SHARING MY VISION OF
ARCHITECTURE

Inspiration From God

"Architecture is not just fine lines but an inspiration from God"

- Sunflower Chong Sun Wah
Sunflower’s Profile

"Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see the shadow. It's what sunflowers do." -- Helen Keller

Sunflower Chong is a Visionary. An ardent art lover she believes that art is a vehicle to reach a higher power. In short she is an ‘Enigma’, putting all her faith in her Creator. She follows the sweet mystery in life and this spiritual path never cease to amaze even the closest to her.

What carries Sunflower through life is her own special belief that all will be taken care of. Her determination and will power is a rare show of faith and belief. Having escaped from her first Lebanese husband from Abu Dhabi, armed with nothing but her 2 children, she returned to Singapore and with tears written a poem "Let me enhance Worldwide Unity with share, care and love by understanding people's need"

Let Me Enhance Worldwide Unity With Share, Care And Love By Understanding The People’s Needs.

God I am not, but an expression,
And a gift of God.
Saint I am not,
Nor a Saint would I try to be.

An ordinary being I am,
Born with qualities true,
To work for my country’s needs,
And the aspirations of its people.

At times I am not what you see or what I am,
With time I hope you will understand me.
Though I like not its sham, drudgery and broken dreams,
This world still is a beauty shining with ‘welcome beams.’

In fact I am contended and very happy,
I am still alive and free,
Especially on my return to Singapore,
Where many duties await me.

My devotion and loyalty are strong and even mighty,
That I may contribute fully to our lost society.
Let us not lose another twenty-five years,
If you can lend me your ears,

My special task is help us to achieve an identity,
To foster the people’s happiness and unity.
This great mission that I shoulder, will it be too big for me I wonder?
Am I ready, to take on such a great responsibility?

To achieve what I feel God wants of me,
The people’s support and understanding I seek.
The only answer to counter I believe,
Is the fostering of Universal LOVE as our Belief?

Religion is pure and good,
If there is only ONE to believe.
It can be mean and nasty,
When different sects contend to lead,

Please listen carefully to me,
Lend me your ears if you are not too busy,
Your full attention I need,
To understand all my yearnings and beliefs.

To reach our goal of unity,
Let’s build with one identity,
Preached goodness, give kindness,
Conducted in fairness, strive for Inner Happiness.

-To grow strong roots of true unity; Act in them is our first necessity -Sunflower 1983

Receiving little education from school, having failed her O-Levels at the age of 16 years old, she was born in a time when it was thought that it was not necessarily for women to have higher education. For her the School of Life is ‘The Life the University through Experiences’. In short, the world is her universities and the experiences are her teachers.

A natural adventure seeker, she went to the Gulf War as the only woman there to bring the Russians to put out the oil wells fire. She has written proposals on new forms of Architecture and presented it to the authority. Unfortunately, they stubbed her due to various reasons.

As a Singaporean she has a deep sense of duty and responsibility following the S21 spirit, long before the campaign started. This is just one of the examples amongst the
numerous others.

Taunted by many people as radicalism and an idealist she never once changed her principals for the sake of conformity. Her unorthodox way of living life has also drawn much criticism but her deepest satisfaction is that her family has complete trust and respect for her dreams and aspirations.

She is a devoted and a patient mother of two. Gabriel, her son 23 years old and her daughter Greta 21 years old support her cause ardently. In fact, World Harmony Day was an initial mother and daughter effort, which blossomed into a full team working World Harmony Day.

Gabriel said, “The dreams must go on, but my education can stop”. He has been a silent pillar of strength to both women and they are a family with great passion because her values passed to them – ‘Share, Care and Love by Understanding People’s Need’.

Her understanding that there is Creator’s Law and Man’s Law and Creator’s Job (Compel by ‘The Consciousness’) and Man’s Job (It is all about Survival). Both she tried to fulfilled to her best ability, as she is taking the middle road.

Even with little in their bank account, they are still preserving for a greater cause as the banks in their hearts are filled with richness from working on World Harmony Day.

By Greta Georges

20 February 2003
Brother Joseph McNally's Studio
90 Goodman Road
Singapore 439053

Delivery Order

Send to: Singapore Management University
47 Scotts Road
#06-00, Goldbell Towers,
Singapore 228233

Attention: Mr Ho Kwon Ping

From: Anonymous

Date: March 7, 2000

I piece of sculpture titled "Flying Golden Deer".

Office of the President
Singapore Management University

Received by: [Signature]

Name: [Signature]

Tel.: 344 4300  Fax.: 346 5708  e-mail: brother_mcnally@lasallesia.edu.sg
I HAVE DONATED THE FLYING GOLDEN DEER TO SMU WITH THE HOPE THAT THE STUDENTS WILL BE GIVING BACK TO THE SOCIETY.

Behind the **BEAUTY** and the **BEAST** are the **BRAINS**.

**Bro Jo:** But Sunflower where is the other **BRAIN**?

**Sunflower:** Bro. Jo, since you name the **BEAST** Flying Golden Deer, I guess it must have flown off to look for him to keep him company since you are with me.

**NB:** The unfinished sculpture of Bro Jo was kept in the store for more than 2 years until destiny brought me to Bro Jo. Here the story, Bro Jo was in the hospital and I took care of him and once he came out of the hospital the first thing he did was to bring out the sculpture from the store and finished the tail part of the deer. I received a call from his secretary and she screamed with excitement and shouted out that the deer look like me :) And after I put down the phone I saw a flash, the deer gracing in SMU, so I bought the deer for SMU because Bro Jo’s spirit will guide the students to the right path of giving back to society...
Sharing My Vision of Architecture

'Inspiration from God'

Art Is the Future

“Neither a man nor a nation can live without a higher idea, and there is only one such idea on earth, that of an immortal human soul; all the other higher ideas by which men live follow from that.” – Dostoyevsky

On Straits Times 1 December 2003, Mr. Scott Bedbury Branding guru advises Singapore to make its image more 'human' to make the country more appealing to people around the world. In short, he suggested that Singapore would benefit from having a 'warmer' image that could draw more investors to Singapore as well. What was he driving at when he said that Singapore image should be more ‘human’? I believe he was telling us that Singapore should be a culture city and this means we got to make Art our future, Asian Renaissance here we come!!

Gone is the literature of the great cultural heroes, who struggled and suffered and succeeded in the grounding of a culture, a creed, and an ideal. Gone is the time, when novel and drama were built around simple personalities, who through their sincerity and selflessness in the struggles of their world, mirrored the problem of human life and at the same time opened a wider horizon of human possibilities – Where are the creative thinkers and visionaries of our time? Where are great ideas? Because in this Capitalist world people is too smart, no one is prepared to sacrifice to chase high ideal without any monetary gain.

Pico della Mirandola in his Oratio said, “nothing in the world can be found that is more worthy of admiration than man”, which is often considered as the manifesto of the Renaissance and of Humanism, we become conscious of the high degree which the dehumanization of life and especially the arts has reached in our time. When a journalist asked Andre Malraux, why in our time there are no longer paintings or sculptures of great men like in the renaissance, answered: “Because modern man does not believe any longer in man”. How are we going to bring back the faith in humanity?

My Belief

There is only one language
The language of our heart
Where we will unite as one
Thanks to God Almighty

There is only one religion
The religion of love
Art is the human expression of that love and love is God
Love is the connection to God Almighty

There is only one caste
The caste of humanity
Everyone is born equal
That’s the gift of God Almighty

There is only one God
He is omnipresent
The power is to believe not to analyze
We must continue to have faith in God Almighty

- There is only One God belonging to all - Sunflower 1983

Through nurturing of arts with the understanding that “Art is the human expression of that love and Love is God. Love is the connection to God" we can bring back the faith in humanity. Art has spiritual power and the potential to be the Universal Language for the world, with this knowledge and wisdom I believe Art could shape the future with great faith because we need the future’s world to be ruled with love, compassion and this balance is long overdue for the whole of humanity. Do Singaporeans understand why Bro. Joseph McNally sacrificed his entire life to build LaSalle? All these years of sacrifices what did he get out of it? He got nothing in term of monetary gain but what he got is the love of God. Like Bro Jo I too believed that Art got a hidden spiritual power and only those who believes in it could bring out this kind of power even without education. Sad to say that we have allowed Capitalism to take over the meaning of our existence, for this reason, we witnessed so much violence in this present world. There is an urgent need to bring back the ‘Spirit of the Human Soul’ to save humanity.

A Great Nation must have Art as its core because true art is the best way to bring back our soul as it distracts you from the materialistic world. I know that art has a spiritual connection to ‘The Consciousness’, especially in the performing arts. It cannot be bought. We cannot have art just because our leaders want it. We cannot just say, "We have money now, we are ready for art, and we must have art" Similarly, the Government can’t just expect the citizens to produce babies, "Now I wanted so many babies, go and produce and I will pay you so much per head". It is very worrisome with such pragmatic attitude as I already heard young couples that just got married and they are delaying the pregnancy to wait for the Government announcement how much they will be pay per head. How can a strong and meaningful society evolved through Capitalist mean of you give me so much I will pay you so much? It is so sad and worrisome for the future generation if this is the way to go in nation building? I strongly believe once we allowed Capitalism to dominate the world, it will attack our minds, our culture, our religion, and other things will become the target and this means our emotion is eliminated thus we can’t feel our soul because money has replaced our
consciousness, thus a sense of Godliness in us! Therefore, in our present society, the artists and us must be fully aware of our time and try to understand the crisscrossing and complex social and cultural problems before we will be able to contribute and reintegration by implanting an enthusiastic creativity into the growing generation. The artist must become a conscious and responsible co-worker in the struggle for permanent peace, solidarity, and cooperation between the various national, religious and ideological groups so that the present selfish attitude will disappear and what appear will be a better society feel with love and compassion for humanity. (The 'Band Aid' and 'Live Aid' spearhead by Mr. Geldof was a very good example how one artist with 'The Consciousness' had made a different for the people in Ethiopia where the Capitalist world had turned a blind eyes to it suffering?) That is why I believe creative arts with its character are one of the greatest influences in social and cultural reconstruction because of its suggestive and evocative power.

There is also a great need to create the awareness that ‘Tolerance to World Cultures Diversity Equal Harmony’. The New World Order should make the effort to develop and then integrate World Cultures, instead of creating chaos for the entire world because without order and direction where will we be heading? The New World Order should be shaped by Artists whose creative imagination, feeling, compassion and intuition are able to penetrate deeper into ‘The Consciousness ‘and ‘Sub-consciousness’ of man, so that man become moved, motivated and propelled to action and reach a harmonious world order and to achieve a new golden age, richer, more creative and, hopefully happier than the one the politicians, economists, religious and social leaders had given to us.

Many intellectuals will say that it might sound impossible or too far fetch for artists to take the lead to harmonize the world, but if you don’t try you will not know whether we could achieve it or not. “What people say you cannot do, you try and find that you can.”-Henry David Thoreau. There is always the first time for everything and now the time is right to explore, as there is the need to expand our horizon into this untouched area. In order to fulfill or realize this high ideal, we must as Singaporean be totally committed and dedicated to helping each and every one to understand the importance of bringing our soul back where it should belong to help build a stronger and freer Singapore, especially for the future generation?

Mr. Lee Kuan Yew said that nothing is free in life; I understood that nothing would be given to you if you don’t strive or fight for it, even for ‘Freedom and Peace’, therefore instead of complaining I rather put my thoughts into actions? If there is no compassion in the system, then it is up to the citizens to strive for it, even if we got to go up to the Government to voice our concerns about the sad state of affairs in a progressing society like ours? Therefore, our social and cultural obligation to our children and their children are to enable Singaporeans to develop individual with revolutionary minds because that’s what Europe Renaissance is all about and thus the essence of art.

Through PAP great leadership they had chartered Singapore’s future with an identity, as a clean and honest country to do business with. There is a need to create an identity
uniquely of our own that we can be proud and give hope to the people especially the future generation. I know that Art has a spiritual connection; therefore I strive to bring out the spirituality to connect with everyone through my work. Architecture is the root of our cultural heritage hence it will enable us to find our true identity as Singaporean.

Asia has long been known for its strong Asian values, therefore Great Architecture will reflect who we are our cultural heritage, and where we come from to make us proud of whom we are as Singaporean. Thus by introducing philosophy onto the architecture that inspired and create the conditions for the human intellect and spirit to reach a higher plane, we are creating the presence of God through our consciousness. Once the building could be realized it is overpowering because you could not miss it and this is the secret power of Great Architecture that the higher spiritual power has given to me as a great gift to uplift the spirit and moral of humanity. Great Architecture is 'Soul Talking', thus will lead us the way to enable Singapore to develop revolutionary minds.

This means Great Architecture has the power to connect us not only to our soul but also make us rooted to Singapore.
Great Architecture

“Great Architecture Is Soul Talking” – Sunflower Chong

Art is an ideology with the power to change the course of history. Therefore, the mission of Arts is the enlightenment of humanity. Life is incomplete without the civilizing effects of culture and art.

Great architecture is about great life. Great life is freedom of self-expression, one will not feel complete if they are not allow to voice their inner thoughts, beliefs and aspirations because freedom of the mind belong to a free soul which is the spirit from God.

More than a cluster of lines and forms the highest level of architecture essentially is a spiritual inspiration from God that increases our humanity. It helps us integrate as a people and harmonize as a society in a united nation. Such architecture takes into consideration Man's myriad needs to provide the space for him to live, breath and grow as a human-being because the integrity spiritual, mental, physical and emotional are the true stake of great architecture. In spiritual terms, buildings like humans also need air and sunlight to grow in order to blossom. Therefore, great architecture is about quality, substance, meaning and proportion and not just about striving for great height to excel. In short, great architecture is about art of balance. This means it is a good building in itself, unconsciously of itself as a feature of any style, and yet still manage to maintain the basic fundamental like the transformation of the square (Earth) through the triangular into the octagonal (Star) and finally to the circle (Heaven). Geometry is the essence of true meaningful architecture because it is universal and timeless.

The traditional values, the unity and harmony of nature and art and architecture and the advance of technology and science are the three main criteria to be employed in great architecture. This progressive architecture will represent the character, spirit and feeling of the community concerned. This architecture will also create sense of dialogue with the people. Through this dialogue people will understand, respect and use architecture.

The dialogue can be felt in an abstract way through building that has a soul, which 'breathe life' to the people likes music and poetry that sing to your soul. Poetry can be a melody if the sound is melodiously tone. Similarly, building can also be a melody if the man behind the great building has a soul. It is the best comparison because of all arts; music is the closest to architecture. The mind of an architect and the mind of a composer are very similar in the creation of
structure, scale and melody.

Great architecture is a natural architecture because it's like a beautiful landscape with hills and valleys. The high-rise buildings seem to grow naturally out from the ground. These buildings are like hills powerful, dignified, proud, strong masculine. The low-rise buildings are like valleys, tranquil, peaceful, harmonious feminine. These buildings feel like they belong to each other just like a family and also fit in with the environment and definitely belong to the era - a record of time, place and man.

Such architecture represents a balance of ‘Yin and Yang’ and of humanity living in harmony with nature. This concept respects human needs and the environment because great architecture works for the environment. We must live in harmony with nature and respect the environment that God has given us. Architecture, Man's contribution to the environment must strive to improve the quality of life. By designing good buildings of meaning and significant to the society, we serve society well and are thus indirectly serving God.

Great architecture is born not made, in essence is art whose spirit touches hearts and uplifts lives. It inspires greatness in passion and vision and allows people to attain fulfillment as human beings. It fires the imagination. In providing a guiding light, the best of architecture inspires courage, pride, confidence and patriotism, catalyzing people to develop them not only in terms of creativity but also in other equally important ways politically, emotionally, socially and spiritually.

Architecture ideal is an expression of the soul, revealing an ideal, an insight and a vision. This great vision will translate into a mission. This mission is to mold the society to have compassion because great architecture is human values or they are not valuable. Human values are life giving, not life taking. It is a necessary ingredient to nurture and cultivates individual as they seek unity. It sharpens our conscience to value giving instead of taking to help build a foundation with heart soul and character so that the true aim of human existence will not be lost. Therefore, great architecture will not allow land to hold the improvements, instead of the improvements holding the land.

Art and Architecture is the root of Asians cultural heritage. Therefore, great architecture has the ability to strike a balance between the spiritual and economic, yet skillful in interpreting the character of the nation, and express it's democratic and free life with strong spiritual ideals. Asian's society has a deeply rooted culture, a rich historical heritage and a strong humanistic ideology with religion as part of their life, and these Asian's value should be portray in Asian's architecture, because this Asian's pride will help us to be stronger and confidence as a people.
Believing in the new concept of architecture is essential because our ideals, arrives only when one dare to speak their mind with confidence regardless of the consequences. This is the first step in creating a great nation, which great architecture is all about. ‘Creative Thinking’ is a great tool and to use it well is perhaps the greatest power and the most tremendous force that has entered in the world. If the leaders of every country understand the importance of art and architecture in their society they will know how to pile a strong foundation for the people.

Comments from an Architect Friend about Soul

Subject: Great Architecture

16 May 2000

Hi Sun Wah,

Loved your dinner. Still dreaming about it. Liked your visionary notes very much. I have a few comments that are meant to improve and not criticize. They are also meant to try to understand the current situation we live in and respond to although I believe the worth of visionaries is that they never let that weigh them down and always strive for whatever moves them. The SMU shortlist of architects is slated for next week according to yesterday’s Straits Times – Is there any way we can be invited to the session? Use your pull. It would be great to see the schemes.

My comments: I think most Asian governments are afraid of art precisely because it has the power to change the course of history. Their belief that they know best and not wanting alternative discourses to disturb their path and resources often close the way to other views. This is the situation we face here. If an art form or artist is not understood it is classified as non-art and shut down – witness performance Art here.

