

Singapore Wants In

By Carina Cha

RIDING THE TAIL-END OF THE ART WORLD'S MOST RECENT OBSESSION WITH BIENNALES AND TRIENNALES, Singapore's government is taking careful measure to join the ranks for its own Singapore Biennial—but only after a few test-modules are run.

In the works since late 2003, the plan is to first kick off SENI Singapore 2004 in October—*seni* is the Malay word for art—followed by Singapore Art 2005 (SA). The efforts of Singapore's National Arts Council and National Heritage Board have been pulled together to create a “platform to develop a visual arts hub.” Though some might use caution when learning a city would like to become a “hub” of any sort, SENI and SA 2005 organizers have hopes for attracting the global art scene to its city.

SENI's main exhibition will focus on urban artist collectives (from in and around Southeast Asia, including Singapore and several international participants), as part of its investigation of contemporary art trends and will be called “Home Fronts.” In a symposium to discuss the themes culled from the work contained in “Home Fronts,” “48 Documents” will not only be a forum for discussion but also a multi-medium event taking place over the course of forty-eight hours.

Additionally, Singapore will play host to Multimedia Art Asia Pacific (MAAP), a new media art exhibition and conference to be held in conjunction with SENI and SA. Started in Brisbane in 1998, this special exhibition showcases new media art—that is to say video, performative video, digital and computer art, etc.—and its technologies. MAAP's mission of 2004 will be illustrated through its theme “Gravity” (of real and virtual space, social gravity, the gravity of ideas) and will be thoroughly documented in a

special website.

An exciting event to take place for the duration of SENI (1 October–28 November 2004) is *The Epic*, wherein artists Rutherford Chang and Emily Chua will black-out with permanent marker parts of *The Straits Times's* front page. It results in the viewer being able to see only fragments from the paper's headline pictures.

Unfortunately, scheduling for 2005's SA is still in the works, so information regarding exhibiting artists has yet to trickle in. However, its main goal is to activate members of Singapore's larger art community to seek out, exhibit and award talented new visual artists for their work.

With Singapore hosting such a variety of art exhibitions in the heart of South East Asia, SENI, SA and MAAP will, hopefully, lure art tourists and industry insiders. Singapore's National Arts Council and National Heritage Board would like their city to play a crucial part in generating a cultural dialogue, in addition to showing off some great work.

