

ANNEX A: ABOUT THE CULTURAL MEDALLION AND 2024 RECIPIENTS

About the Cultural Medallion

The Cultural Medallion was instituted in 1979 as an initiative of the late President, then Minister of Culture, Mr Ong Teng Cheong, to recognise individuals who have attained artistic excellence in their fields of artistic practice and made a distinction to the nation's arts and culture.

The Cultural Medallion is conferred by the President of the Republic of Singapore and administered by the National Arts Council. As of 2024, 137 artists have been conferred the Cultural Medallion.

Cultural Medallion nominees are assessed upon the extent to which they have achieved or demonstrated all of the following:

- Artistic excellence and professional maturity manifest through an outstanding and distinctive body of work
- Extraordinary contribution and leadership in shaping the development of Singapore's arts and culture; advancing their field of arts practice; bringing the arts to the local public through educational or community development efforts
- Being an inspiration and role model to other artists
- Good standing and recognition internationally

In 2001, the Cultural Medallion Grant of \$50,000 was introduced to support the artistic pursuits of all CM recipients, and the grant was increased to \$80,000 in 2006. Since 2011, it has been renamed the Cultural Medallion Fund to signify greater flexibility, ease of access and an expanded scope of support of arts-related projects that will positively impact local arts and culture.

Recipients of 2024 Cultural Medallion

Ghanavenothan Retnam (Age, 63) – Indian Classical Flautist, Composer and Conductor



Ghanavenothan Retnam (b. 1961), a Singapore-born Indian classical flautist, music composer, and conductor, embodies the harmonious fusion of tradition and innovation in the global arts landscape.

With a career spanning five decades, the musician has made an indelible mark on Indian classical music through a dedication to cross-cultural collaborations and nurturing future generations. Ghanavenothan's musical education encompasses Indian, Thai, Chinese, and Indonesian traditions – a diverse background involving composing and arranging music for the ASEAN region, where the artist often leads the Singapore delegations.

Excelling in multiple instruments and vocal techniques, Ghanavenothan has performed as a soloist, accompanist, composer, arranger, and conductor on countless stages. The resident music director at Bhaskar's Arts Academy has written innovative compositions for music ensembles and dance productions which have received critical acclaim, bridging cultural boundaries and captivating audiences worldwide.

Ghanavenothan is deeply committed to arts education and community engagement, sharing valuable knowledge through talks, masterclasses, and workshops and fostering a greater appreciation for Indian classical music among students of all ages. Besides lecturing at Institutes of Higher Learning, Ghanavenothan also co-taught music as part of the Ministry of Education's Artist-Mentor Scheme. Contributing to the professional development of music teachers, the composer has been commissioned to write original scores for Singapore's school music syllabus. Ghanavenothan's involvement in signature community platforms and philanthropic endeavours highlight the transformative power of music in everyday life.

The education advocate's notable achievement is a specialised training for students, as well as conducting 14 flute *arangetrams* and creating Singapore's first-ever Carnatic Flute Ensemble. The dedication to the arts has led to numerous accolades, including the Young Artist Award (1995), the Lifetime Achievement and Humanitarian Medallion from the World Peace and Harmony Organisation (2003), and the prestigious

titles *Sangitha Kala Bushana* (2015) and *Natya Sangeetha Choodamani* (2018).

Ghanavenothan stands as a beacon of artistic excellence and cultural diplomacy, inspiring generations of artists and audiences with undiminished creativity and commitment to the arts.

Siew Hock Meng (Age, 82) – Social Realist Paint Artist



Siew Hock Meng (b. 1942) is highly regarded as a second-generation Nanyang artist who excels at pastel compositions, oil portraits, and allegorical artworks imbued with nuanced sensuality and subtextual impact.

Born in Johor and educated in Singapore, the aspiring painter joined the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts as a student of pioneer artist Cheong Soo Pieng. After one year, Hock Meng became more interested in the meaning and purpose of art and life rather than simply learning painting techniques. Abandoning art, the erstwhile student became a rubber tapper in Malaya so that there would be more time to read about aesthetics and philosophy.

In 1975, Hock Meng returned to Singapore to run an art gallery and devoted time and energy to portraiture, which led to a growing reputation and strong patronage in Indonesia and Taiwan. The artist then explored other subjects and themes, such as human figures and the lives and cultures of Asia which was a favourite destination over the years. With an observational eye, Hock Meng painted Singapore's landscapes, as well as places in the region, such as Bali, Myanmar, India, and Cambodia, which have significantly influenced the artist's Realist approach.

Hock Meng shared personal thoughts on art and civilisation in a fully illustrated book 'The Key to Human Civilisation: The History of Pictorial Language.' The author has also published five coffee-table books which showcase a substantial and sustained body of works over six decades.

Besides being active in the Equator Art Society, the aficionado was a core committee member at several art societies including the Singapore Watercolour Society.



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Hock Meng was also awarded the National Day Medal for Fine Arts in 1971, and the award for Visual Arts Creation, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts Alumni Association Singapore, in 1981 and 1984.