On great architecture as great life I couldn’t agree more – you may want to read and show examples of how we remember past civilizations through their art – Borrobadur in Java, Machu Pichu in Peru and Angkor Wat in Cambodia. In the West, many great visionary buildings never built influence built work: Piranesi’s Cancelleri drawings in the 17th Century; Saint Elia’s Futurist cities in the 1930s and the French Situationalists in the 1960s. Plus the writings of the social critics.
Walter Benjamin on museums and gallerias.

You may be jumping the gun, as most visionaries do, by suggesting that freedom of self-expression frees our spirit. It is precisely because we are afraid of creativity and change here that makes art incomplete and expunged. Everywhere I look I am conscious of the missing Passion in all spheres of activity. Without Passion we cannot express or appreciate art let alone Great Art. So this may be something to channel your energies after your SMU project moves on. Perhaps you can work with Bro Jo to form some kind of entity that encourages Passion and dreaming over making money and babies exclusively. People need to grow to appreciate – just as a child changes its desires over time and grows more complex as it matures. The danger of advocating Soul is the same as Passion. This time it’s the Government – it may be a concept too abstract and non-concrete for them to understand. Poetry is seen as a useless pastime and not an important cultural recording device that sets the spirit of nations into contemporaneous interaction.

Totally agree with letting the Land speaks. It’s the Earth that calls for the spirit of a place. We have to be sensitive enough to understand that calling. Our tragedy is that those who make the decisions ignore this aspect – purely because they don’t even see it exists while some of us that see are left to ‘Shout’ in the darkness. But it’s only by making a little noise that you can move the Heavens.

Best Wishes to you new endeavor to make SMU the New Renaissance.

Meng

Comment from a Young Singaporean Architect on Great Architecture & WHD

Subject: Re: World Harmony Day 2004
Date: Fri, 5 Dec 2003 11:58:16 -0800

Hi Sunflower,

I’d really like to congratulate you that you’ve done such a marvelous job in your writing. Such courage and perseverance are simply admirable. From a background nowhere related to arts, your incredible determination in supporting a place for arts, a value for place, a soul for value, is truly inspiring to the young people. Arts and architecture are
the future of nation building. I couldn’t agree more! I’m definitely supportive of all noble art forms, and performance art is one that not only has direct correspondence with the audience but the closest and most immediate one, which has no reason to be suppressed.

However, as much as I’d like to attend this coming event on Saturday, I’m so sorry to inform you that I’m unable to make it, due to some urgent situation in my current work that I’ve already committed. I’ll be out-stationed for the coming weeks to oversee a project, and well, to see if some great architecture can be born!

It is indeed amazing to hear somebody like you, a non-architect, to talk about Great Architecture, and even more amazing to find myself sharing similar visions about architecture with you. “Great Architecture is about quality, substance, meaning and proportion and not just about striving for great height to excel”. Great Architecture is definitely something that is natural, that is sensitive, that is consistent, and that is born. Being the tallest or largest or most advanced doesn’t really mean much. Instead, continuing the tradition as well as creative innovation will lead architecture to greater heights. A country needs Great Architecture, so as to breed great people and a great society.

There’re just a few personal views that I’d like to share. I’m not sure if democracy and Confucianism are mutually exclusive. Though over thousands of years Confucianism had been practiced as a political system, it can too exist as a value which I feel is even closer to its original intention: the hierarchy in individual-family-society-nation is not exactly contradictory to what a democratic society should be pursuing. While in a democratic society English is to be the sole medium I also find it uneasy. Multi-lingual society should be encouraged in the same spirit, as freedom of minds should be enjoyed. Language is the key to culture. In fact, more languages should be introduced to every individual so that one gets a wider perspective and promote better understanding between cultures and races.

Anyway, in a world that is getting more intricate and sensitive each day, understanding among different cultural backgrounds become extremely important. It is in this light that I think the notion of World Harmony Day is very noble and should be continued, as it is very positive in thinking, constructive in approach and peaceful in conduct. With high spirit, your aspirations about arts, about Singapore, about ASEAN and the world are really touching! I wish the success of WHD, and above all, world peace!

Best Regards,

Kenghua
Arts Exchange
(www.americansforthearts.org)

"Where the speech of man stops short, then the art of music begins."

Richard Wagner,

"Pyramids, cathedrals, and rockets exist not because of geometry, theories of structures, or thermodynamics, but because they were first a picture--literally a vision--in the minds of those who built them.

Eugene Ferguson, Historian,

"For those who say government should not support the arts, I challenge them. The arts are like timeless seeds planted in our community. With minimal attention, these seeds will grow. But with nurturing, they will grow and bear fruit that will feed the whole community."

Michael Hightower, Commissioner of the Fulton County,

“The ability to focus one’s energy in a creative manner, to be inspired by the innate beauty of art, is one of the most important lessons we can hope to learn in our lives. If we as a society can use the arts to show children the beauty and possibility which life holds, we will make a difference. I believe that all children have worth and that every child can be saved. It is truly our mandate to inspire those at-risk children and motivate them to move in the right direction. Enlisting the assistance of arts programs will help at-risk youth realize their potential in the most meaningful of ways."

Jeremiah S. Jeremiah, Jr., Chief Judge, Rhode Island Family Court,

"Art for me is like a vent to let my frustrations out and a ray of hope to let me know that everything's OK and anything is possible."

Kathia Diaz, student, RAW Art Works, Lynn, Massachusetts

“Partnership arises because we sense in the arts that same search for an ideal of quality and excellence that imbues many of our business decisions. The arts take us out of our various, individual, and competitive companies into that parallel world where we can all unite in enjoying a broader, common image or ideal."
Rawleigh Warner, Jr., Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer, Mobil Corporation,

"Art has a great deal to do with the quality of life we lead, not just as men and women, but as a society. Art has a great deal to do with freedom; history has taught us that when the arts decline and die, freedom declines and dies. Business requires an environment of freedom to thrive and prosper, just as art and individuals require that same environment.

David S. Tappan, Jr., Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer, Fluor Corporation,

"During the past quarter century, literally thousands of school-based programs have demonstrated beyond question that the arts can not only bring coherence to our fragmented academic world, but through the arts, students' performance in other academic disciplines can be enhanced as well.

Ernest L. Boyer, former president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching,

"Engaging at-risk youth in the arts can instill self-esteem and confidence and open doors to imagination and discovery. After school arts programs provide a positive alternative for youthful energy that may otherwise not find a creative outlet. Metropolitan Life Foundation applauds Americans for the Arts for its leadership in reaching out to at-risk youth through the arts. We are proud to support Americans for the Arts' national initiative Youth ARTS: arts programs for youth at risk: the Tool Kit. This resource will help hundreds of communities bring young people and the arts together for amazing results."

Sibyl Jacobson, President and CEO, Metropolitan Life Foundation,

"Communities that support youth-based arts organizations do more than preserve and develop their youth for the future. They engage the creative energies of youth in positive ways that enrich community life and culture today."

Shirley Brice Heath, Senior Scholar, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Professor of English and Linguistics, Stanford University,
"Artists in every discipline and from every ethnic group have much to share and I know from personal experience how what they have to share can change one's life...There are thousands of American artists who are well trained and willing to use their creativity for the good of the society that spawned them. We should not waste this resource."


“They [the arts] are instinctively trying to hand the public some kind of stuff that wins the audience away from the often sordid surface of existence. They may do it badly, they may do it obviously, they may do it crudely, but they do have the hunch that what the millions want is to be shown that there is something possible to the human race besides the dull repetition of the triviality which is so often the routine of common existence....... And every now and then they have blundered into doing something with the touch of the universal in it.”

Congressman David Obey (D-WI), Democratic Ranking Member of House Appropriations Committee, 2002

"I learned that I am capable of creating beautiful, exquisite pieces of art. Everything is within reach if I try and believe in myself."

Julie Edmunds, student, RAW Art Works, Lynn, Massachusetts

“The $232 million that the Federal Government has invested in the NEA and NEH has returned $134 billion to Federal, State, and local economies. I cannot think of any Federal investments that yield that kind of return.”

Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (D-NY), Co-Chair of the Congressional Arts Caucus, 2002

"The arts give a generation the ability to define its own time. It seems to me on a very grassroots level, the future survival of the arts in this country may have something to do with the artists, playwrights, and dancers opening their worlds to the next generation...There is nothing more inspiring for students than to meet an artist who has managed to make a life of creation...And, frankly, there's nothing more inspirational for an artist than being in touch with the future."

Wendy Wasserstein, 1999, 1999 Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy

"Last year's Cezanne exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (funded in part by the NEA) poured $86.5 million in the city with a direct economic impact of $122.5 million
over three months. The marketing package developed with the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau resulted in 37,000 hotel room nights."

*Edward Able, President and CEO, American Association of Museums, 1998*

"Through the shocking power of their own drawings and words, you (can) look into the inner lives of dozens of America’s homeless children. In these disturbing images and stories, you will see...haunted, collapsing, empty homes... (And) signs of poverty, despair, fear, and shame. You will also see the incredible strength, the generosity of spirit, and hope shown by these children who endure so much."

*Marian Wright Edelman, executive director of the Children’s Defense Fund, 1997*

"Compelling evidence exists to demonstrate how federal funding for the arts combined with private sector and other public sector support has had a profound impact upon the health, education, and economy of our nation. Business leaders are taking the opportunity to build upon the strong networks and partnerships, the broad access and cultural diversity, and the economic stimuli and social problem-solving abilities created by the arts to nurture further growth at the local level. The arts enrich the lives of all Americans because they speak to our economic, intellectual, and spiritual well-being."

*Michael H. Jordan, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of The CBS Corporation, 1997*

"I would invite our friends in Congress on any day to come to see the children, the elderly, or the temporarily disadvantaged who come to our theater and museum, just one of hundreds across our nation, and point out for me which among these Americans are the elite--and, more to the point, which are not. It is a pleasure to watch their faces as they enter the theater and the museum. But it is an astonishment to see their faces as they come out. They are, in their shared experience, new people, aware of things they only dreamed before, or did not dream at all. Art had done its job. Those who bring them to it have done theirs."

*Winton M. Blount, industrialist and former Postmaster General of the United States, 1997*
"As a prosecutor, I know that crime prevention pays far greater dividends than prosecution. To this end, I make RICO funds available to after school arts and social programs for at-risk children that stimulate imagination, develop skills and contribute to character development. Children whose hearts and minds are nourished and challenged in wholesome ways--such as by art, dance, theater, and sports--are much less likely to succumb to the lure of crime."

Richard M. Romley, Maricopa County Attorney in Arizona, 1997

"I attribute my successful career not only to hard work and determination, but also to the performing opportunities created by the NEA."

Denyce Graves, American-born international opera star, 1998

"American business has an urgent need for highly qualified people who can adapt to change, are problem solvers, and have a global view. A person schooled in the arts has a greater appreciation of our diverse world. This leads to more creative contributions to society and the work place."

John Hall, Former Chairman and CEO of Ashland, Inc., 1997

"When we're out recruiting businesses, they look at the whole city. They do, in fact, want to know if we've got a symphony, an opera, a ballet. It's just good business for the city to have alternatives to sports."

Hugh L. McColl,Jr., Chairman of the Board and CEO of NationsBank Corporation, 1997

“If it were not for the arts and humanities, I would not be able to achieve my goal in life, I would not even have one. Through the broadcast program at Youth Radio I am able to make the future better for the next generation by giving them a voice and bringing youth issues to the public."

Ayoka Medlock, an intern at Youth Radio in Berkeley, California, 1997

“We do have a word, 'Wolakota' which reflects a way of life that is in balance with everything. We strive to create balance for each person: physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. Art for Lakota people is a means of reaching Wolakota. Lakota art is the way our culture is beautified, shared, and survives."

Lydia Whirlwind Soldier, Sicangu Lakota scholar, educator, grandmother, and artist, 1997
"For those who say government should not support the arts, I challenge them. The arts are like timeless seeds planted in our community. With minimal attention, these seeds will grow. But with nurturing, they will grow and bear fruit that will feed the whole community."

Michael Hightower, Commissioner of the Fulton County Government, 1997

"I suggest that the great art belongs to all people, all the time--that indeed it is made for the people, by the people, to the people."

Maya Angelou, 1990, 1990 Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy

"When we teach a child to sing or play the flute, we teach her how to listen. When we teach her to draw, we teach her to see. When we teach a child to dance, we teach him about his body and about space, and when he acts on a stage, he learns about character and motivation. When we teach a child design, we reveal the geometry of the world. When we teach children about the folk and traditional arts and the great masterpieces of the world, we teach them to celebrate their roots and find their own place in history."

Jane Alexander, Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts (1993-1997)

"We must infuse our lives with art. Our national leaders must be informed that we want them to use our taxes to support street theatre in order to oppose street gangs. We should have a well-supported regional theatre in order to oppose regionalism and differences, which keep us apart. We need nationally to support small, medium, and large art museums, which show us images of ourselves, those we like and those we dislike. In some way, very important to us, we need to see those we dislike even more than those we like because somehow we get glancing visions of how we look 'as through a window darkly.'"

Maya Angelou, 1990, 1990 Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy

"Arts education is important as a means of giving our young people a sense of civilization and the multiple forms of literacy that will give them meaningful access to our culture. It is essential for all students, not just the gifted and talented. When taught well, the arts provide children with opportunities to develop creativity, to learn the tools of communication, and to create multiple solutions to problems. The arts provide individuals a language that is universal, one that cuts across the disciplines and helps to bring more coherent meaning to our world."
Betty Castor, Florida Education Commissioner, 1990

"The art teachers I have known have always given me a sense of where they stand on fundamental issues; they have allowed my sharing with them in a magical process of creating or responding to art; they have helped me grasp the concepts and techniques for the work I undertook, and above all, they empowered me to take risks and extend what was my existing knowledge and understanding to another level through the work I was doing. All of this sounds pretty basic to me."

Jerome J. Hausman, 1990, Art Education

"Art is humanity's most essential, most universal language. It is not a frill, but a necessary part of communication. The quality of civilization can be measured through its music, dance, drama, architecture, visual art, and literature. We must give our children knowledge and understanding of civilization's most profound works."

Dr. Ernest L. Boyer, former president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1988, Toward Civilization: A Report on Arts Education

"Live a balanced life--learn some and think some, and draw and paint, and sing and dance, and play and work every day some."

Robert Fulghum, 1989, All I Ever Really Need To Know I Learned In Kindergarten

"Without the arts, education is not education but vocational training...Practicing one's profession successfully calls for skills in dealing with people, for being able to comprehend the connection between cause and effect, and the ability to carry the burdens placed on the individual in a free society. The arts help to prepare the human mind for such needs."

Norman Cousins, 1987, Christian Science Monitor
"Modern art activity can provide a new birth and new creative directions of usefulness for such a community. As art activity is developed, the community is recreated. The vital roots of every phase of life are touched. As the community is awakened to its opportunity in the arts, it becomes a laboratory through which the vision of the region is reformulated and extended. And as the small community discovers its role, as the small community generates freshness of aesthetic response across the changing American scene, American art and life are enhanced."

Robert Gard, 1967, Arts in the Small Community

"Another conclusion I seem to be impelled toward, even though I am not quite sure of my facts is that creative art education, or better said, Education-Through-Art, may be especially important not so much for turning out artists or art products, as for turning out better people. If we have clearly in mind the educational goals for human beings that I will be hinting at, if we hope for our children that they will become full human beings, and that they will move toward actualizing the potentialities that they have, then, as nearly as I can make out, the only kind of education in existence today that has any faint inkling of such goals is art education. So I am thinking of education through art not because it turns out pictures but because I think it may be possible that, clearly understood, it may become the paradigm for all other education."


"It is out in these places where the silent common people dwell. It is in these neighborhood laboratories that a new vision of county life is being developed. They are the cradles of democracy. It is here that a force is necessary to democratize art so that the common people can appreciate it, science so that they can take a part in it, and recreation so that they can enjoy it."

Alfred Arvold, 1923, The Little Country Theater

"Its principal function is to stimulate an interest in good clean drama and original entertainment among the people living in the open country and villages, in order to help them find themselves that they may become better satisfied with the community in which they live. In other words, its real purpose is to use the drama and all that goes with the drama as a force in getting people together and acquainted with each other, in order that they may find out the hidden life forces of nature itself. Instead of making the drama a luxury for the classes, its aim is to make it an instrument for the enlightenment and enjoyment of the masses."

Alfred Arvold, 1923, The Little Country Theater

"The mainspring of creativity appears to be the same tendency which we discover so deeply as the curative force in psychotherapy--man's tendency to actualize himself, to
become his potentialities. By this I mean the directional trend which is evident in all organic and human life—the urge to expand, extend, develop, mature—the tendency to express and activate all the capacities of the organism, or the self. This tendency may become deeply buried under layer after layer of encrusted psychological defenses; it may be hidden behind elaborate facades which deny its existence; it is my belief however, based on my experience, that it exists in every individual, and awaits only the proper conditions to be released and expressed. It is this tendency which is the primary motivation for creativity as the organism forms new relationships to the environment in its endeavor most fully to be itself."

*Carl Rogers, 1961, On Becoming A Person*

"I hope we have a good program next year, but whether it is good or not doesn’t particularly matter. I think the one we’re closing today is the finest we ever have had, but that isn’t important either. What is important is the work we did together this year, before the tent went up. For the first time in my memory, all the people in this town got together for a common purpose. We raised three thousand dollars to put this Chautatuqua on, but if we had sent that money to the heathen and had no program at all, Paducah would have been a better city because our people learned to work together. The program itself was just that much bonus."

