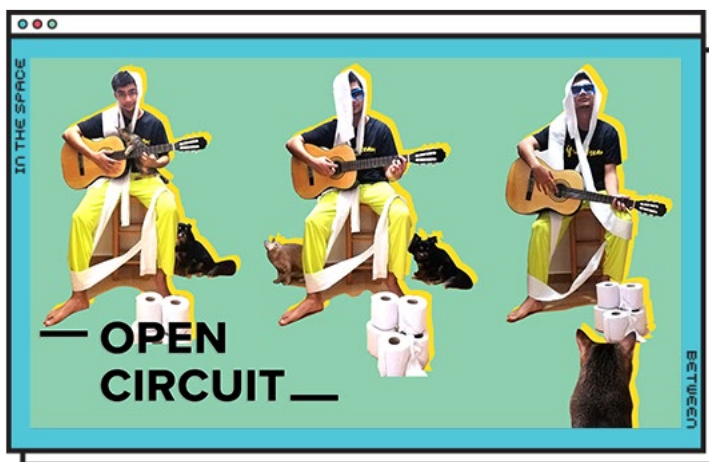
19-20 Aug | 7.30-8:00pm



Screen Shorts brings you into the new world of theatre via teleconference! Making theatre come alive through our common experience of using online communication tools, our student talents will perform four original short plays that cover a range of themes – from sexism and class differences, to friendship and connection.

Open Circuit

19 Aug, 8:00-8:30 pm | 21 Aug, 10-10:10 pm



Make space for laughter and fun! Open Circuit is a talent show that creatively challenged us to use our common circuit breaker experiences as prompts to create a short video performance. Fancy seeing a magician's tricks with toilet paper, or a dancer in PJs? Tune in on 19 Aug to watch the chosen finalists and vote for your favourite videos! To close off the Carnival, join us again on 21 Aug to see who will be crowned **HERE!** Arts Carnival's Open Circuit Champions!

nuSTUDIOS Film Screening: Happy Birthday (PG)

19 Aug | 8.30-9:00pm



Directed by Praveer Tewari and Robert Chua

Join us in a short film screening created by nuSTUDIOS Film Productions, a community of filmmaking enthusiasts in NUS! One of their original films, Happy Birthday, explores the clash between a youthful love and an untimely reminder of mortality in a journey through cup noodles and cigarettes. The screening will be followed by a panel discussion with the filmmakers as they discuss what goes on behind-the-scenes as budding filmmakers in NUS.

Club Sandwich

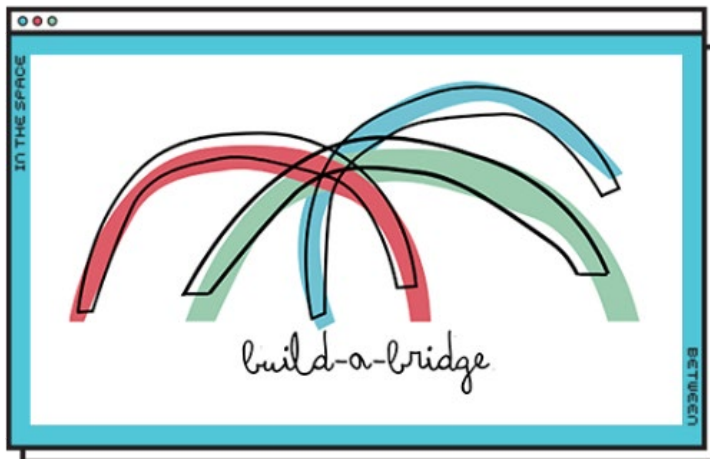
19-21 Aug | 9:00-10:00PM



Wondering which arts group, you should join in the coming year? Well, this is the show for you! Aired over three episodes as a late-night talk show, Club Sandwich lets you in on the secrets of CFA's 21 Arts Excellence groups who will also have to flex their artistic skills—all within a fixed time limit. Get to know these groups even more by participating in a live chat, and stand to win special club-specific giveaways!

Build-A-Bridge

20 Aug | 8:00-9:00PM

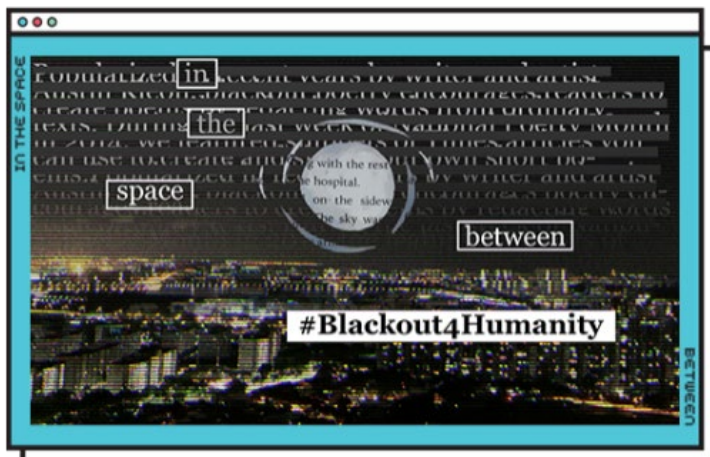


A collaboration between photographers from the Migrant Workers' Community and students from the various student arts groups, Build-A-Bridge hopes to create a space where understanding, appreciation and connection can be fostered through the arts. Inspired by the photographs and stories of these migrant artists, students and alumni have created a wide range of performances through their various art forms. Come see, hear, and learn about the many things we have in common with our migrant friends during Build-A-Bridge.

