



YOUNG ARTIST AWARD 2023

## MELISSA TAN



'At the Edge of the Universe Window', Richard Koh Fine Art (RKFA), Artspace @ Helutrans, Singapore, 14 March – 4 April 2014.

Photo courtesy of Melissa Tan

MELISSA TAN (b. 1989) is a visual artist based in Singapore. Her interest lies in a fascination with nature and composing different methods of mapping it. Her recent projects explore the poetics of moving space objects and rethinking of myths that are intertwined. By employing a combination of drawing, digital rendering, and laser-cut methods, she explores her concepts through the visual language of different mediums.

Since receiving her BA (Fine Arts) from LASALLE College of The Arts, Melissa has participated in six solo shows and numerous group exhibitions, including a recent presentation at Art SG 2023. She was the youngest artist in the 2016 edition of the Singapore Biennale: An Atlas of Mirrors. She participated in several overseas exhibitions and residencies, including the Chatou, Île des Impressionnistes in France; Strarta Art Fair at the Saatchi Gallery in London; and the Dena Foundation Artist Residency Programme in France, which was supported by the National Arts Council. Her works are included in the public collections of Singapore Art Museum (SAM), Marina Bay Sands (Singapore), Government of Singapore Investment Corporation (GIC) (New York), Meta (Singapore), and CapitaLand (Singapore).

With her studio located at Goodman Arts Centre, Melissa is an active participant in the arts community with involvements in open studios/houses and cross-collaboration projects with fellow neighbours. She was also one of the mentors invited by OH! Open House for 'Proposals for Waterloo' in 2017. In addition, Melissa has hosted several internship programmes with various art schools and mentored aspiring artists and curators who have gone on to establish themselves in their respective fields.

Most recently, Melissa was appointed as an advisor to Haridas Contemporary, a local gallery founded by her husband, while maintaining her full-time practice. In this capacity, she endeavours to support young artists by seeding opportunities for exhibitions, dialogues, and professional counsel.



## A CONVERSATION WITH MELISSA TAN

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

As a child, I spent a lot of time with my mother reading with me. Admittedly, I developed rather late with my reading and writing, and I gravitated instead towards pictures and visuals to make sense of storylines. I was exposed to beautiful illustrations and was enamoured by them. I would copy using tracing paper and draw the images multiple times into an exercise book. The drawings in these books were richly detailed and they were probably why I developed my fondness for intricacy. My work today embodies a quality of storytelling, giving viewers clues to the narrative.

**Please share what a typical day in your life as a visual artist is like.**

Depending on the project(s) I am working on, my day can be quite different. At this moment, I'm working on a series of metalworks.



Melissa in her studio, Goodman Arts Centre 2021.  
Photo courtesy of Melissa Tan

This series begins with mapping the location of certain asteroids in the galaxy. I then spend a lot of time reading and researching each character that is represented by each artwork. I'm also working a lot on my computer using programs to ascertain the forms before sending them to a metal fabricator. Later, I'd use resin to stick the fabricated metals together. The process is rather labour-intensive.

It is also quite loud and messy and I am thankful for my kind neighbours at Goodman Arts Centre who graciously tolerate the noise whenever I use my machines!

**What were some of the biggest challenges you faced in your artistic journey and what motivated you to continue in spite of these challenges?**

The most important aspect of being an artist is to be financially self-sustaining. The secondary concern is having a suitable space to work. This is vital as my current work involves sanding tools and chemicals.

In my early years, I was working in my bedroom and the materials I used were dictated by spatial limitations. I had to inconvenience my family with my art-making. I often commandeered the family dining table for printing and even converted the common toilet into a dark room to work on my silkscreen prints. Thankfully, I had a supportive family.

