

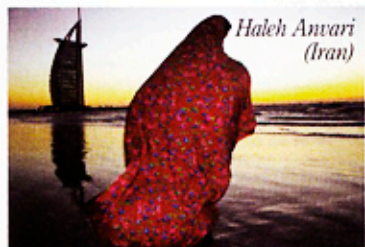


Phillip Toledano (UK)

Where to draw the line?

Singapore's not known for liberal arts policies, but attitudes are slowly evolving.

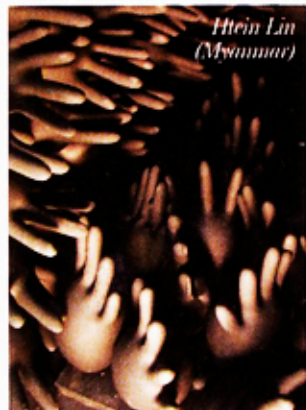
Tania De Rozario shows how next month's M1 Singapore Fringe Festival embodies a wider recognition of challenging art



Haleh Anvari (Iran)



Institute of Critical Zoologists (Singapore)



Htein Lin (Myanmar)



Jonathon Kambouris (USA)



Hans Op de Beek (Belgium)

Barely legal Fringe works illustrate the interface of creativity and criminality

Art is no stranger to the law. For years, artists have created work that questions it, works within it, flouts it, or simply makes space for discourse regarding it. The upcoming M1 Singapore Fringe Festival plans to challenge the often problematic relationship between these two inseparable entities, under the theme *Art & the Law*.

Known for its ongoing attempt at pushing boundaries, the 2010 instalment of the annual event will feature 20 groundbreaking works from 12 countries, with the visual arts section featuring works from Belgium, Myanmar, England, Iran, the USA and Singapore. Aiming to expand the definition of 'law', the festival seeks to explore boundaries constructed by culture, religion, relationships, nature and even the structures of art-making itself. Organised and curated by The Necessary Stage, projects to look out for include *A Guide to the Common Flora and Fauna of the World* by the Institute of Critical Zoologists (Singapore), a fictitious scientific organisation dealing with animal-related issues; *Last Meals* by Jonathan Kambouris (US), which touches on copyright infringement and the death penalty;

There's no doubt the relationship between art and the law in Singapore is no longer limited to censorship and state funding

and *The Scale of Justice* by Htein Lin (Myanmar), who investigates detention within military Burma.

The notion of fine art working within or against the boundaries of the law – and vice versa – is not new to Singapore. Just take the punishment and subsequent censorship of Joseph Ng, whose 1994 performance involved the clipping of pubic hair as a protest against media reportage of gay issues. Fifteen years on, Boo Jun-feng's 'Tanjong Rhu', a short film addressing the same arrests, premiered at the 2009 Singapore International Film Festival. Is this evidence of a sea change in what's deemed permissible,

or acceptable? Given that the film was subsequently axed without explanation, after it had already received a warm response at Berlin and Tokyo festivals, I'm inclined to think not.

There's still much debate over the validity of any politically charged work exhibited within the confines of an institution. But there's no doubt the relationship between art and the law in Singapore is no longer limited to censorship and state funding. With a newly nominated member of parliament now representing the community, the prospect of a Censorship Review Board, and e-group ArtsEngage discussing issues that range from money to bureaucracy, even sceptics like me are wondering whether the next subtle pushing of boundaries is going to make some real news.

After all, the Fringe Festival is not the only creative platform that seems to be taking interest in the law this year. Agus Suwage, who was accused by Indonesian lawmakers of creating pornography and not art, responded with a series of works whose subject matter was the same law that chastised him. The law in turn took an interest in art, when artist Seelan Palay's film *One Nation Under Lee* was seized by authorities. Art that pushes for human rights has also been a hot topic this year, with artists such as Sha Najak showcasing her works at Post-Museum in collaboration with Project X, a group looking into the concerns of sex workers.

Furthermore, MARUAH (Singapore Working Group for ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism) recently decided to collaborate with artists to raise human-rights awareness. Keen to create a monthly forum for art, the organisation hopes to launch the first fruits of this project with TickleArt – a public arts space dedicated to creative experimentation – on 10 December. TickleArt's co-curator Zarina Muhammad says: 'So much of art today revolves around social issues. Artists are no longer concerned simply with aesthetics. They are interested in the significance of objects, and what they represent within the larger contexts of the social and the political.' It looks as though 2010 will be an exciting year for art – in conjunction with the law. *The M1 Singapore Fringe Festival* (www.singaporefringe.com) takes place from 13-24 Jan 2010.