*Mayor of Paducah, Kentucky, 1914*

"The Civic Theater idea, as a distinctive issue, implies the conscious awakening of a people to self-government in the activities of its leisure. To this end, organization of the arts of the theater, participation by the people in these arts not mere spectatorship, a new resulting technique, leadership by means of a permanent staff of artists (not of merchants in art), elimination of private profit by endowment and public support, dedication in the service to the whole community: these are chief among its essentials, and these imply a new and nobler scope for the art of the theater itself."

*Percy McKaye, 1912, The Civic Theater*

"Art Education can acquaint children with more subtle forms of feeling and more precise images of the human spirit than they are likely to discover on their own."

*Laura Chapman, 1978, Approaches to Art in Education*

**Advocacy**  
**Arts Education**

“I think music and the arts should be considered core subjects in our nation’s schools. There is absolutely no conflict between the expansion of our fine arts programs, our music programs and focus on other academic programs.”
Rod Paige, U.S. Secretary of Education, 2001
Vh-1’s "Save the Music" Report Card

"Arts education is important as a means of giving our young people a sense of civilization and the multiple forms of literacy that will give them meaningful access to our culture. It is essential for all students, not just the gifted and talented. When taught well, the arts provide children with opportunities to develop creativity, to learn the tools of communication, and to create multiple solutions to problems. The arts provide individuals a language that is universal, one that cuts across the disciplines and helps to bring more coherent meaning to our world."

Betty Castor, Florida Education Commissioner, 1990

"Music can give you your dreams. It will teach you hard work, it will break your heart and make you so happy, you can't stand it. . . .I don't think I'd have been president if it hadn't been for music."

Former President Bill Clinton, 2001
At an event celebrating the restoration of music programs to the Newark Public Schools

"The arts give a generation the ability to define its own time. It seems to me on a very grassroots level, the future survival of the arts in this country may have something to do with the artists, playwrights, and dancers opening their worlds to the next generation...There is nothing more inspiring for students than to meet an artist who has managed to make a life of creation...And, frankly, there's nothing more inspirational for an artist than being in touch with the future."

Wendy Wasserstein, 1999
1999 Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy

"The old way is to hand kids a few tools and expect them to learn a vocation. The fact of the matter is, there's a lot of avenues inside a young person's head. This program shows what can be done through arts and through music. You can develop skills, you can develop work patterns, you can develop interests in a vocation."

Ralph Munro, Washington Secretary of State, 1997

"As a prosecutor, I know that crime prevention pays far greater dividends than prosecution. To this end, I make RICO funds available to after school arts and social programs for at-risk children that stimulate imagination, develop skills and contribute to character development. Children whose hearts and minds are nourished and challenged in wholesome ways--such as by art, dance, theater, and sports--are much less likely to succumb to the lure of crime."

Richard M. Romley, Maricopa County Attorney in Arizona, 1997
"The art teachers I have known have always given me a sense of where they stand on fundamental issues; they have allowed my sharing with them in a magical process of creating or responding to art; they have helped me grasp the concepts and techniques for the work I undertook, and above all, they empowered me to take risks and extend what was my existing knowledge and understanding to another level through the work I was doing. All of this sound pretty basic to me."

Jerome J. Hausman, 1990
Art Education

"Live a balanced life--learn some and think some, and draw and paint, and sing and dance, and play and work every day some."

Robert Fulghum, 1989

"Education is a primary agent of acculturation and art is closely linked to culture. Since culture is a fundamental imperative after food, shelter, and progeny, both education and art have survival roles."

Stuart Hodes, 1989
Arts In Education
Community Development

"I attribute my successful career not only to hard work and determination, but also to the performing opportunities created by the NEA."

Denyce Graves, American-born international opera star, 1998

"The arts have been a valuable component for creating a healthy business climate, and the NEA has been a critical catalyst in this growth."

Philip M. Condit, Chairman and CEO, The Boeing Company, 1998

"Public arts spending is especially important in rural areas. To make the arts more widely available, funds from the NEA for grants to underserved areas are an important source of this support."

Peggy Amsterdam, Executive Director, Delaware Division of the Arts, 1998

"Compelling evidence exists to demonstrate how federal funding for the arts combined with private sector and other public sector support has had a profound impact upon the health, education, and economy of our nation. Business leaders are taking the
opportunity to build upon the strong networks and partnerships, the broad access and cultural diversity, and the economic stimuli and social problem-solving abilities created by the arts to nurture further growth at the local level. The arts enrich the lives of all Americans because they speak to our economic, intellectual, and spiritual well-being."

*Michael H. Jordan, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of The CBS Corporation, 1997*

"Recent research documents that the arts stimulate learning, improve overall academic performance, teach discipline, promote teamwork, and help children develop problem-solving skills."

*Karen Evans, Director of Education, Arena Stage, 1998*

"The NEA has been an incredible beacon for public/private partnerships that leverage arts funding among and between city, county, state, and federal governments as well as the private sector."

*Alec Baldwin, President, Creative Coalition, and actor, 1998*

"When we're out recruiting businesses, they look at the whole city. They do, in fact, want to know if we've got a symphony, an opera, a ballet. It's just good business for the city to have alternatives to sports."

*Hugh L. McColl, Jr., Chairman of the Board and CEO of NationsBank Corporation, 1997*

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*Michael Hightower, Commissioner of the Fulton County Government, 1997*

"If you do not have performing and visual arts, you don't have a complete community. Both public and private entities must invest in the arts to enhance a community's quality of life and its appearance. In Oklahoma City, it is a priority to offer a variety of entertainment, educational, and cultural opportunities--something for everyone. Performing and visual arts play a key role in making our city a wonderful place to live."

*Ronald J. Norick, Mayor of Oklahoma City, 1997*

"We must infuse our lives with art. Our national leaders must be informed that we want them to use our taxes to support street theatre in order to oppose street gangs. We should have a well-supported regional theatre in order to oppose regionalism and differences which keep us apart. We need nationally to support small, medium, and large art museums which show us images of ourselves, those we like and those we
dislike. In some way, very important to us, we need to see those we dislike even more than those we like because somehow we get glancing visions of how we look 'as through a window darkly.'"

*Maya Angelou, 1990*
1990 Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy

"It is a matter of enlightened self-interest for business to support the arts. And, it is a matter of good corporate citizenship. But most of all, it is a matter of making our community and nation a better place to live for those of us who take great pride in calling it home."

*Winton M. Blount, Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer, Blount, Inc., 1985*

"The partnership between business and the arts in America is more solid than ever before in our history. This alliance will flourish if the arts continue to approach business with creative ideas and projects and if business increasingly accepts the arts as an integral part of a free and pluralistic society."

*Ralph P. Davidson, Chairman of the Board, Time, Inc.,*

"The arts are an essential part of our lives. They serve as the transition lines of culture in modern society, and they deserve the generous support of all of us--in both large and small businesses."

*John P. Diesel, President, Tenneco Inc.,*

"At Hallmark Cards we believe that our employees and our communities are enriched by an exposure to and understanding of both the visual and performing arts. As a company, which relies upon excellence in design, we have found that the arts provide creative stimulus and a sense of quality. In our communities we have found the arts provide a source of pride and a sense of place."

*Donald J. Hall, Chairman of the Board, Hallmark Cards, Inc.,*

"Art has a great deal to do with the quality of life we lead, not just as men and women, but as a society. Art has a great deal to do with freedom; history has taught us that when the arts decline and die, freedom declines and dies. Business requires an environment of freedom to thrive and prosper, just as art and individuals require that same environment."

*David S. Tappan, Jr., Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer, Fluor Corporation,*
"The arts have been an integral part of life in Chicago from its very beginnings. Our founders realized that to be a true international center Chicago had to embrace and cultivate the arts as much as it did commerce. Today, that feeling is stronger than ever and as a result, Chicago has realized its place as a true world-class city. You only need look at last year's Monet exhibit at the Art Institute, which drew a million visitors from across the country and around the globe or read the national and international reviews that Chicago's remarkable theater scene attracts consistently. The arts helped make Chicago what it is and we are all better for it."

Richard M. Daley, Mayor of the City of Chicago, 1997

"The arts are a natural, inevitable ally for any successful business. The partnership arises because we sense in the arts that same search for an ideal of quality and excellence that imbues many of our business decisions. The arts take us out of our various, individual, and competitive companies into that parallel world where we can all unite in enjoying a broader, common image or ideal.

Rawleigh Warner, Jr., Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer, Mobil Corporation,
SUNFLOWER CHONG
sharing my vision of architecture
"Many of life's failure are people who did not realise how close they were to success when they give up"

Thomas Edison
"I make a promise to him that I will do it my way..."

SUNFLOWER CHONG

"My country I care
Patriotism and loyalty I declare..."

I CARE FOR EVERYTHING IN MY LIFE
Sunflower Chong
1983
in conversation with

Bro. Joseph McNally

Behind the BEAUTY and the BEAST are the BRAINS.

Bro. Joe : But Sunflower where is the other
BRAIN?

Sunflower : Bro. Joe, since you name the
BEAST Flying Golden Deer, I
guess it must have flown off to look
for him to keep him company
since you have me.

"A mind with two extremes
Is flying freely in my dreams

The urge for tranquility
Yet the yearning to help us to reach unity"

Search
Sunflower Chong
1983
Foreword

Dear Fellowmen,

My name is Chong Sun Wah, I am popularly known as Sunflower but please call me Sun. Many people have said that I am born with a strong mind of a man, a heart of a lion and I am lucky to have a name of a flower to give me the balance. I am an ordinary Singaporean with an extraordinary dream to unite nations through arts and architecture, because I believe there is a hidden power in architecture that has not been explored by architects. My philosophy is that the struggle in life creates a challenge for me and this challenge makes my life exciting. As William James said, "To improve the golden moment of opportunity, and catch the good that is within our reach, is the great art of life."

We do not see things as they are. We see things as we are. Peter Eisenman said, "Architecture in the present is seen as a process of inventing an artificial past and a futureless present. It remembers a no-longer future." I believe this is one of the main reasons why people feel insecure and sometimes lost because they don't know who they are and will be. In short, a lost of sense of identity.

Nations like Germany, France, England and Austria have legitimate concerns that their cultures will be swamped or their politics fundamentally altered by unfettered immigration. Straits Times on Saturday dated 29-7-2000 reported that according to a document drawn up for discussion by the group's ministers, "Europe will need 75m immigrants over the next 50 years and to become a racially hybrid society." Therefore the single ethnic will rapidly disappear and every country will eventually be multi ethnic, thus multi cultural. Hence, my greatest concern and worry, not only for Singapore but the world at large, is in the area of identity in a multi-racial community. The recent example of the coup attempt in Fiji is a real concern. I strongly believe there is an urgency and great need to address this issue not individually but as a nation and as a world body, because it is threatening the social fabric of society.

Mr. Ho Kwon Ping spoke eloquently and feelingly of the influences, beliefs and turning points in his life (Straits Times October 16, 1999), He said, "My mistake was that I was searching for an 'ism' – a world-view – just as some religion." Many people in this world have also made this mistake not because they are less intelligent, rather, because they have lost faith in one another. There seems to be a need to anchor on to something powerful enough to give them hope and meaning in their life so that they will not be lost.

"Architecture is born in the heart," said Frank Lloyd Wright. I couldn't agree more. What's more, Great architecture is a nation's identity, it is a voice of power to be reckoned with, a voice that is immeasurable because it seems to have a spiritual power which can instill patriotism through rekindling human spirit that is the essence of life. I instinctively believe that by introducing art and philosophy behind architecture, it becomes the most powerful medium to provoke the mind to think beyond oneself, and about our shared existence in this universe.

Through my long and painful journey, I finally dare to say that I have discovered the hidden power in art and architecture. I strongly believe it is the best form to replace the 'ism' simply by instilling an understanding of spiritual architecture. As Henry Miller said, "the new era is the era of spiritual creativity." Arts and architecture can play a role if we are conscious and sensitive by creating designs that will forge an identity to unite the minds and hearts of the people. As Peter Eisenman said, "It is necessary to propose an alternative idea of architecture, one whereby it is no longer the purpose of architecture, but its inevitability, to express its own time." In short architecture must belong to the era – a record of time, place and man. Therefore, the mission of arts and architecture is the enlightenment of humanity, just like the 'Bodhi' trees at Bras Basah.
Sydney Opera House is one fine example what architecture can do for a nation and people. So you may ask what is identity? Perhaps for as long as we engage the issue, as if it were a question, as if it were a search for a set of answers, it will remain elusive to us. What justifies itself a symbol of the people? The Sydney Opera House has become easily identifiable with the country where it is sited. What makes the Opera House, a uniquely Australian object, rooted to the sentiments of both locals and tourists? Despite the fact that it was conceived by a foreign architect, and bore little connection to any Australian architectural precedents, it exists today as a symbol of the nation.

As we know by now, this project gives the country its unique identity and is a pride of all Australians and has become the visual symbol of Australians. The Sydney Opera House has become a very important landmark for Australian through the years due to its unique design. Can you imagine how powerful SMU is going to be if we can create architecture sensitive to the aspirations of the people, and reflective of their identity?

Architecture, is only architecture when it is an act, as opposed to thought. Writing, drawing, and building, each are an act from thought. Therefore my concept proposal for SMU is about ‘Time’, represented by the pyramid hourglass library. Time to concentrate on our ‘Brain’, represented by the brain design on Drama Center with SMU lion logo as the facade. To remind us of our ‘Roots’, we must go back to history that is the Singapore River, where not only was it our economic lifeline but it was always known as the old heart of the city. Therefore to develop Singapore into a Renaissance city, Bras Basah is the natural birth site of a new Renaissance because the water from the Singapore river flows to the mouth of Fort Canning and continue to Bras Basah which was once known as ‘wet rice’. The total design of SMU will be in organic architecture inspired by the padi field. As such, SMU site should be integrated with Fort Canning Park. Thus, this place will be known as the cultural heart of the city equipped with arts facilities and workshops to create vibrancy.

My answer to the question of identity is to take a bold step forward now to create forms and spaces which people can enjoy and thus remember. By creating designs that provoke people to think and question life, I hope to mould the minds and hearts of the people, leading them on to share from within their soul, to harvest their potential and stir their social consciousness. Once Singaporeans can begin to care for the well being of their fellowmen, the nation will flourish. My design concept embodies Asian values and beliefs to unite the people and nation. Eventually, the place itself attempts to reach out to the world through architecture.

Therefore, akin to the Sydney Opera House, SMU is the soul of society and an awakening of who we are and going to be. In time to come this place will gradually but surely grow to be a very important landmark in the eyes of all Singaporeans but the world as well, because I can foresee this is going to be the soul of the world. It is very elating to read this write-up from Straits Times dated 25-7-2000, that “Singapore isn’t the cultural wasteland as derogatorily perceived by many.” A reviewer wrote this comment from Business World entitled ‘Changing the Singapore scene’.

My main strength lies in my understanding that without great passion we cannot express or appreciate art let alone Great Art, what more to expect all of you to understand the importance of Great Architecture or Spiritual Architecture. Without a soul you know not your true existence in his universe Therefore great art is expressed from one’s soul.

“It is within my power either to serve God, or not to serve Him. Serving Him, I add to my own good of the whole world. Not serving Him, I forfeit my own good and deprive the world of that good which was in my power to create.”

- Leo Tolstoy -

Sunflower Chong
Singapore
This proposal was done in collaboration with freelance architects. The main concept weaves together two themes:

1) **concern for the environment**, &
2) **the artistic expression of Singapore’s diverse ethnic cultures.**

Natural elements (waterfalls, rocks, trees etc.) and the man-made forms inspired from the different ethnic cultures.

Much use is made of symbols easily identifiable with Singapore: the crescent and stars of its national flag. The symbols became the visual motif for the whole project, serving to unite the various forms – man-made and natural – within the site. The profile of the center as seen from the main road and from across the bay is that of an inverted crescent with five poles representing the five stars. This motif is echoed in the site plan.

The front facade is an expression of man’s imagination and creative powers, with stark use of concrete, glass and steel structures. Open space, functioning as “portals” for people, leading into the amphitheatre and framing views of the bay, adds variety and interest to the order of the facade.

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**ART CENTRE – The Waterfront Theatres**

**Ideas Implemented**

**THE SATAY CLUB**

Kiosk restaurant designed in the features of Malayan traditional architecture. This restaurant connects to the SEAFRONT PROMENADE and has provisions for informal outdoor dining. The several outdoor ethnic stages can also be viewed from this point.

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"There is one language
The language of the heart
If you have a true heart
You will naturally love Arts”

HEART
Sunflower Chong
1992
As one approaches the waterfront, these man-made forms gradually give way to natural forms and settings – waterfalls, lakes, rock gardens, palm gardens and open green areas. The landscape peaks at both ends of the site and gently slopes down to the waterfront promenade with the lowest level at the amphitheatre stage.

The amphitheatre thus becomes the visual as well as metaphorical center of the site, where the eye rests and people converge. It is here that the five poles – the star totems – rise from the water, behind the amphitheatre stage. These totems tower the other structures, and visible from faraway, they are a constant reminder of the five virtues.

Traversing the site will be a circulation tunnel that begins at the MRT station and ends at the commercial area beneath the three buildings. Along this tunnel will be niches of varying sizes and shapes displaying works of art. This tunnel will serve to link the buildings as well as the open areas by providing access to them.

Through this space a stream of people will come and go, stopping once in a while to look at the artwork, talk, observe, exchange ideas, and learn. This “stream of humanity” will be a microcosm of our own society – a multi-racial, multi-ethnic society in flux, united and secure under one roof. What will happen when we come out of the cave?
FLOATING HOTEL / ARTISTS’ RESIDENCE
Designed along the lines of a typical Malayan longhouse: this floating facility serves tourists as well as visiting international artists and guests. Traditional Malayan architectural features and motifs are extensively applied. Access to ARTS CENTRE is through a connecting boardwalk.

