

YOUNG ARTIST AWARD 2017

JOSHUA IP



Kahchun

Joshua is an active editor and anthologist, committed to developing new voices in our literary scene.



destination: INK spoken word event,
organised by spacer.gif collective, 2016
Photo courtesy of Crispin Rodrigues

Joshua Ip (b. 1982) is a poet, editor, and literary organiser. He has published four poetry collections with Math Paper Press, most recently 'footnotes on falling' (2017). He has won accolades across multiple genres. His debut poetry collection, 'sonnets from the singlish' (2012) was the joint recipient of the Singapore Literature Prize (2014). He also won the Golden Point Award for English Prose (2013), was placed 2nd for English Poetry (2011), and was awarded an Honorable Mention for Chinese Poetry (2015). He was selected by Griffith Review as one of Asia's '20 New Voices under 40' for a multi-city tour of Australian festivals. He has performed his work at international literary festivals in London, New York, Guangzhou and Goa.

Joshua is an active editor and anthologist, committed to developing new voices in our literary scene. He has co-edited seven anthologies including the 'SingPoWriMo' series (2014-2016), 'A Luxury We Cannot Afford' series (2014) as well as 'Unfree Verse' (2017), the first historical anthology examining 80 years of Singaporean formal poetry, and 'Twin Cities: An Anthology of Twin Cinema Poetry from Singapore and Hong Kong' (2017). He edits the 'Ten Year Series' imprint, providing a platform for writers who have gone through the first Manuscript Bootcamp in Southeast Asia.

He co-founded Singapore Poetry Writing Month in 2014, challenging poets to write a poem daily for 30 days online. The latest edition in April 2017 gathered more than 4,000 writers. He helps to run 'poetry.sg', a digital archive of Singapore poets with critical introductions, videos, selected works and bibliographies. He facilitates emerging writers in writing workshops and, in 2016, brought these programmes together under Sing Lit Station, a literary non-profit that seeks to develop the Singapore writing scene. In its first year, it has generated numerous outreach programmes – pop-up readings in MRTs and buses, invisible poems on sidewalks that appear in the rain and poetry workshops for the migrant worker community. ■



A CONVERSATION WITH JOSHUA IP

**“Nobody do,
ownself do. Nobody
know how, everybody
anyhow together.”**



Singapore Writers Festival, Closing Debate:
“This house believes Singaporeans are in the
mood for love”, 2016

Photo courtesy of Gwee Li Sui

Tell us about your earliest memories encountering the arts. Who or what were your key influences?

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The first two poems I properly read were Rupert Brooke’s ‘The Soldier’ and Wilfred Owen’s ‘Dulce et decorum est’. I was in secondary school at that time; before that I was already familiar with poetry through musicals and lyrics, parodies and wordplay. In later years, I was influenced by the wit of Wendy Cope, the music of Yeats and Larkin, the linguistic sensitivity of Arthur Yap and E. E. Cummings, the virtuoso verbosity of Fang Wen Shan and Hopkins.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced when creating new works?

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Lack of time, of course, as work and life set in after my well-exposed school years. At some level, a lack of motivation, as exposure to language and conceptual poetry in school with professors like Charles Bernstein and Kenneth Goldsmith tickled my intellect but dissuaded my interest in originality and the poetic ‘I’.

What motivated you to continue in spite of these challenges?

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The encouragement and prodding of a few fast friends – Timothy Wang in my teenage years, to submit a portfolio to the Creative Arts Programme; Kenny Leck and Stephanie Ye, as some of my first readers who provided the encouragement to submit work for competitions and then publication; Grace Chua, who threw down a gauntlet to get a book out. Many published Singaporean poets also blazed the path before and provided generous advice and help while I muddled around – in particular, a drive up to Scotland to see Alvin Pang read in 2012 led to countless ideas and inspiration thereafter.



What is your personal philosophy in life, and how does it translate into your writing?

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Nobody do, ownself do. Nobody know how, everybody anyhow together. Laughter and tears are two sides of the same coin. The first makes me leap in fearlessly and foolishly into countless projects and poems. The second makes me recognise that I often need help, and that artistic collaboration and mutual accountability are large parts of my achievements so far. The third is visible in my material.

What do you want the audience to experience through your poems?

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My first collection, 'sonnets from the singlish', was blurbed by an old friend and fellow poet as 'a frothy frolic with an aftertaste of despair.' I particularly like that description – bathos and pathos come hand in hand for me, and it is through the ability to both laugh and cry at ourselves that we truly feel life in all of its incoherent glory.



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“Writers under 30” at Pedder on Scotts, by BooksActually, moderated by Joshua Ip, 2017
Photo courtesy of Amber Lin

What advice would you give to students who want to pursue a career in your field?

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Don't write. Work for a decade, preferably in a job which makes you miserable at least 20% of the time. Travel, if you're lucky enough to afford it – if you can't, read. Make multiple poor life choices. Give away bits of yourself and steal significant bits of other people in return. Be at least noddingly familiar with the pleasures of the flesh, within one's respective moral schema. Lick the plate of life clean of every last drop of sauce. Then come back and write. ■

“Lick the plate of life clean of every last drop of sauce. Then come back and write.”



WORDS OF APPRECIATION

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