With special thanks to the Migrant Workers Photography Festival Team, Migrant Workers Centre and the Office of Student Affairs.

#Blackout4Humanity

21 Aug | 7:30-8:00PM



In this time of social distancing, we unite in solidarity from home, despite the space between us, through words in *#Blackout4Humanity*. Hear from our judges, Jennifer Anne Champion, Stephanie Dogfoot and Dr Tan Chee Lay, as they review the shortlisted blackout poetry on 21 Aug, and celebrate the poets in our midst as they inspire us with words of hope, self-care, solidarity and appreciation.

NUS Museum IG Challenge Awards

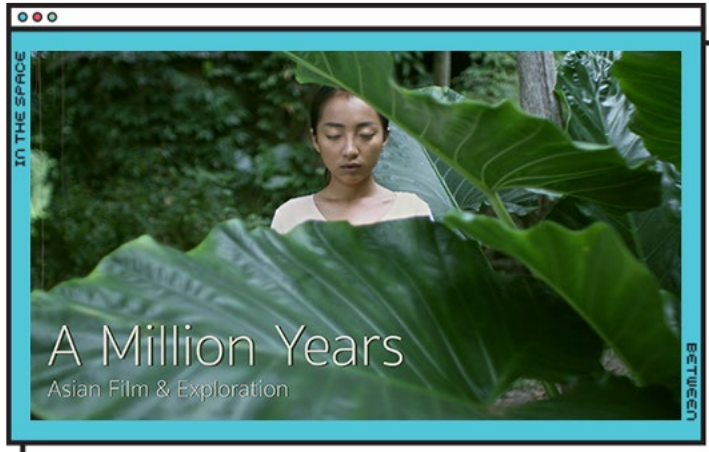
21 Aug | 7:00-7:30pm



While the COVID-19 pandemic led to the temporary closure of museums all over the world, art recreation challenges have taken the internet by storm. Many people have brought iconic works into the confines of their home, by using objects found in everyday spaces to recreate the works for themselves. For our very own NUS Museum Instagram Challenge, we invited you to recreate a sculpture or painting from the museum's Ng Eng Teng Collection. Find out who won by catching our live Awards Ceremony!

NUS Museum Film Programme: A Million Years (PG)

21 Aug | 8:00-9:00pm



In Khmer with English Subtitles

Conceived in relation to the NUS Museum exhibition, tropics, a many (con)sequence, this short-film screening of Cambodian filmmaker Danech San's *A Million Years* anticipates a longer film programme next year, teasing out elements and discussions central to the notion of the tropics. Complemented by an exclusive Q&A session with Danech moderated by film researcher Phoebe Pua, this programme explores the region's relationship with its own landscape where the moving image functions as a self-portrait.

FILM SUMMARY:

A young woman relaxes at a riverfront restaurant with a friend. She recounts stories of her past experiences, finding enchantment in the flows of the river and the trees on the mountains nearby.

unMask: an interactive AI-driven online audiovisual installation

All Days of the Carnival

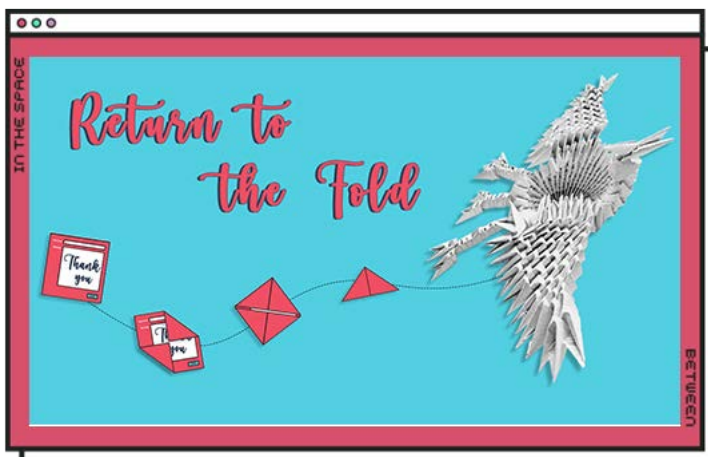


Let us put our best face forward to wish for the day we no longer need our masks on. Specially developed in collaboration with NUS School of Computing, unMask is a rallying call to come together for a new tomorrow. All you need to do is upload a selfie and let unMask unite you with other photos to create a unique audiovisual artwork. Be a part of this collaborative work during the HERE! Arts Carnival, as we find new ways to connect with one another.

In collaboration with NUS School of Computing.

Return to the fold

All Days of the Carnival



Return to the Fold traces the construction of a phoenix paper sculpture, titled Rebirth. Each origami piece contains a message of appreciation for our NUS heroes who have been actively contributing to the fight against COVID-19. You can write your message, fold the origami

piece, and be a part of this tribute to our NUS heroes. Take part and see your messages take flight! You can share your messages physically or online at bit.ly/ReturnToTheFoldOnline

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