PALM GARDEN
“sloping downwards to the sea like that of a mountain sliding down to the valley.”

FLOATING RESTAURANT
Indian architectural features are applied to a floating restaurant anchored offshore. This facility serves the adjacent floating hotel guests as well as the public wanting to experience the art centre from a different angle. Marine craft can also dock alongside.

Idea Implemented

ENTRANCE TO UNDERGROUND TUNNEL
From the MRT station, one can either go up and enter the building through the main entrance or enter through the circulation tunnel which circumnavigates the site and has various exit points into the various areas of the site. An Indian-inspired scalloped arch marks the entrance to the tunnel.
INTERIOR OF ART CAVE
along the circulation tunnel can be found niches displaying various works of art.

ROCK GARDEN WITH INSCRIBED BOULDERS
"These rocks are inscribed with stories about the centre and what it stands for... Granite boulders and rocks set to visual composition with multi-lingual inscriptions..."

FREEDOM PARK featuring "WALL OF IDEAS"
We can create a "Wall of Ideas" where people can feel free to express themselves and to articulate their thoughts against this "Wall".
ENTRANCE TO ARTIST’S VILLAGE

The ARTISTS’ VILLAGE is made up of three buildings each representing the major ethnic group (Chinese, Malay & Indian). Below the buildings are commercial spaces and car parks. An “ART CAVE” is also located under. The middle building is directly linked to the circulation tunnel. Adjacent to each building are open stages for each ethnic group.

PERFORMANCE STAGES
(top right): CHINESE OPEN AIR STAGE
(above): INDIAN OPEN AIR STAGE
(right): MALAY OPEN AIR STAGE

CAVE EXIT AT ROCK GARDEN

One of the several exit points from the main circulation tunnels which traverses the length of the site.
The Proposed National Library at

Marina South

"Far across the wide ocean
Is a future unknown?
The immense wealth hidden
Is it not within our deepest self?"

Searching My Path at Marine Parade
Waterfront
Sunflower Chong
1983
This proposal was made in collaboration with Sami Mousawi International. Sited at the Marina South waterfront, the National Library of Singapore proposal aims to announce universally a new progressive architecture with an unmistakable Singaporean identity reflecting the image of the place as an advanced nation.

Composed with a strong axis leading from North-East to the South-West and commencing from the core of Marina South to Marina East, and with a strict symmetrical and geometrical order generated from a basic square form in multiples of 5.4 x 5.4 metres, a unified scheme was achieved.

The architectural form of the pyramid symbolizes a new meaning and interpretation by representing the balance between the horizontal forces of the harbour and the green belt and vertical forces of the high-rise housing development planned in Marina South. Together with gestures of monumentality, as well as on-site views of the waterfront, the setting seems to suggest that the Library will provide a window on distant lands and cultures.

The various fenestrations in the design, the use of water landscaping features that flow from sheltered to open sections of the building, and the creation of day lit “internal” streets in the Library, creates a synergy of the outdoor and indoor to give a rich spatial experience for users throughout the library.

The proposal also details the aim of integrating information technology facilities, clarity of navigation by users within the library and storage of environment-sensitive materials.

The National Library building is also envisioned here, as standing alongside other libraries of similar design which house materials gathered from the region.
Heart Transplant

Editor's Note: Sunflower is the penname of a concerned Singaporean who has taken a passionate interest in the art and the environment. Although not an architect by training she has great conviction in the power of architecture to transform society, a quality some architects have sadly forgotten.

SIA AGM 24 March 1993

The development of Marina South Downtown (MSD) into an area with "heart", "soul" and "character" will be successful if we consciously apply several principles.

First is the principle of intrinsic creativity. The masterplan for MSD should be conceptualized not only from the mind but also from the heart. The end result will be a work of art from the soul.

This creativity comes from experiences from life and is spontaneous, allowing the designer true freedom of expression. The architect must be civic conscious and the design drawn out from this premise will bring forth a great concept like a powerhouse with a message.

"two sides of the pyramid are open, framed by tiered balconies, the open-air section faces the sea.. the openness suggests a society with a generous outreach"
Such a concept will steer the hearts and minds of the people to appreciate their heritage and strengthen their identity as Singaporeans. This means architecture must relate to people, nature and country in order not to lose our roots, as we evolve in time and space.

The creative juices to design a great masterplan comes from the need to find solutions to problems. The problems are related to these questions:

- Singaporeans, who are they, what are their values and what do they expect from life?
- Is profit making the priority or is giving Singaporeans what they need more important?
- Is there a need to create an identity?
- Will MSD be for the rich only, or for the ordinary?
- Will Government professionals, developers, businessmen, or laymen approve the concept of the development?

Second, is the principle of functional simplicity? The design should incorporate, the traditional elements of our multi-cultural heritage, which are found in the past, and use these as starting points for more abstract interpretations. It will also blend in futuristic features to facilitate efficiency but not imitate the skylines of the world’s greatest cities.

MODEL AS SEEN FROM HARBOUR

A great concept evolves from the architect’s conscious effort to establish harmony between the use of the building and the user of the building. The design must show a concern for our people and must be create a “caring” environment for the less fortunate. Singapore is a melting pot of many people, cultures, and religions; and these elements must be seen in the architectural character of MSD, brought together to create a vibrant city and one that is distinguishable from other international cities.

In order to achieve such a vision, we have to create a garden city park. The models of Jurong Bird Park, Botanical Gardens and the East Coast Parkway will be ideal guidelines. Only this “heart transplant” is appropriate, because Nature has only one language – it belongs to all.

This garden city park should be the heart of the development to act as the major link and continuity through spacious walkways, canals and waterways. MSD will then be a place where people can work, shop, live, spend their recreational hours in a healthy and friendly atmosphere, where quality of life is enhanced and improved.

MSD can become a bustling center that draws Singaporeans from all walks of life; the area can set an example for others to follow. This will happen when the masterplan incorporates the essential themes in our multicultural heritage and allow for the dynamic evolution of the area to harmonize with the progress of Singapore.
PERSPECTIVE OF MAIN HALL

"a unique library, huge and yet warm"
The Hotel PT HII/PT Natour proposal was done in collaboration with Kaplan/McLaughlin/Diaz in 1997. Its guiding philosophy is using architecture, as an art which touches hearts and uplifts lives, and helps to integrate the nation and harmonize society. Located on a strategic downtown super block, the futuristic masterplan aims at invoking a quality environment, visual strength, functionality and harmony with the environment. The buildings can be seen as...
symbols of Indonesia’s success, and a journey is established to encourage users to understand Indonesia’s history.

The Hotel PT HII/PT Natour proposal is about a ‘vision to the future’ of Indonesia. This development is based on the philosophy of ‘Unity in Diversity - One People, One Language and One Nation’. The complex relies on the subliminal power of symbolic expressions in art and architecture. Our design proposal is Architecture as art - its spirit touches hearts and uplifting lives. It must help integrate the nation and harmonize society. This project will be recognized as the ‘soul of Indonesian society’ because it will provide the setting for people to grow politically, economically and spiritually. Therefore, Indonesia’s culture needs a number of significant inspirational landmarks like this to help bond the nation.

The proposed mix-use development will provide Jakarta with the unique opportunity to create a civic landmark destination, which combines a National Arts Center, and a business site that includes a hotel, offices and retail altogether. Located on a strategic

“The universe is enormous
Turn on its axis
To comprehend its complexity
Is at the edge of destruction gradually
No greater force
But only God can control our course”

COSCIKOUSNESS
Sunflower Chong
1993

MANTRA ARCH
JAKARTA
HOTEL PT HII / PT NATOUR
KAPLAN / MCLAUGHLIN / DIAZ
The enlightening ‘journey’ starts at the Independence Memorial Monument near the base of the Independent Tower. It allows the visitors to reflect on Indonesia’s pre-independence past and provides a sense of awakening. In contrast, the Independence Tower is the landmark symbol of Indonesia’s attainment of independence, stability and prosperity for its people.

Viewing the Tower, independence is represented by the office tower’s is 62 levels, when added up, the number 6 plus and 2 is 8, the figure of prosperity. The number 62 is also derived from the date of Indonesia’s Independence Day, which is 17-8-1945. The number of main office tower levels at 45 represents the year and the number of the Tower top levels at 17 represents the day. Eight lotus petals will appear from the 45 level representing the month. The lotus flower detail also reinforces the symbol of survival under difficult conditions. Stability is signified by the presence of Islam. The building is derived from two joined squares forming an octagon star. The facade of the main office also has an Islamic design to represent the Muslim population. Finally, prosperity is symbolized by the building ‘rice cone-like’ top, one of this project landmark elements visible from the ground throughout Jakarta. The Tower will act as a constant reminder to treasure what Indonesia has achieved and inspire people to continue working even harder and to excel.

Upon climbing the waterfall steps, the journey continues at the retail podium level, which represents the Sukarno era to the ‘present’. The journey takes one past the historically significant Hotel Indonesia. Built in 1962, it symbolizes the new Indonesia after independence and still retains a strong identity for prosperity among the people. With its incorporation into the new development, it will retain the heritage of its location at the Downtown Welcome Monument and is the catalyst for new prosperity.

Adjacent to the Hotel Indonesia is the ASEAN House and the new ‘Asanac Square’. The ASEAN House incorporates the natural tropical environment. From the elevated Asanac Square, the building bridges across to the adjacent site and at the rainbow’s end to the Arts and Cultural Center - the new pulse of the city or the ‘future’. It is finally landmarked by its Indonesian roof structure the ‘rumah adat’, the pride of the nation.

The Arts and Cultural Center is 7 storeys high which symbolizes the seven heavens. The number 7 is chosen, as it is a divine number befitting a place of spiritual enrichment. The 7 levels will be the ‘design center’ for ASEAN art. Two performance halls flank the main entrance and plaza. Its unique tensile structure offer a modern public facility symbolizing the wings of the ‘garuda’ the symbol of Pancasila, or ‘the believe in one supreme God, civilized humanity, nationalism and unity, democracy and social justice for all Indonesians’. This symbol acts as a guardian angel protecting the house of the arts. It will remind Indonesians to uphold their traditional values and know their true identity.

This unique Arts Center will not only provides a venue for arts, entertainment, cultural exhibitions and performances; it will also act as the hallmark of the Indonesia’s success in establishing their national identity. It will enrich the people through artistic experiences and will inspire them to develop their creativity and patriotism. The Arts not only concerns itself with the spiritual level of life that exists independent of the daily necessities, but will also act as a source of employment, cultural education and cultivating of true relationship.

In conclusion, the Jakarta mix-use development for Hotel PT HII/PT Natour will transform the present site into a symbol of the new Indonesia, a national icon and a catalyst for economic progress. The realization of this master plan will inspire Indonesians and provides them a powerful symbol of their independence, nationhood, progress and recognition within the global family. It will provide a source of Indonesia pride, identity and belonging that will lift Indonesian spirit into greater heights.

“The true foundation of the nation is the stability in the hearts and minds of its citizen. Only when this foundation is fortified by these fundamental values can the true assets of the country be built.”
- Sunflower Chong -
SITE PLAN

LEGEND
1. CULTURAL CENTER
2. ASEANIC SQUARE
3. ASEANIC SQUARE
4. ASEAN HOUSE
5. EXISTING HOTEL INDONESIA
6. LANDSCAPED RETAIL PODIUM
7. INDEPENDENCE TOWER
8. MEMORIAL MONUMENT
9. JAKARTA WELCOME MONUMENT

"The root of mankind Is to carry world peace in mind"

PEACE
Sunflower Chong
1983

MANTRA ARCH
JAKARTA
HOTEL PT III / PT NATOUR
KAPLAN / MCLAUGHLIN / DIAZ
INDEPENDENCE MEMORIAL

This is where the journey starts, a gateway which invites one to awaken, and to be aware. The Tower is a symbol of the country's attainment of independence, stability and prosperity for its people.

CULTURAL / ART CENTER

From the elevated Aseanic Square, a bridge reaches to the adjacent site, a projection into the "future". Its roof structure is an abstraction of historical designs, and houses various activities for the arts. The future is one that is concerned with spiritual attainment in life, inspired by the arts.
The ASEAN House incorporates the natural tropical environment within its double atrium lobby design. It is a focal point in the landscape, representative of the present aims for prosperity and stability.

“The true foundation of the nation is the stability and the heart and minds of its citizen. Only when the foundation is fortified by these fundamental values can the true assets of the country be built.”
SMU Design Proposal - Bras Basah Park

Design Proposal
at Bras Basah Park

Design Period: June - 2000

Visionary:
Sunflower Chong

Design Architect:
Deo R. Virtucio

Assistants:
Pan Wen Pu
Goh Jin Chuan
Greta Georges
"The East Wind changes
the Earth into green.
When the days are cloudy,
the Mountain show its greatness.
Let our outlook be far beyond
Time and Space"

Artist
Tong Siang Eng
1992

"Asians will raise through great creativity
To make their country proud

Whatever the influences might be
We will know who we are with a strong identity

Let our outlook
Be far beyond time and space"

Interpreted by
Sunflower Chong
2000
Great Architecture

Art is an ideology with the power to change the course of history. Therefore, the mission of Arts is the enlightenment of humanity. Life is incomplete without the civilizing effects of culture and art.

Great architecture is about great life. Great life is freedom of self expression, one will not feel complete if they are not allow to voice their inner thoughts, beliefs and aspirations because freedom of the mind belong to a free soul which is the spirit from God.

More than a cluster of lines and forms the highest level of architecture essentially is a spiritual inspiration from God that increases our humanity. It helps us integrate as a people and harmonize as a society in a united nation. Such architecture takes into consideration Man's myriad needs to provide the space for him to live, breath and grow as a human-being because the integrity spiritual, mental, physical and emotional are the true stake of great architecture.

In spiritual terms, buildings like humans also need air and sunlight to grow in order to blossom. Therefore, great architecture is about quality, substance, meaning and proportion and not just about striving for great height to excel. In short great architecture is about art of balance. This means it is a good building in itself, unconsciously of itself as a feature of any style, and yet still manage to maintain the basic fundamental like the transformation of the square (Earth) through the triangular into the octagonal (Star) and finally to the circle (Heaven). Geometry is the essence of true meaningful architecture, because it is universal and timeless.

The traditional values, the unity and harmony of nature and art and architecture and the advance of technology and science, are the three main criteria to be employed in great architecture. This progressive architecture will represent the character, spirit, and feeling of the community concerned. This architecture will also create sense of dialogue with the people. Through this dialogue people will understand, respect and use architecture.

The dialogue can be felt in an abstract way through building that has a soul, which "breath life" to the people like music and poetry that sing to your soul. Poetry can be a melody if the sound is melodiously tone. Similarly, building can also be a melody if the man behind the great building has a soul. It is the best comparison because of all arts; music is the closest to architecture. The mind of an architect and the mind of a composer are very similar in the creation of structure, scale and melody.

Great architecture is a natural architecture because it’s like a beautiful landscape with hills and valleys. The high-rise buildings seem to grow naturally out from the ground. These buildings are like hills powerful.

"I fear 'progress men'
Who change this world
Into their own hand"

I FEAR
Sunflower Chong
1982

CONTINUED FROM PAGE XX
dignified, proud, strong masculine. The low-rise buildings are like valleys, tranquil, peaceful, harmonious feminine. These buildings feel like they belong to each other just like a family and also fit in with the environment and definitely belong to the era - a record of time, place and man.

Such architecture represents a balance of Yin and Yang and of humanity living in harmony with nature. This concept respects human needs and the environment because great architecture works for the environment. We must live in harmony with nature and respect the environment that God has given us. Architecture, Man's contribution to the environment must strive to improve the quality of life. By designing good buildings of meaning and significant to the society, we serve society well and are thus indirectly serving God.

Great architecture is born not made, in essence is art whose spirit touches hearts and uplifts lives. It inspires greatness in passion and vision and allows people to attain fulfillment as human beings. It fires the imagination. In providing a guiding light, the best of architecture inspires courage, pride, confidence and patriotism, catalyzing people to develop them not only in terms of creativity but also in other equally important ways politically, emotionally, socially and spiritually.

Architecture ideal is an expression of the soul, revealing an ideal, an insight and a vision. This great vision will translate into a mission. This mission is to mould the society to have compassion because great architecture is human values or they are not valuable. Human values are life giving, not life taking. It is a necessary ingredient to nurture and cultivates individual as they seek unity. It sharpens our conscience to value giving instead of taking to help build a foundation with heart soul and character so that the true aim of human existence will not be lost. Therefore, great architecture will not allow land to hold the improvements, instead of the improvements holding the land.

Art and architecture are the roots of Asians cultural heritage. Therefore, great architecture has the ability to strike a balance between the spiritual and economic, yet skillful in interpreting the character of the nation, and express it's democratic and free life with strong spiritual ideals. Asian's society has a deeply rooted culture, a rich historical heritage and a strong humanistic ideology with religion as part of their life, and these Asian's value should be portray in Asian's architecture, because this Asian's pride will help us to be stronger and confidence as a people.

Believing in the new concept of architecture is essential because our ideals, arrives only when one dare to speak their mind with confidence regardless of the consequences. This is the first step in creating a great nation, which great architecture is all about. Creative thinking is a great tool and to use it well is perhaps the greatest power and the most tremendous force that has entered in the world. If the leaders of every country understand the importance of art and architecture in their society they will know how to pile a strong foundation for the people.

"To free your mind is to free your soul"
Sunflower Chong - 1997
SMU Visions and Philosophies

One of this century greatest architectural and cultural critics Lewis Mumford said that ‘The shelf that we create for ourselves marks our spiritual development as plainly as that of a snail denotes its species …..Once the conditions are ripe for good architecture the plant will flower by itself.’ The state of a country’s architecture is an index of the quality of its economy and the maturity of its culture. This theory also applies in the area like the arts.