**What do you want the audience to experience through your works?**

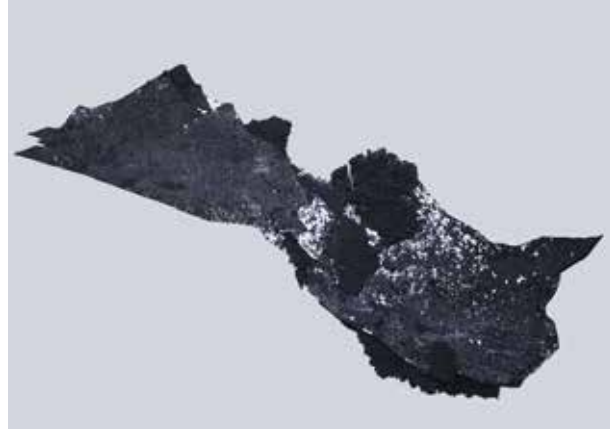
It will be nice if they can relate to them. Their reading completes the work when they find their own meaning in it. My current work involves hidden imagery from mythologies across various cultures and times which some may find familiar. I reference paintings, sculptures and antiquities. I find great joy in sieving through these materials to find what I feel works best for the characters whose voices I try to convey to viewers.

**What advice would you give the younger generation who would like to pursue a career in the arts?**

A lecturer of mine once said: Never wait around for inspiration as it is unreliable. That stuck with me. It reminds me to be proactive and stay curious. We must not wait for things to happen.

When I graduated from art school, I was lucky to secure an internship with the Singapore Art Museum. I learned so much from my mentors who were immensely patient. The internship helped shape me. I was fortunate to have insights into the arts industry. I'm a firm believer of mentorship programmes for the young.

It is also helpful to have a good support system. When challenges arise, it is good to have close friends and contemporaries who encourage you to continue art-making.



'The Shape of Things to Come', Richard Koh Fine Art (RKFA), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 24 May - 14 June 2018.  
Photo courtesy of Melissa Tan

### What are your hopes and vision for Singapore's visual arts scene?

I hope to see more young artists on the trajectory to become financially sustainable. When that happens, it will spur a change in the public's attitude towards the arts as a viable ecosystem for jobs. In turn, this should generate excitement for the arts and Singaporeans will be more supportive of local talents.

### How does receiving the Young Artist Award change things for you?

I am very grateful for this award. I do not think it will change me as an artist entirely but I regard it as a validation of my practice. I hope this award opens up new avenues of conversation with professionals from different fields who share aspirations and concerns of contemporary life.

### Tell us more about how you would like to further grow and contribute to the arts scene.

I hope to grow alongside the burgeoning local arts scene and provide opportunities and counsel to young artists. In addition, I hope to exhibit more on the regional arts circuit to create dialogue with our neighbours and for them to sample the creativity of Singaporean contemporary art. I believe our local art scene has a lot to offer.



## WORDS OF APPRECIATION

A village is required to raise this artist and I am forever in its debt. This achievement would not have been possible without this group of people:

Both my families for their unwavering support. My parents who are my cornerstones, and my sisters for their love and wise counsel.

Adeline Kueh, Betty Susiarjo, David Chew, Hazel Lim, Ian Woo, Jason Wee, Jeremy Sharma, Louis Ho, Salleh Japar, Silvia Chan, Susie Lingham and Susie Wong for their mentorship and guidance. Andrea Fam, Euginia Tan, Geraldine Kang, Jodi Tan, Jon Chan, Khairullah Rahim, Kian-Peng Ong, Samantha Yap, Sebastian Low, Sheng Yuen Loo, and Vanessa Ban for advocating my practice.

LASALLE College of the Arts, Gajah Gallery, ISA Art and Design, OH! Open House, Singapore Art Museum, and all private collections that have presented my work.

Special thanks to Richard Koh and Michael Low for nurturing my career at Richard Koh Fine Art and allowing me to grow alongside amazing artists for the past 10 years.

Lastly, I would like to thank my husband, Christiaan Haridas, who has been by my side through thick and thin. Your unwavering belief in me gave me the strength to keep moving forward. Always moving forward, together.