“As a man thinks, so does he become. Every man is the son of his works.”
- Cervantes.

Changes are in the air for all Singaporeans. Singapore has talked about Renaissance, creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, saying that these are essential to our growth. As Keshvan Nair said, “Change cannot be avoided. Change provides the opportunity for innovation. It gives you the chance to demonstrate your creativity.” This means we need to focus on art and architecture because the fifteen-century Renaissance was about introducing art onto architecture. In our Asian context, we should introduce philosophy onto architecture, because Asia had been known for its strong Asian value. Therefore, this dynamism can be achieved through Singapore Management University (SMU) project by embracing Great Architecture, because beyond functional competency, a consolidated civic and cultural landmark gives meaning to one’s own unique identity.

“It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare; it is because we do not dare that they are difficult.”
- Seneca

Frank L Wright said that Great architecture is about great life; if great life is freedom of self-expression, then SMU should not be just a University. It must be a university about life learning, because of the academic objective it stands for but, most important, is the symbol it may later become – a world-class architectural showcase – and only if the solutions are right. In simple term SMU should not turn society away, instead it will be the extension of the people. Therefore if we are wise, we should seize this great opportunity of the SMU project to help Singapore to realize its aspiration of:

| An Asian Renaissance | SMU, the New Heart of the City |
| Catalyst for revolutionary minds and visionaries | SMU, the Silicon Valley of the Mind |
| Great Architecture | SMU, the Soul of the People |

The SMU project is a prestigious one. The proposed site reveals a wonderful, albeit tricky, configuration for a city campus concept. The beauty, moreover, is in its size, location and orientation. What else would an architect ask for than to be challenge by these factors as well as the sheer complexity of the project? And the greatest challenge for any architect is to create a sense of power, unity and harmony in all these buildings once you look at it. The SMU project is a beautiful but complex piece with environmental, social and historical dimensions to it. I envision the SMU to be multi-faceted designed materplan and a set of structures with an architecture that revolves around a central philosophy. My visions and philosophies for the SMU’s architecture will contain very strong symbols of prosperity and thus it may be called ‘Great Architecture’.
Therefore the total design of SMU concept plan must embrace key Asian characteristic, values and beliefs. Asian architecture is all about soul and inculcating Asian value. Asia has long been known for its strong Asian values, therefore modern Asian architecture will reflect who we are our cultural heritage, and where we come from. It should be a building rich with our cultural heritage. It must have substance that will grow with time to help us foster our sense of pride and belonging. This kind of architecture has the power to communicate with the people, and thus inspire us to believe in ourselves as individuals and as a nation. Strengthening the pride of an Asian within our hearts will undoubtedly encourage us to excel further.

One of the greatest attributes of our Asian culture and belief is the ‘Yin and Yang’. It is all about the art of balance, because without a balance in our life we will be too pragmatic, and pure pragmatism has no room for compassion. If this happens our nation will be in a very sad state, and our country will not endure. Economic progress and spiritual betterment must go hand in hand. Otherwise we will be a nation filled with selfish individuals who do not have a sense of duty and responsibility towards the country.

Being an Asian society, we must not lose this opportunity and with a sense of duty to promote an understanding of visions and philosophies as a way to enhance architectural solutions to a project. It is worth listening to Finnish architect Alvar Aalto in his own words about architecture. He said that “For architecture to take a deeper role as a humanizing, cultural factor that defends man we need works cast in matter itself – no words can help. We need it to have social awareness and compassion for the human tragedy. Architecture must be deeply rooted in place and circumstances, it requires a delicate sense of form; it must support human emotions.” Therefore when objects and forms act as repositories of meaning, they gain symbolic content. These are what needed to implant in the SMU project if we as a nation embrace this great philosophy.

“The words that enlighten the soul are more precious than jewels.”
-Mazrat Inayat Khan

SMU campus can be a powerful symbol of rebirth in many ways. It is the rebirth of an old site, as the new heart of the city. The Singapore River had always been known as the old heart of the city that symbolizes economic.

Singapore is striving to be a Renaissance City, therefore SMU at Bras Basah site will be known as the new heart of the city, which embraces art. It is the rebirth of philosophy and arts in the form of architecture. Most importantly, it is the rebirth of our Asian heritage.

The SMU architecture will be physically modern but spiritually Asian. It will depict SMU mission statement “to be a world-class university for education and research with stimulating and diverse programs to develop entrepreneurial, knowledgeable and responsible men and women capable of leading in a dynamic global environment.”

To portray a well-balanced education, the total design of SMU will have arts facilities that will bring the energy of the Bras Basah entertainment and culture precinct right into the heart of SMU. This will definitely create a vibrant precinct of culture, scholarship, innovation and entrepreneurship because art is being actively used in the development of personal business skills, promoting business. This action will enable SMU to realize its aspiration to nurture students into global-minded individual with a mind of their own and the ability to strike a balance in their lives “without which the mind will be without a soul or the soul without the mind.”

In this fast pace and pragmatic society, it is necessary for business people to adopt a holistic approach to work and to life, to enable them to be responsible human beings to the world at large. A balance education is about nurturing individuals with beautiful souls, (Singapore need plenty of them) SMU being a
world-class university needs a well-balanced education to mould individuals who can think for themselves, if not education has lost its purpose, objectives and direction.

“The secret of life is balance, and the absence of balance is life’s destruction.”
-Hazrat Inayat Khan

Our people are our greatest natural resource. SMU must have arts facilities to create the conditions for multidisciplinary approach to education and business, combining the creativity and freedom of the arts, with the discipline and structure of management. This will enable our future leaders to have the desire and the passion to serve the country with intelligence and compassion. It is good to note a recent surveys in Switzerland came out this believe that ‘A happy country it seems, is one where politics is not a spectator sport.’ Politics do built strong character, confidence and courage, therefore SMU should not lack such requirements to help them excel to be world thinkers and leaders if not around the world but at least around this region.

“Nothing we ever imagined is beyond our powers, only beyond our present self-knowledge.”
-Theodore Roszak

P R E L U D E

Objective, Functions & Goals

Why is it important to create Great Architecture with the support of arts facilities to enable Singapore to reach its aspirations to be a Renaissance City?

Architecture and thought are soul mates. Every building is born in the mind of its creator. Therefore Great Architecture is all about:

1) Value Creation
2) Spiritual Awakening
3) Arts development and enrichment

The arts facilities are the core to our success to achieve an Asian Renaissance City -
The magic is the Ripples Effect

-Globalization Tourism
-ASEAN Greater Asia for stability and security Cultural integration for better understanding
-Singapore Identity, a generous society
-Bras Basah Birth of an Asian Renaissance
-SMU Arts Facilities
**INTRODUCTION**

**Spirituality**

*Why the spiritual concept is important?*

In Chinese society, traditional architecture and city planning reflect the beliefs and values in which space at both domestic and urban levels, is organized in harmony with the world around us. The basic concept of *feng shui* is to help harmonize and adapt buildings to the geographic and climatic condition of an environment. Hence *feng shui* is considered a *pseudo-science,* working with, rather than, against the forces of nature.

In essence, the aim of obtaining good *feng shui* is to be able to channel the positive energy of nature—often referred to as *qi,* and believed to be the cosmic breath of the celestial dragon so that it accumulates and flow smoothly through a city as a structure. Good *feng shui* is believed to guarantee abundance and prosperity and SMU students need plenty of it to give them the spiritual foundation that will be a requirement in this modern and fast pace society-in order not to lose oneself.

It is very important to reinforce such concept like spirituality because in this pragmatic society we are robbed of our soul right in front of our very eyes. It is only when we are aware of our roots that our feet can be firm on the ground to help us be reminded of our heritage. If not there is the danger that we don’t even realize our lost identity until it is too late to do anything about it, except to accept it and live with it; just like all Singaporeans.

Thus the lost of power to feel is simply the lost of our soul. *“The more the Soul Lives in the light of the Spirit, ‘tumed toward’ that which is above itself, the more creative it becomes.”*—Plinthus. Without feeling you cannot reach passion; so how do you develop your spirit? This means you cannot. Therefore passion cannot be created; moreover creativity, where there is none. What is more important to create is the understanding that *“Every life needs its altar. It may be in a church or quiet nook, it may be a moment in the day or a mood of the heart...but somewhere the spiritual life must have its altar. From there, life gains its poise and direction.”*—Esther B. York. *Can SMU’s total development be the altar for our people to give them a sense of direction to help them to develop their self-confidence to know who they are?*
INTRODUCTION

Symbolism - What is its implication

In the world around us, we see many symbols that inspire and teach us on the meaning of life. Therefore finding the sacred meanings in everyday architecture is a discovery of the fundamental links between spirit and matter and matter as being similar to balancing of art and business.

To create powerful Landmark in architecture form is to invest in a specific place with meanings and memories. This can happen by investing institutionalized ‘national ideology’ of a country; very often this ‘national ideology’ will benefit those who have prerogative to exercise power.

Symbolism means something, which represents something, a sign or mark. Monuments, Landmark and great design are objectified symbols of past and present time in a specific place; their meanings are often created to remind people of a significant event in the course of history. Monuments are erected to commemorate cultural changes, important persons, national heritage or history, and important events during the formation period of countries. On another hand, present places and events can be objectified to express the sentiments of the individual and collectives.

“When objects and forms act as repositories of meaning, they gain symbolic content, and archetypal building forms are no exception. Besides serving their practical function of shelter, these forms act as outer symbols of our inner consciousness. A floor is both a physical means of support and a tangible symbol of emotional stability; a wall offers a symbol of separation and enclosure; a roof represents nurturing shelter.” – Anthony Lawlors

Each of the other architectural elements in turn becomes a focal point for the thoughts and feelings that animates our lives. That is why symbols are very important in our life to give us a sense of awareness of who we are. We must not limit our perception of symbols to a narrow range of forms – the flag, the cross, and the dollar sign – but every object can be infused with symbolic content. The Indians live in a world of symbols and images where the spiritual and commonplace are one….To them they are part of nature, part of themselves – the earth, the sun, the wind and the rain, stones, trees, animals, even little insects. They try to understand them not with the head but with the heart, and they need no more than a hint give them the meaning. This is what we have to learn in this new age and New World; using our heart more often to develop our inner feeling and power.
The ideas consolidated here are borne out of the consideration that the school needs to be seen as part of a larger social context, not as a walled enclave, self-contained and set apart from its surroundings. The campus can then learn from the city, and the city can learn from its campus. Thus, as an architectural discourse, the points extend beyond the built form, into usage projections, extensions, ideas which are based on extrapolations, meant to establish the SMU campus as a dynamic landmark in the city.

The broad concept of the overall form of the SMU campus is based on creating a Landscape for Learning. Furthermore, it is an educational park, where functional architectural elements are juxtaposed to give meaning, much like how a tangram puzzle can recombine to create an unlimited array of recognizable forms. The goals of this approach are as follows:

- The landscape is a common denominator, it creates an overall theme, which people can relate to.
- Elements of landscape bridge the human scale to the high rise structures in the urban site.
- A multitude of metaphors based on landforms: such as an underground pass which alludes the sense of a cave or a valley, to long, gentle sloping paths of long periscopic views, to the passing through of “necks” of spaces in between steep banks and buildings... all these create significant boundaries and transitions which affect the senses. At this point, I must urge the reader to abandon imagery of much of the “landscaping” which has occurred here, of large, flat and desert like plains of cow grass, of cosmetic markings meant to demarcate property areas, of areas of shade under raintrees, indistinct from each other because they have been cultivated in an almost pristine manner.
- Such is a spine that weaves through the campus, emerging for air and light, from fenestrations in the landscape, and burrowing at points, lying dormant and quiet in others. Its form and spatial qualities experienced from either within or out, bear the localized influences of the realm of each building it plugs into, grazes by, or creeps up upon.
- The most expressive element of this landscape is water. The water is a flowing entity which accompanies the pedestrian at various parts of the campus, it is both a metaphor of their ceaseless activities, as well as a gently fluctuating landscape which surrounds them. Water traverses and transforms, from still reflecting pools, to streams that fracture into purring rivulets, into forceful falls, its nature setting a mood for each background, within the varied landscape.

We assert that a landscaping as such, of noticeable transitions, and affective settings, creates memorable, personal experiences for its users, thus establishing an identity of both place, and self in relation to it especially for its students and staff users. This idea of perception, through a moving experience in the landscape differs starkly from the idea that the space is defined geometrically, and can be grasped from a viewpoint. The expectations of a moving observer, of sequential experiences (transition into an open sky, for example), inviting participation and thus understanding of the space through passage in time, are concepts rooted in Asian architecture.

Integrating with the City: Combined Occupancy and other Shared Endeavors.

A campus in the city should not be one that is tucked away out of the public's view or use. This proposal asserts that we can set up several "focal points" throughout the campus, functioning as places shared use between the public and the students and staff.

This form of assimilation begins with the Business Library as specified by the brief, which opens its doors to the downtown business community, perhaps even till late evening hours. More importantly, it should integrate with complexes of computing technologies, which facilitate personal study (with perhaps priority allocation to students), so it is not merely a bookshelf and book drop.

Similar to the small shop houses and eating places that have colonized the ground floors of Singapore's high-rise structures, combined occupancy is at work here, as we locate retail and commerce spaces adjacent to the campus (mostly at the ground-floor and subterranean planes). This is intended to be more than a gesture of an "interface". The design of this integration should be rooted in recognition of the fact (as Chris Abel has pointed out) that the economic systems of Asian cities are based on two economic systems: a modern, firm-based and a pre-industrial urban economy, comprised of complex networks between diverse, usually small operators and activities, functioning within extended systems of kinship. This means that we introduce a framework where businesses can set up shop in proximity, and of permanence, to the university community. This can be one step towards reducing depersonalization of services, improving the generally poor service culture of the region.

In a city that hardly sleeps, should human life vanish at the sound of the dismissal bell? The use of school facilities by its students long after school-hours, is not as idealistic as it sounds, as a look at the studios and workshops of design schools, will show that a number of students are content with the conducive environments of a quiet night, and continue working on their projects till daybreak. The removal of time-blocks in the education can also extend beyond the classroom.
The Lion is the most recognized symbolic representation of Singapore. The visual identity of SMU is also that of a lion. It draws its inspiration from the ancient Chinese puzzle, the Tangram. A Tangram is an artistic collection of seven geometric pieces set in a square. The SMU website multimedia animation (www.smu.edu.sg) shows that SMU’s logo of the lion actually originates from a complete square. The square breaks into seven pieces of triangles, which then reunites into an integrated representation of the lion. The process and composition is both precise yet disciplined and versatile. This is similar to the ‘Yin and Yang’ concept of balancing the opposite. It will be a challenge for SMU’s design to translate into architectural representation this SMU Tangram lion.

How do we translate this into architectural form?

The total expression will begin on the University Library at plot A&B. The seven pieces of triangular will break away from a total square which is the base of the library and come back in a joint form as the eyes, nose and mouth of the SMU lion. Therefore the library would be seven storeys high, and the design of the building will look like the hourglass in the shape of a pyramid because the SMU lion mouth and nose look just like the pyramid hourglass design.

The essence of the lion will also immerge on this site to portray the rising of the lions to serve society. This expression will be represented by the ‘sun’ roof structure that will look like the eyes of the lion head. As the tangram breaks away again, it scatters into seven pieces and these pieces will be represented on site C1, C2, C3, Plot E, D1&D2, the open green field and the old National Theatre site. This means Fort Canning Park must be included in the total design for SMU for the simply reason that arts facilities has been included in SMU. All the buildings will be related in the sense that all the design will have a sloping effect just like the padi fields on plots A&B.

To reinforce the essence of the Tangram as a sense of balance, the use of circles will symbolize a well-balanced education. Another is the use of clocks to symbolize the essence of time. To connect all these buildings mentally the circles are used to send powerful messages across. The Time Bridge at C1 and C2 with its round clock is an echo that time is short and that we better not lose any more time in the development of the arts. If we are able to create this balance than we will be the leaders in the region. This is symbolized by the globe structure at the Administration Building.

This ancient game, also known as the ‘wisdom puzzle’ prophesies – transcends racial and cultural borders. It is as relevant today as it was thousand of years ago and Singapore is a proof of the prophesy as we are a multi racial, multi religious and multi cultural society living in harmony.
CIRCULATION

CROSS-SECTIONAL VIEW ALONG BRAS BASAH ROAD

CROSS-SECTIONAL VIEW OF LIBRARY AND ACADEMIC BLOCK

CROSS-SECTIONAL VIEW (WORKSHOP AND CAR PARK)

FIGURE-GROUND AND LANDSCAPE

PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION AND VEHICULAR DROP-OFF POINT
One beautiful windy night after a hard day’s work, there was a little girl captured by the sight of the swaying trees together with her neighborhood friends. “Look at the trees,” she exclaimed, “it looks like they’re talking to one another; do you think one day buildings can be taller than the trees and they, too, will talk with one another.” At that time, the tallest building in Singapore was the Asia Insurance Building. Having heard of it, the little girl became excited but because they were poor, she didn’t have a penny to ride a bus and see this building which was suppose to be taller than the trees. That was 40 odd years ago and the little girl was I, the fantasy, then, was architecture and up to the present, it still is.

The skill to communicate as a nation is very important to me. Architecture does not exist, only the spirit of architecture exists. Because a building springs from a thought in someone’s mind, it is an extension of the spirit that animates our lives. As Frank Lloyd Wright aptly put it, “As no stream can rise higher than its source, no building can rise higher than the consciousness of its architect.” So I strongly believe great architecture can bridge this gap if we can design structures that can solve this challenge. If you can free your mind you are freeing your soul. Therefore in my simple mind nothing is impossible, because the impossible is for the unreachable.

“We shall never cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.”
-T.S.Eliot

Architecture is not about ego and how it should represent HIM or HER or creating brand name like some famous architects had done. For a layperson like me, architecture is my soul, it is a primal element of human existence; it has deep connections to the sacred powers of life. In short it reflects who I am, my values, beliefs and aspirations. Therefore, whatever I touch, I am touching life and at the same time creating life, because my undying passion and Great Spirit for humanity give me the power to enable me to see thing in a different light. “The miracle is not to fly in the air, or to walk on the water, but to walk on the earth among people.” That was how the concept of great architecture in SMU had arrived.

My architecture is about value creation because of my strong views about how life should be. My belief is spiritual awakening, because it is part of my soul, without this balance I will be lost in the wilderness created by the modern man due to their continuous greed, which they lamely called it ‘progress’. Last but not least is my passion and determination to convince the government to focus on arts development in order to enrich our souls. My only aspiration is to see happiness in the face and heart of my people. I know they wanted the government to put equal funding in arts developments like they have in other areas like the IT and Sciences.
"The secret of happiness is not in doing what one likes,
but in liking what one has to do." — James Barrie

Besides giving meaning in my life, I am doing architecture to bring out its hidden power where no one imagined it existed. The Tao te Ching says the way of the sacred "is like a well: used but never used up. It is like the eternal void: filled with infinite possibilities. It is hidden but always present." This unique power of feeling is a passion and the intuition is a gift that I had acquired, and managed to turn it into ability by nurturing my mind through the years. Through my long and thorny journey in search for Worldwide Unity by understanding the people's needs, I had realized the greatest power of an individual is hidden deep in our soul.

What I have in architecture is a gift from God and it gives me great pride, which make me feel very complete and fulfilled as a person. I had also discovered through my long and painful journey, a great architect is just a servant of society and great architecture is about serving society. A person like me who love God deeply need to serve to add meaning to her existence, because loving God is striving for greater humanity. I am a true visionary who sees buildings coming alive and 'breathing life' to the people. I strongly believe in architecture's power to influence people and make an impact on their lives for the betterment of society. Isn't this what the government hope to achieve for the people?

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscape
but having new eyes." — Marcel Proust

Art and architecture are the roots of our cultural heritage. To enable arts to move forward, we have to achieve great works of architecture. On the other hand, great works of architecture must be implemented with traditional elements to retain our identity, instilled with both philosophical values and teachings.

Architecture is the physical foundation of the arts. Why is it so? Because a great building housing the arts is a home for its offspring's like a parent caring for her children. Music, dance, theatre and the fine arts of painting and sculpting are therefore offspring's of architecture.

I strongly believe that great designs arrive from the need to solve problems and the hope to make changes and improve society. These, being difficult, yearn for men and women who are fearless, exuding confidence, determination and guts. Usually, people who conceive and create revolutionary designs have strong values and character.

These people possess powerful visions, a passionate interest to change society not for the sake for change but realize if we do not change we will be stagnant and be
left behind. They believe that their inner talent is an ‘inspired gift’. They have the
desire to excel and contribute to the goodness of society. They believe that
knowledge acquired is precious and must be shared to make society a better place
for everyone. Their only reward and greatest fulfillment is to see happiness among
the people. Monetary gains are secondary compared to the kind of satisfaction
they receive.

"Love is not getting, but giving. It is sacrifice.
And sacrifice is glorious." – Joanna Field

Dr. Tan Chin Nam called me a one-woman crusade for arts and architecture when
I submitted the National Library proposal in 1993. If only he realized how strong an
encouragement it was for me. I asked his advise what am I going to do with myself
with such a passion. He told me that if I still strongly believe in my ideology, I should
do whatever I can to achieve it and his parting words were ‘Never give up’. In the
confrontation between a stream and the rock, the stream always win, not because
of strength but because of perseverance. My search of the impossible dream to
enhance worldwide unity through architecture and the arts is therefore a life-long
and painful journey.

"Never, never, never, never give up."- Winston Churchill

Now, everybody is talking about making Singapore a ‘Renaissance City’. I hope we
do not choke on this idea too much. Nevertheless, my concept proposal is a sin-
cere and honest effort to share my views of what I believe can be achieved for the
SMU as well as for Singapore in general. As I mentioned earlier, this proposal is
also a simple gesture to introduce myself as a Singaporean who cares and dares.
To quote Marcus Aurelius he said, “Our life is what our thoughts make of it.”

“Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss it you will land among the stars.”
-Les Brown

Why don’t we give art a chance? We have nothing to lose, but everything to gain
because the people will be happy with the government, as I said earlier that our
new mindset is to work hand in hand with the government to make Singapore
great. We can be a great nation when the people and government are thinking with
one heart and one mind. By embracing arts facilities in the SMU project prove to
the people the government hear them and will do all their best to fulfilled their
aspirations, if not now maybe in the very near future.

‘No society of the past ever found its significant expression without the participa-
tion of its artists; cultural problems cannot be solved by intellectual processes or
political actions alone.’ – Walter Gropius
"I had brought the Russian in aide to cease the Kuwait fire."

"Witness the Kuwait fire was an experience of a lifetime."
"I was escorted by kuwaitee's army with the russians behind me viewing the fire"
‘My special task is to help achieve an identity
To foster my people’s happiness and unity

This great mission that I shoulder
Will it be too big for me I wonder?

Am I ready?
To take on such a great responsibility”

Let me enhance Worldwide Unity with Love and Care by
Understanding my People’s Needs
Sunflower Chong
1983
Embarking On the Impossible Journey to Make SMU an Arts University

“All that is gold does not glitters, not all those who wander are lost.” – J.R.R. Tolkien

Mahatma Gandhi told his son that if he believed in his dream he must go for it, but halfway if he does not believe in it, he must drop it altogether. I still believe in my dream for Singapore, therefore I could not give up, so I chose a cheaper way to get the job done for SMU. Instead of commissioning a foreign architect firm to do the concept plan just like what I had done for the ASEAN House project in Jakarta, I got the students from NUS to do it for me. It is the vision that I needed to bring out that NUS site cannot be the new Renaissance as Dr. Tan Chin Nam team had given their report to the Government. Instead, SMU is the ideal site to realize the Government aspirations of the New Renaissance City.

I often wondered as an ordinary Singaporean could I make a different and play a part to achieve this goal to effect change. If I could play a part, I often wondered how should I go about achieving it without being misunderstood by the people, especially by the intellectual’s ones? As everyone knew in Singapore an ordinary person can’t go and tell the Government that they had made a mistake in their planning, so the only way to go around the system without getting myself into trouble for trying to be smart was through joining the SMU competition. Art must be part of living, how wonderful if my concept proposal for SMU to be the birth of Singapore New Renaissance City can convince the Government to change their mindset for SMU to be an Arts University? If they were convinced to accept the idea that SMU is the birth of the New Renaissance, this means inevitably arts must be incorporated its curriculum and hopefully SMU will eventually be converted into a fully-fledged Arts University for ASEAN. If I could not achieve this objective at least the Government knew that the SMU site has the capacity to stretch its potentials through studying my masterplan.

Since Singapore strive to be the city for the world, why not also a citizen of the world? I dreamt that one-day Singapore could be home not only for all Singaporeans but for the citizens of the world as well. How? Singapore is in a unique position to be a cultural powerhouse. It is a cosmopolitan society, the gateway between East and West, therefore the possibility is tremendous to attract all the brains from the world to come together to Singapore to inject new ideas to integrate World Cultures. I believe through this process many great ideas will blossom spontaneously for greater humanity.

Coming out with creative ideas is not a problem for me but my greatest challenge lied is with the civil servants, as they do not welcome ideas from the public especially from an individual like me. Moreover, if the Government did not give the signal or green light to receive ideas from the public, the civil servants do not take their own initiative, instead, they deemed our actions as a challenge to their intellect or we were questioning their performance. As they told me that they know how to do their job and they do not need a person like me to tell them how to do it? I was reprimanded to stop behaving like I am the Government! And even when the Government gave the green light that citizens
could give ideas, yet the civil servants still refuse to accept my proposals. The way they behaved as though Singapore belong to the Government and not to the people. My proposal for the Singapore New Renaissance City at SMU was really a long journey before it was out in the open after with great effort and determination I managed to get myself involved with the SMU competition so that all my ideas will be out in the open instead thrown into the bin by the officials.

If I did not grab this only opportunity of the SMU to let the Government knows what excellence in education is all about through my proposal, I believe I would not have the opportunity to reveal to all of you the hidden power of Great Architecture. If we understand what renaissance means - European Renaissance is about going back to the past and build on from there, thus it was necessary to excavate before it was possible to build a new, and to see again in a new light, implied new eyes, or at least good vision then the Government will understand the power of Great Architecture is the true foundation for nation building. I really hope the Government can see that SMU can be our Third Birth to realize the Government aspirations to turn Singapore into the new renaissance city. Once I could achieve this first step the next step to integrate cultures will come naturally and thus enable Singapore to be the Brain and Soul of the world. Can you imagine ASEAN being the ‘Hollywood of the East’ and Singapore being the brain and soul of the world will be a dream comes true within 20 or 30 years times and the best of it all is that Singapore will be the catalyst, this is what I meant by leading but not seen as leading?

The Americans called me a born artist. Could it be that in their eyes I seemed to acquire the skill in the art of living? That is chasing an impossible dream and yet still manage to survive graciously and gracefully? (But I often wondered for how long because my friend said that one day I will end up in a hole at the rate I am going chasing this unrealistic dream for Singapore to be the brain and soul of the world.) If you consider that as my success that I have live fully, then I guess it got to do with my philosophy that the struggle in my life give me the challenge and this challenge create excitement to my living and uplift my spirit and whole wellbeing.

Our Third Birth - ‘SMU - Birth of Singapore New Renaissance’

“There is no force so great as an idea whose time has come.” - S. Best and C. Smith.

“Best and Smith are referring to ‘the spirit of the times’, a favorable period when the efforts of many individuals, through fortuitous circumstances, come together to create a beneficial leap forward – in science, technology or some other important field of endeavor. They sum up this phenomenon through the German word Zeitgeist, a force expressed by Dr. Julian Kenyon in 21st Century Medicine as ‘a major shift of the consciousness. He likens it to the astonishing progress made in many areas during the Renaissance. More thinkers are aware of the spirit of the times than can pinpoint its causes, though all seem to agree that it is powerful, all pervading and startlingly positive.
What emerges directly from the quote above is that ideas are potent and that potency affects both the conceiver of the idea and other individuals by an osmotic process of communication throughout society.

Furthermore, the power of an idea culminates at a certain point, when 'it's time has come' – when driven by a sense of rightness, we act upon what we have conceived, despite what surface logics or the negative spiraling of worry might tell us to the contrary.

Best and Smith imbues Zeitgeist with certain independence: It happens anyway. But how much more effective is that energy if we are aware of it and eager to exploit its potential?

“To imagine is everything.” – Anatole France.

What Janadas Devan Got To Say About Singapore Third Birth?

On Straits Times, 9 August 2003, this was what Mr. Janadas Devan had written for Singapore 38 birthdays “Singapore has come a long way by being a dogged hedgehog running a steady race and it needs to be a fox if it wants to stay ahead.” He has awakened our mind; his article is food for the souls and will keep our minds thinking for a long while if we desire to bring Singapore to greater heights. Mr.Devan also said, “In spite of the best will in the world, it would be difficult to remake Singapore unless this change -Attitude of the Government. Unlike in the making of Singapore, where it was possible for a handful of foxes to lead from the top, the remaking of Singapore will have to lead by varieties of foxes in different fields acting independently.” The dream of Singapore New Renaissance at SMU can only be achieved if the Government understood what Mr. Devan was saying.

Time to Be Foxy

“The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.”
That extraordinary line appears among the fragments of the Greek poet Archilochus. Some decades ago, the British historian of ideas Isaiah Berlin invoked it in an influential essay. The Hedgehog and Fox. Taken literally, the line may “mean no more than the fox, for all its cunning, is defeated by the hedgehog’s one defence”.

Interpreted figuratively, though, Berlin made the line yield a meaning that divided writers and thinkers, and perhaps “human beings in general”, into two broad types. Hedgehogs, in his interpretation, are thinkers directed by a single, universal, organizing principle” to which they subordinate everything else. Their minds are centripetal, relating all that they seize upon to a central vision.
Foxes, on the other hand, “pursue many ends, often unrelated”, “seizing upon a vast variety of experiences and objects” without “seeking to fit them into, or exclude them from, a unitary inner vision”. Their thought is centrifugal. Berlin named Dante the exemplary hedgehog, and Shakespeare the quintessential fox. In terms of Eastern philosophy, one might cite Confucius and Lao-Tzu to illustrate the contrast.

**Can we classify countries similarly?**

On the face of it, it would be absurd. Countries consist of millions of individuals. No country, not even the most totalitarian, has a singular “mind’. Still, they do have systems – political, economic, social and cultural. Might we not say of these that some are hedgehog-like and some fox-like? An economy with socialist features, for instance, would have hedgehog tendencies, while one dominated by the free-market would have fox tendencies.

Similarly, countries that are racially homogeneous, or have political systems that emphasise consensus over conflict, might be called hedgehogs, while countries that are the opposite, foxes. By such rough-and-ready mans, one might describe Japan and Germany as hedgehogs, and United States and Britain as foxes. I wouldn’t defend this classification to the last particular, but advance it merely as an “aid” to discussion, a “starting point” for speculative spirit, where would Singapore fall? Most people, including Singaporeans, would readily answer: it is a Dantesque, Confucian, and Japanese Hedgehog.

Many might also add: And so what? If it had been a Shakespearean, Taoist, American Fox, it would have bellied up long ago. The Remakers among us would plead: That might have been true before; it is no longer so. They are all right.

Being the descendants of immigrants, Singaporeans are natural foxes. But to overcome an extraordinary number of challenges, they turned themselves into hedgehogs. The remarkable thing is that this transformation was led by quintessential foxes – the first generation of independent Singapore’s leaders who were foxy to the nth degree. Foxes built a hedgehog system. It was inevitable. For which other post-colonial country has had two births: The first, on Sept 16, 1963, when Singapore merged with Malaysia, a near-fatal breech case; and the second, on Aug 9, 1965, a dramatic C-section? Survival in such circumstances depended on relating everything – from economic policy to housing policy, from national service to the education system – to a single organizing vision: Singapore shall prevail by distinguishing itself from the region, and linking itself to the world. But that model may have exhausted itself with the old economy. The underlying vision in the new economy may still be the same – there is no viable alternative to the “global city” vision – but the means of achieving it may have to change.
But can a hedgehog system produce foxes? Accustomed to having everything fit neatly, hedgehogs must now become foxy – pursuing many ends, seizing chances as they come, not expecting things to fall into a predictable pattern. It won’t be an easy transition.

IF MR BILL GATES and Mr. Steve Jobs had come to Singapore in the early 1970s, would we have welcomed them? Would EDB have recognized their talents and given them pioneer status? Would the local banks have funded them?

The answer to all three questions is probably “no”. Messrs Gates and Job would not even have got past customs and immigration. They would have been stopped, dragged to a barbershop and ordered to have a haircut.

Thirty years ago, these now respectable captains of industry were longhaired, blue-jeaned, counter-cultural beatniks. In America, their likes were criticized but tolerated. In Singapore, they were criticized and excluded.

I’m not suggesting that there is a necessary connection between long hair and business success. Nor am I suggesting that compared to America’s counter-cultural-entrepreneurs-in-the-making, Singapore’s shorthaired bureaucrats and businessmen are a dull and uncreative lot.

Indeed, the current criticisms of Singapore’s entrepreneurial culture is mistaken in at least one respect: If not for the supposedly unenterprising, risk-averse Singapore Government and its government-linked companies (GLCs), there wouldn’t be much of a Singapore today for Singaporeans to complain about.

Still, the criticisms are useful in one respect: Singapore can’t just coast on its past successes. Efficiency of organization and production can no longer be the sole source of its competitive advantage. For one thing, others are catching up. For another, we would need something extra – “creativity”, “foresight”, “oomph”, call it what you will – to stay ahead.

What is it that gives America that ‘oomph’? Why doesn’t Singapore have more of it? Why, after 40 years of industrialization, does it have only one Mr. Sim Wong Hoo, while America turns them out by the hundreds every year, and even Taiwan and South Korea do better than we do?

Obviously, many factors are involved. Size is one, culture is another. I would emphasise one factor above all: America’s tolerance of difference, its fundamental openness to ideas, and the varieties of models of excellence that exists within its culture. Unlike in Singapore, where we tend to overvalue one kind of talent – the scholar type – the US has no such preference. It admires basketball stars as much as movie stars and theoretical geniuses like Albert Einstein as much as practical geniuses like Henry Ford.
One would be hard pressed to find many summa cum laude from Ivy League universities among the CEOs of Fortune 500 companies. They are highly intelligent people, to be sure, but not solely in terms of paper qualifications. At least two among them, our friends Gates and Jobs, are university drop-outs. Would any GLC in Singapore hire a drop-out as an executive, let alone make him a CEO? More than anything else, it is this variety of talent that explains America’s ability to strike out repeatedly on new paths. Societies that have a narrower conception of talent tend also to value stable conditions of life. It colors their emphasis on past experience.

The reliable Mandarin - that figure of excellence that traditional societies like Britain and China used to admire - is someone who has mastered a technique, a way of being based on the wisdom of the past, and hardly ever looks beyond that horizon. America, by contrast, doesn’t have many mandarins, and hardly tolerates the few it has. But precisely because it values varieties of talent, suspending its judgment as to which might prove the most valuable in the future, it remains always ready to receive the new. Indeed, it expects it, welcomes it.

Singapore doesn’t have the same capacious view of talent. The Government not only monopolises talents of the traditional variety by sweeping great numbers of them, via the scholarship rout, into government and allied services, it monopolises the very definition of talent.

In spite of the best will in the world, it would be difficult to remake Singapore unless this change. Unlike in the making of Singapore, where it was possible for a handful of foxes to lead from the top, the remaking of Singapore will have to lead by varieties of foxes in different fields acting independently.

Government will not disappear in the meantime. Its coordinating functions will remain of crucial importance. It will remain the only agency capable of ensuring justice for all, and in a crisis, there is no substitute for government, as we saw in the recent Sars crisis.

But the reach of Government will have to change. Instead of telling people what they can and can’t do, it should restrict itself to defining clearly what can’t be done. And instead of being the chief arbitrator of value, it should restrict itself to being the catalyst of change that it cannot itself to being the catalyst of change that it cannot itself direct in every particular.

But it is not only a question of what government should do. It is also a question of what people will let it do. There cannot be government by foxes of hedgehogs for hedgehoggery. People say they want less government, more space for private initiative, less nannying. On the other hand, many also want “guarantees” against failure. This was evident in the response to senior minister Lee Kuan Yew’s recent speech to unionists, with one 37-year-old telling The Straits Times: “I’m not reassured by SM’s words, because he never gave the guarantee that our lives will be better, that we will have jobs. He only said that we must adjust.”
We have all asked: How far will the Government go in restructuring? Is it really prepared to let go? Is all this cosmetic or real? Perhaps another set of questions ought to be asked: incertitude afflicts Singapore today. This wavering is as much the result as it is the cause of the transition it is going through. The result – because transitions are always unsettling; the cause – because the transition is being forced by an acute sense that the old structures will no longer work, but with an uncertainty about what would be replace it.

We are into our third birth. It would be as difficult as our second. Changing from hedgehogs into foxes is metamorphosis.
13 July 1999

Ms Chong Sun Wah
Visionary Designer
Mantra Arch

Dear Ms Chong:

FORUM HOTLINE: 428 8235

Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore, 14 July 1999


We are pleased to enclose your entrance pass and agenda for this event. The other forum materials will be available at the venue on 14 July 1999.

As security will be an important factor in view of the high profile of the speakers, we seek your cooperation, as admission to the forum, and the luncheon venue, will be on the basis of identification from your entrance pass.

The forum will open promptly at 8.30am. We look forward to seeing you there.

Sincerely,

James Meyer
Forum Sales & Registrations
AGENDA
Singapore, 14 July 1999

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Honestly speaking, it was not an easy journey to reach the government directly to hear you – So near and yet so far because they refused to see me on the basis that I was an individual. The only way around the system is to seize this great opportunity of the SMU project to push my cause with the hope maybe this time around they will give me the attention thus the opportunity to present my vision for a renaissance city.

Even at this juncture the struggle was as hard because Mr. Ho Kwon Pin refused to see me. The staff told me he will be attending the Shangri-La dialogue, so I have no choice but to buy a ticket at $500 to try my luck to meet Mr. Ho at the Shangri-La dialogue meeting. With the blessing from God I managed to get hold of him and told him I am not an architect by profession but I would like to participate in the design competition for SMU? He looked at him with a stern face and reluctantly he agreed on the condition that I must have an architect firm as my partner. So here I won half the battle 😊

The architect firm that I had approached was not willing to include my name in their submission after my team and I have completed our proposal. It was only after they agreed to include my name in the submission then I hand over my proposal to them. What a journey to let my ideas be heard, I was not even dreaming to win the competition but because PM Goh Chok Tong's office refused to look into my proposal that I have no other choice except through this competition to bring out my grand vision for Singapore. My persistent was because I hope to open the eyes of the Government to turn SMU into an Arts University for the region. We must think big and aim high and that had always been my motto. In Singapore if you open your mouth literally to give ideas you can get into trouble with the authority, but doing a proposal they cannot fault me. I really hope that the Government will implement some of my suggestions for SMU especially to leave the green field in front of Cathay building untouch?

I had spent almost $15,000 for the SAC proposal just to get the satay club idea onto the masterplan of SAC. And the idea of the tunnel from the MRT to the SAC and the amphitheater were implemented too. Another $30,000 was spent on the National Library with a model flown in to Singapore just to make sure at the end of the day that it was not going to be a business library as planned by Dr. Tan Chin Nam team ‘Library 2000’. My main objective was to change the civil servants mindset how in the 21st century the new library should encompass, at the same time to bring across to them the ideas that art must be integrated into the library premises too. I wanted a new kind of library with great human interaction; therefore I also suggested to them to bring the library to shopping mall since Singaporeans’ culture is window-shopping. But most of all I wanted this library to be the world library and with SMU being the birth of a New Renaissance, this will be a perfect combination. And only God knows how much I had put in for the SMU pursue.
Singapore Institute of Architects - CIRCULAR

31 May 2000

To: Senior Partners/Directors of SIA member Firms

Re: SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY URBAN AND ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN COMPETITION

Further to our Circular No 42/2000 MF/MS/occ dated 18 April 2000, we would like to inform members that URA had issued a Press Release to all UIA members on the SMU design competition. We re-produce the content of this Press Release for your information and attention.

“THE URBAN AND ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN OF THE NEW CAMPUS OF THE SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY”

This competition, in two stages, launched and organized by the “Singapore Management University is not conform with the terms of the UNESCO/UIA Regulation for international competitions in architecture and town planning, notably concerning the following points:

-Awards and prizes
-Sovereignty of the jury
-Anonymity not respected in the second stage
-Competition timetable (insufficient time in relation to the amount of work required)
-Copyright and right of ownership rules not respected.

Consequently, this competition has not been approved by the International Union Architects (UIA)

The UIA therefore informs its Member Sections, as well as architects interested in participating, that in the event of litigation between the promoter and the competitors it would be unable to be party to any procedure whatsoever.”

Ow Chin Cheow

Executive Director
Singapore Institute of Architects

My Journey to the Concept Development of SMU

18 April 2000
I would like to share with all of you my journey to the whole development of the concept idea of SMU. Two wonderful people without their knowledge were responsible in helping me shape the total vision of SMU. To me, the miracle is not to fly in the air, or walk on the water, but to walk on the earth amongst people. Just by talking to them (I have not even met one of them before) they had inspired me to create such a wonderful dreamland for SMU because I was doing exactly what they hoped to see in SMU. So it was not just my dream but the dream of the people as well.

They were Bro. Joseph McNally and someone from SMU who cared to listen. The journey started when I participated in the idea competition. At that time the total design for SMU in my mind was still quite vague. What was very clear is that the concept will symbolize Singaporeans do have brains and united through education. I wanted plot A&B to integrate as the main campus, based on fengshui because that is where the wealth come from. Moreover Fort Canning Park will be an ideal sanctuary for the students. I wanted the total design to be represented by the padi field to symbolize that it is time to feed our brains, but I still need something in the center for the padi field design to be the spine for the campus. I just could not come out with any idea until the second man did it for me just by saying millennium means time. This had happened when I called him to change the name of Singapore Management University to Singapore Millennium University. Trying to be smart as usual, I told him that the word Millennium sounds better, why they don’t change the name. However, he said that millennium means time and it is not a suitable name for the university. When he commented that the name suggested was not a good idea I was not listening. This is because all I heard was the word TIME and my immediate response was that I saw an hourglass to represent the essence of time as a library at the center of the padi field. Can you imagine how excited and thrilled I was! How weird, I always thought millennium means something unusual is going to happen and it never crossed my mind that it means time. It was only after hearing from this man that millennium represents time that I had the idea to come out with this powerful design for the padi field concept. I was very happy, as you know when you are stuck with ideas you just can’t move forward to complete the design even how clever you may be. Before this comment had been made, I was experiencing a mental block; therefore I was overjoyed when this enlightenment lapsed in my presence.

I have to let you know it was never my intention to participate in this vision competition or the big competition because firstly as you know I am not qualified in many ways. Secondly, I thought I was done with Singapore, after the way the civil servants had treated me when I presented the Singapore Art Center and National Library proposals to them. I can’t help myself because my desire to communicate with the Government took over all my right senses. I just need to grab this opportunity to let the Government know what excellence in education is all about, so I was forced to give the project director a call to make sure I was allowed to write. He said that if I wrote more than 250 words he would disqualify me. Even if he did so it made no difference to me. What matter was that Sunflower had spoken and this action had eased my heart and brain and this was important for my soul?
When I was on the line with him he said that the writing for the idea competition was good but it must be structurally sound. This mean that they do not believe the design I had created for SMU is workable in architectural terms. Therefore, I took the liberty of preparing a primer to explain my design further with the hope that he will understand what I am trying to achieve for SMU. In my primer I had created the main campus site with a padi-field concept and he believed in architectural form padi-fields concept will not looked good. I could only reassure him by saying it was going to be beautiful. Then one fine day when we were on the phone, he asked me to look at the newspaper with a design of a computer chip. And surprising enough, this chip looked like the padi-fields. Finally, he was convinced the padi-fields were the right concept for SMU.

I needed to tap his mind further because I felt a powerful connection whenever I hear him speak. I asked him, to be honest with me, as a Singaporean what he hopes to see happening in SMU. First, he refused because he is wearing the SMU hat. I asked him to put that hat down and talked to me as a Singaporean to another. Immediately I can hear a different voice, so friendly and welcoming. When he said that his aspirations were to see that all Singaporeans can enjoy the beautiful garden, waterfall, and pond at SMU with their family at week-end instead of window shopping, he had touched my heart. I was ready to give my heart to him. (How ridiculous and silly of me to fall for a guy on the phone just because he shared my passion in caring for people.)

I felt a sudden surge of hope for Singapore. There was a new sense of excitement running through my blood that told me that I am doing the right thing for Singapore’s future. His aspirations had sparked me to create all the vibrancy that will be happening at the site, especially at the cultural street. Due to this honest conversation we had together, I was so inspired that not only are the people going to enjoy the wonderful landscape in SMU, they are also going to be enriched by all the arts activities that I had created around the precinct. For example the artist's pavement, second-hand bookstores, sculpture alley and a very long cultural street with workshops at Fort Canning Park all the way to the old National Theater site where a new hotel will grace the old site.

The journey I had with Bro. Jo started when he was in the hospital for his spinal operation. God had blessed me by giving me this opportunity to serve him. To cut the story short, after he came out of the hospital the first thing that he did was to bring out the unfinished sculpture he had left for two and the half years and finally completing it on 27 Feb 2000. When he completed the sculpture that day, his secretary who had never seen me except talk to me on the phone called me immediately and exclaimed with great excitement that the Golden Deer looked like me, she added that it embraced my true spirit and I should own it.

The people around Bro.Jo started to tease him; they asked, “What happened in the hospital between you and Sunflower?” I was very curious because in my mind how can the sculpture look like me. So without hesitation, I went to the workshop and looked at the deer. True enough the tails of the deer look like the petals of the sunflower, yellow in color and orange like the sun. This unique deer named by Bro. Jo ‘Flying Golden
Deer’ represents universal truth, speed, spirituality, and longevity.

At that time Mr. Tay Kheng Soon created a lot of noise in regard to the knocking down of the National Library. The reason why I had bought the deer for SMU was because the secretary of the project director told me that her boss was very worried and so was I. At the same time Bro Jo.’s assistant had managed to convince me that this flying deer is unique because the head of the deer looks like a bulldozer. He believed the controversial of the National Library would just disappear as the deer symbolized the knocking down of the library.

My next problem was my need to have a square base for the hourglass library. The architect that was supposed to help me to bring out my vision said that the padi field concept is an organic architecture and he said it must be round instead. I did not want to argue so I left the discussion as it was. But after I saw Bro. Jo’s sculpture of the Flying Golden Deer confidence suddenly took over. I was so inspired by the deer that immediately I saw the shape of the new library at a new site in the design of hourglass pyramids shape, embraced with the same material from the old library, especially since the bricks and the new materials are similar to the materials used in the sculpture of the deer.

The only puzzling thing was that the pyramid hourglass upper section is vacuum except with two ribs in victory sign between the vacuums. The man that I had never met except talk to on the phone helped me solved this mystery. Isn’t it just amazing how designs are being developed? I presumed that this is how spirituality is at work when you are connected with people and in mysterious ways without our knowledge. I supposed this is what you called spiritual power at its best.

After designing the padi field concept with the pyramid hourglass library, I needed something to symbolize the brain and I just could not come out with any idea. Bro. Jo inspired the design of the Drama Center with the brain concept when he shared his story of the brain with me, on my first visitation to the hospital.

More than ten years ago he and his friend wanted the government to build an enormous brain structure to emphasize the importance of the brain and they would like this project to be located at Sentosa Island. His friend believed that Singapore could be the brain of the world. What a coincidence, this is what I am trying to achieve in this project by proving to the world through our innovation and creativity that Singaporeans do have brains. After endless talks they had with different authorities, nothing had been materialized. In great spirits, he told me maybe this time they had Sunflower they could build the brain as a sculpture at Fort Canning. When he mentioned about the brain to be constructed in sculpture I was in seventh heaven, because this brain is the last piece to complete my puzzle.

Being naïve as I was, I told him not to worry because not only are we going to build the brain, the brain will be functional on a smaller scale from Fort Canning Park to the Drama Center. He was so excited although nothing had been accomplished and he
said that they must paint a picture of Mona Lisa of me if this project can be materialized. I was so happy and he was so happy, maybe this is what happiness is all about, dreaming and fantasizing the impossible in life.

But I still had a problem, I needed a face for my brain but I did not want a human face in front of the brain. Again, the second man helped to unravel my puzzle without his knowledge, when he sent me the e-mail explaining to me the story of the SMU logo. This was in response to the question that I had posed to him about the significance of the logo of SMU. Through this encounter, I was inspired to design the whole project base on the essence of the SMU tangram lion. Can you imagine how powerful SMU total design is going to be?

I should be happy and contended with all these new discoveries, yet I was not satisfied because I needed a heart for the lion to give it a balance. But how should I design the heart and yet it does not look like a heart? Again it was the second man who helps me solve this problem by telling me that my hair is beautiful like the torso of the lion (I attended the press conference without their permission because I wanted to know how this man look like) instead of designing the Drama Center into a heart shape, I interpret the linking of Drama Center to the Cultural Street as the heart. The movement of the people will represent the blood vessels.

I really had not envisaged that through this communication with him on the phone that my total vision for SMU had become so powerfully. The journey with him is by far the cheapest in comparison with other projects. The cost incurred was to collect back my journals. For the other creative pursue, I incurred much hidden cost that at times I could not imagine how I could ever part with all my hard earned money. Either I am the most stupid girl or the most intelligent girl in town.

I don’t need the whole of Singapore to believe in me, one is enough to encourage me to pursue my vision further. Just like in the Jakarta project, I was very fortunate to have the whole team of the committee who believed in me (although it took me three years). How can I go wrong in my pursuit to enable Art to replace God? As in the case of the SMU project, instead of ridiculing me like many do, one man from the organization care to listen to me and asked me to send my design concept to him for study.

Subsequently, after revealing my past works, he believed in my vision. How fortunate I am to meet this kind of Singaporean who pushes me on without their realization. I hope there are more such Singaporeans around so I don’t need to struggle so hard.

I believe what drive me nut about Singaporeans is that they had been spoon-fed for much too long especially the highly intellectual ones. It is high time for all of us to take stock and be responsible in a constructive way to improve Singapore in all aspects and stop blaming the government for everything that went wrong. This is what I had always been doing, but always been misunderstood. Why don’t I give up? One very simply answers my love for God is unconditional and similarly my love for my beloved country knows no boundaries. In my uncomplicated heart to love God is simply to love my
country and if I do love my country I have to support the government who is running the show.

But I believe the main reason is my constant pride that is the driving force. I need to prove to this man in SMU and the government that all my written words are not just beautiful words but can be a reality in architectural form and that Singapore can be the brain of the world if we set our mind to achieve it. Our only fault lies in that if we do have a talent we are too blind to see it because as long as it is a talent that does not produce the bottom line they were not considered as one.

I had completed the SMU concept proposal as my gift to him because I know deep in his heart he held high regard and respect in my endeavors and most importantly he believed in my vision for Singapore’s future. I can never forget what he had told me on the phone after I had sent my SMU primer to him. He said that when he sat with me in SMU he would be seeing Sunflower’s vision. If Sunflower can see her vision at the end of the day is all because of him. If he had not helped me unlock my entire puzzle, I don’t think I could have arrived at this stage in completing the new primer. Do you know that meridian means the highest point of success? Do all of you think Singapore Meridian University sounds better? Don’t I ever give up?

Deep from the bottom of my heart, I was so taken by his words of admiration of my vision, I guess it must be this remark that had kept me going to complete the submission for SMU under very difficult circumstances. I believed deep in my heart I wanted him to be proud of me when he knows that I did the whole concept proposal with only two first-year students from NUS and a freelance design architect.

All I need is for this man in SMU and the government to know is that my vision for SMU was inspired and all the materials were written by me and all the design and planning of the architecture was also done by me. We had formed a group called Arts Circle. The purpose of this group is to foster greater awareness of the need to promote creativity in the right direction. Without money how can all these beautiful people do something constructive for Singapore? My heart and soul are with them; therefore I have to work very hard to find the money for them to begin the journey of spiritual creativity. If my concept proposal is accepted I would like to contribute the design fees to the Art Circle to strive for greater humanity through the arts.
Letter to SMU Project Director Mr. Eddie Wee

11 January 2000

Dear Eddie,

During the SMU symposium held at the Singapore Art Museum, Professor Chua BengHuat said that architecture couldn’t create vibrancy. I disagree. If you create space for four chairs and a table in a crowded walkway, four random souls will surely stop to rest for a while, and they might start speaking, and if you serve coffee as well, ideas will surely be exchanged and perhaps even friendships formed. That is how great architecture should evolve, driven by the desire to release the human spirit.

Our Government wants Singapore to become the New Renaissance City, what does that mean? Renaissance means ‘rebirth’. Essentially it means that individuals must feel a new sense of vibrancy and aliveness within themselves, and the arts are the most important aspect of this birth. But where and how will this rebirth take place in our modern society? The answer lies in the SMU campus.

I sincerely and strongly believe that architecture can and must transcend beyond space requirements and functionality. Truly great architecture is about connecting with the essence of our existence. Indeed, great architecture can inspire and create the conditions for the human intellect and spirit to reach a higher plane. This is my sole objective in submitting my architectural vision for the SMU campus.

The SMU campus can be a powerful symbol of rebirth in many ways. It is the birth of an old site as the new heart of the city. It is the rebirth of philosophy and arts in the form of architecture. It is the rebirth of our Asian heritage – the total design of plot A & B represent stepped paddy fields, as with many Asian celebrations, a bountiful harvest is celebrated with the harvest dance. It is in the spirit of tradition, celebration, excitement and hope that we must provide arts facilities around SMU. In practical terms, art facilities at SMU will mean bring the energy of the Bra Basah entertainment and culture precinct right into the heart of SMU. It will create the conditions for a multi-disciplinary approach to education and business, combining the creativity and freedom of the arts, with the discipline and structure of management.

Mantra Arch is neither an architectural firm nor a design company; I am neither an architect nor a businessperson. I am a visionary that sees the full potential and power of the SMU campus in bringing about a renaissance in Singapore. I also have the resources to see my vision through.

In October last year, PM Goh had called us Singaporeans to individually or as a team, gives good ideas to government. He said, “Big ideas or small ideas, let them flow” and “Turn Singapore into a nation of ideas.” This has always been my intention; I have thus formed a group of passionate art lovers – “The Art Circle” who amongst other things can clearly see the importance and significance arts facilities at SMU. I hope the
government will hear our voice, and that we can uplift architecture to great heights through the SMU projects.

I hope that you can join in our gathering of the Arts Circle to achieve the best for SMU

Your’s truly
Sunflower Chong

Our Email Correspondences

Hi, this is sunflower here. Hope that you are not working too hard. Anyway out of curiosity, I need a clarification from you.

You see, is the logo of SMU a Lion’s head? I will be pleased to hear from you as soon as possible.

Thanxs
Hi

Yes it is the face of a lion, our national icon. The logo design process was very interesting and I was in charge of it. There are many meanings. It is about the lion and the tangram – a Chinese puzzle design game set.

Every stroke and element in the logo symbolizes special meaning. At the same time it projects a very new age and hip design.

Do you like it?

Cheers
Eddie

Dear Eddie,

Thank for the reply, not only do I like it I simply love it. What’s more I am overwhelmed by it because it confirmed my total design for the padi field is based on the meaning of the lion and the tangram and Dan (Architect from HDB handling the project for PM Goh Marine parade upgrading) cannot argue with me because this special design cannot be compromise! Now, I am ready to start constructing the model.
Thanks a million, knowing you and especially talking to you is an inspiration. You will agree with me after you see the end result of the padi field total design.

Thank you once again,
Sunflower

The model maker who was doing the model for Marine parade upgrading told me that the design that I proposed for SMU would not be accepted. I asked me why? He said it is too unrealistic in the mind of the Government. They only expect to see a serious building especially for education. He advised me not to waste my money to make the model. It was always the same reply, “Don’t waste your money.”

Through this encounter, I was inspired to design the whole project based on the SMU Tangram lion. I really had not envisaged that through this communication with him on the phone that my total vision for SMU had become so powerful. In order to realize such great aspirations, it involved every sector of the government. This is the very reason why I had to write to all the authorities to support the aspirations to make SMU a vibrant and exciting center for education, the only thing I had not let out was to make SMU an Arts University because if I did that SMU authority will kill me.

I was pushing for SMU to change its originally specialized business and management scope to encompass more diverse academic palette by including a technical and an art department to its repertoire. If that was not possible I hoped to convince the authorities through my concept proposal that SMU site should be the Birth of a New Renaissance. These means art facilities like workshops and open spaces should be incorporated in the masterplan. On top of it, I was adamant to save the ‘Green Field’ in front of the National Art Museum, because I strongly believed, that a building should not be constructed on the green field. If we so decided it should be a kind of structure up in the air.

How sad you might say of my experiences with the civil servants, but that’s the true fact of life in my beloved Singapore! I had promised the civil servants that SMU would be my last proposal to the Government. So bear with me, my fellow citizens! In my mind I still felt the faults lie with these bureaucrats who did not make the effort to reach the hearts and minds of the Government to convey the people messages to them, because the civil servants already make up their mind that it was a lost cause, just like what my teachers had told me in my primary school days in regards to the ethnic lesson – the Government won’t listen! When Kao Pao Kun held the dialogue discussion at Substation, all of us wished that there should be some Government officials to listen to our cried and calling so that our struggle will be much easier but not one came, why? The Government will send their people to attend the political meeting but not the social gathering. But anyhow in the minds of most Singaporeans whatever you tried to do, they will always pour cold water on your face. If you do something it got to be for some hidden agenda, therefore, naturally, most of them thought that I had an ulterior motive by doing the proposals.
No! They were wrong about me, I strongly believe that we must allow art to grow in its natural form, so I do my best to reach out to the Government and hope they could feel me and understand why I was behaving so. In my mind, without freeing the society or opening up the society true arts will not come alive. So the Government got to decide how they wish to bring about this form of dynamism and only visionaries should be employed to carry out the job and not the civil servants because they are all "DEAD" spiritually and emotionally due to fear of losing their job. (I am very concerned about the future plan the Government has for Nafa and LaSalle.)

My deep conscious told me that if we still wait and sit on our comfort zoom, that will be the end of SINGAPORE, we might not have a Singapore left to fight for. So why not fight for it now and take my consequences instead to regret later that we should have done this or that for Singapore. Life is too short for regrets or turning back as we can’t turn back the clock. I want to leave this world a happy woman and I need to have a clear conscience and be at peace with my soul, so to speak.
HOW THE SMU’S MASTER PLAN COMES ABOUT?

1) The Government’s aspiration to make Singapore into an Asian Renaissance City – SMU the new heart of the city replacing Singapore River.

2) Prof. Chua BengHuat’s comment during the feedback session
   “No amount of architectural development, no amount of urban planning, can actually create vibrancy. That is the conceit of architects”

3) I could not agree with the masterplan of the foreign consultants. The design may fulfill space requirements and functionality, but I believe architecture also has a role to play in building up the essence of our human existence. Great Architecture, at its most ideal, should inspire and create the conditions for the human intellect and spirit to reach a higher plane.

4) The need to grab this unique opportunity to showcase what modern Asian architecture is all about- “an architecture with a soul and powerful ideology”

5) My personal belief that SMU could be more than just a management university

6) Two wonderful men who inspired me in the development of SMU.

1. The Government’s aspiration to make Singapore into a Renaissance City

As Asians, do we really understand the true spirit of the European Renaissance?

* If we have to go to the West to discover our Asian Renaissance, then we really do not know what renaissance is all about. It is not by bringing in the ‘gondola’, or bringing in ‘champslysee’ that we become a renaissance city – that is far from it! Renaissance got nothing to do with the physical aspect of it; it is all about creative mind. It is about innovative ideas.

* On the other hand if we go to China, India and around Asia to search for our roots, then I can confidently say we know who we are and where we come from. Asian Renaissance here we come.
What is renaissance all about?
* I understand “renaissance” as the ‘rebirth’ or the revival of philosophy, literature, arts and architecture.

* Renaissance is about revolutionary minds from the quiet studies of scholars. The first
achievement of the humanists is a poet named Petrarch was, by an effort of imagination to grasp the classical world in its own terms. Quoting the ‘Life’ section of the Straits Times on the 17th of March, our “Renaissance City vision must start with the individual”. The European Renaissance was about men like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo who had revolutionary approach to doing things. For example Michelangelo had introduced arts onto architecture - the Sistine Chapel.

*Renaissance is about going back to our past and build on from there. This means it was necessary to excavate before it was possible to build a new, and to see again in a new light, implied new eyes, or at least good vision.

* The true spirit of the renaissance movement was premised as a fresh awareness of the study of humanity, and what it meant to be fully human. The French historian Michelet summed it up when he characterized the renaissance as ‘the discovery of world and man’.

How are we going to apply the European Renaissance in the context of our Asian society?

*Renaissance is about rebirth of the arts and literature. SMU should be integrated with Fort Canning Park by creating a cultural street at Fort Canning Park. Bras Basah site together with Fort Canning Park will be a cultural heartland of the city equipped with arts facilities and workshops to create vibrancy. It would be ideal to locate the three theaters that had been promised by the government to the people at this unique site.

*Renaissance is about philosophy and architecture, therefore our development of an Asian Renaissance is by introducing art and philosophy behind architecture. SMU's architecture is “an architecture with a soul and a powerful ideology” to challenge the mind. It will become the most powerful medium to provoke the mind to think beyond oneself, and about our shared existence in this universe. Therefore, Great Architecture is a nation's identity to instill confidence in their minds, and be confidence of who they are.

* If Renaissance is about the revolutionary mind of the individual, than the development of our Asian Renaissance must come from the minds of our people.

* If Renaissance is about going back to our roots, than in the context of Singapore society, we must go back to our history and that is the Singapore River. Not only was Singapore River our economic lifeline, but it was also known as the old heart of the city. Therefore, to develop Singapore into a Renaissance city, Bra Basah is the natural birth site of a new Renaissance because the water from the Singapore River flows to the mouth of Fort Canning Park and continues to Bras Basah, which once translated, is known as ‘wet rice’. This means the total design of SMU will be in organic architecture inspired by the padi field.

* The study of humanist is in fact in our modern days mean to strive for greater humanity. Whatever we do we must have compassion for others. Therefore, in the development for SMU we must not fail to add these elements into the total development
in physical as well as in spiritual terms, although we are fully aware it is a management university.

2. The comments of Prof. Chua BengHuat

“No amount of architectural development, no amount of urban planning, can actually create vibrancy. That is the conceit of architects”

A symposium was held in March 1999 to discuss the plans for SMU. Prof. Chua expressed his view that this university will kill the site if proper care was not taken for its design and architecture.

I couldn’t have agreed more with what he said.

**How bad planning can kill the site?**

*Just by locating the campus center at site plot E, C1-3 and the green field.

How creative planning can vibrant the site?

*Just by freeing the spine, that is plot E, C1-3 and the green field, there must be activities held that will compliment with the development of DhobyGhaut, the mixed development at Cathay and the Singapore Pool.

**What are the challenges?**

The challenge of building the architecture of SMU lies with the understanding of Berenson’s words:

“No artifact is a work of art if it does not help to humanize us”.

Therefore, the total design must challenge the minds of the people and embody Asian values because we are an Asian society with strong values and deep culture to help us remind us of our origins. These strong beliefs will unite the people and nation. Eventually the place itself attempts to reach out to the world through architecture. Thus, this is the true power of ‘Great Architecture’.

Another great challenge is the sense of balance. The concept of ‘Yin and Yang’ is deeply rooted in Asian architecture. Therefore must be the successful marrying of the dignity and privacy of the university while maintaining a certain open-ness about it. This should be a natural gift for an Asian. What I have done for the masterplan for SMU came naturally to me because I realized a strategic location is cradled between the
Orchard and City Hall shopping belts. Therefore I believe the plot E, C1-C3 and the green field need to be vibrant, to be opened up to form a spine with the two areas. The sanctity of the area can be preserved on plots A&B where the main campus will take place.

With this concept comes harmony. What follow next will give an abundance of wealth is water. This means the most expressive element of this landscape is water. Water is a flowing entity, which accompanies the pedestrian at various parts of the campus; it is both a metaphor of their ceaseless activities, as well as a gently fluctuating landscape, which surrounds them. Water traverses and transforms, from still reflecting pools, to streams that fracture into purring rivulets, into forceful falls, its nature setting a mood for each background, within the varied landscape. Just like what the project director of SMU aspires SMU to be, “a garden of delight”, for all of us to enjoy without paying a single cent when we enter the paradise of SMU. On top of it, by creating people-friendly Theaters and Galleries in the open space for free, how lucky Singaporeans are going to be if this can really happen in our lifetime.

Therefore, the proposed of SMU is focused on the goals of bringing an environment for a comprehensive education for the individual, as well as an identity of place and self. The broad concept of the overall form of the SMU campus is based on creating a Landscape for Learning. Furthermore, it is an educational park, where functional architectural elements are juxtaposed to give Meaning, much like how a tangram puzzle can recombine to create an unlimited array of recognized form.

3. What is the difference between Sunflower's masterplan and the foreign consultant's masterplan?

**Plot E**

Foreign consultant’s masterplan - 5 storey Academic

**Sunflower’s masterplan** - 16 storey Administration Building and Auditorium

**WHY?**

Cathay site has the most powerful fengshui. SMU is a unique university. It must not allow any building to outshine its importance and statue; therefore to take away such power from Cathay Building, the design and height play a vital role of its future role and development in the region.

The site at plot E is a prime estate and the authority allows for buildings here to be built till 16 storeys. SMU must maximize this site potential and its commercial possibilities to give back good return to the development.
Located next to Singapore Pool and Cathay mixed development, it is ideal for this building to have a three- to five-storey podium of medium and quality retail shops with two anchor tenants – a bookshop and a fitness center to pull in the crowd. On top of it, the inclusion of retail tenants in the lower storey of the building takes away the somber one might even say bureaucratic tone of typical administrative offices. Adding a touch of a shopping mall’s bustled take the ‘chilly’ atmosphere of corporate establishments.

Plot C3

Foreign consultant’s masterplan - 5-storey Academic as SMU landmark

**Sunflower’s masterplan** - 70m high SMU Landmark Tower as information Center

**WHY?**

Plot C3 is a triangular piece of land and it is not advisable to have a building on this site based on fengshui. This site is considered the lungs. It must be an open space with water and greenery. The only ideal structure will be like a big sculpture and the best way to build is below ground to link it with Dhoby Ghaut MRT, Cathay Building and the Administration Building. While this area is relatively quiet now due to the construction that is going on for the new Dhoby Ghaut, as well as the closure of Cathay cinemas, we anticipate increased human traffic come 2002 with the opening of the new station.

As such, we believe that it is ideal that a landmark in the form of an information tower be placed at this site. This area is like a mini garden, where the design of the structure will maintain the orientation of the whole sight.

This information tower will be 70m high, and will serve a dual purpose. Firstly, be it shoppers, tourists or even MRT commuters, upon approaching from Orchard Road shopping belt, will be greeted by the magnificent of this landmark, to welcome them to the area. Secondly, this information tower will serve educational purposes in having a variety of exhibits and displays to inform everyone more about Asean and the region.

Plot C1 & C2

Foreign consultant’s masterplan - 5-storey Academic and Campus Center

**Sunflower’s masterplan** - 4-storey Academic and Recreation Center

**WHY?**

In a city that hardly sleeps, should human life vanish at the sound of the dismissal bell? The removal of time-blocks in education can also extend beyond the classroom. We propose that the sports and recreational facilities should be available for extended periods, even to the public. Should the youth’s culture of “night-life” in this locality simply be “hanging out” at eating or beverage joints? There are already programs in the
United States, where sports facilities are kept open throughout the night, to encourage a healthier lifestyle and to discourage juvenile delinquency. Moreover, the night classes held at this site will keep the place and mind vibrant intellectually.

Therefore, C1 and C2, being the heart of the SMU site, will be ideal to be the recreation center. The foreign consultant’s plan is to place it at plot A but this is not ideal. Because not only did we understand the nature of the place, we are bringing back the history behind these fields. According to architect KohSeowChuan in his letter to the Straits Times Forum Page on the 15th of February 2000, the site of the present Bras Basah Park was once the home of the Ladies Lawn Tennis Club. Founded in 1884, it had a permanent clubhouse with 12 tennis courts and 2 croquet greens.

Therefore, in our masterplan we have allocated the top storey of these two building with tennis courts. The clubhouse will act as a bride between these two building. Around C1 facing the green field, we have created an open stage for all purposes.

The design of these two buildings will be in harmony with one another. At first glance it looks like a piece of artwork living in harmony with nature. This unique design will soften the whole surrounding because once it is lighted up it will look like a big lantern.

Green Field

Foreign consultant’s masterplan - Library

Sunflower’s masterplan - Open space with an amphitheater, secondhand bookshops and artist’s pavement

WHY?

Over the years the field has been the location where many have met up for a game of football. (It is not true when Mr. Ho Kwon Ping said during the symposium in March 1999 that no one used the green field. It is also not right for the foreign consultant to say during the briefing on 17 May 2000 that we should forget about playing football.) In fact, the same fields served as a football field for the boys of St. Joseph’s Institution which was previously located there.

The current masterplan by the foreign consultant eradicates this piece of history to build a library on this plot. Already, a portion of the land has been set aside to build a new road to alleviate any road congestion that may arise in the future. I strongly feel that the field should be left as it is, as people need open space. We are also trying to inculcate a sports culture among Singaporeans. To take away such precious open space is going against this goal. In my eyes it is a crime committed out of ignorance of our culture and we need to preserve whatever we can. We are trying our best to hold on to our history. On top of it, to place the library at this site is bad fengshui.
What we could do is to enhance this place to make it look friendlier by creating it into an amphitheater. This unique site should be reserved for outdoor activities, be it for sports, or for other major functions like the one recently held by SMU. The side facing the church will have an artist pavement with open displace of their works at the same time we can see them at work. These workshops can also be turn into booths when there is an exhibition on. The other side that is facing plot A will be shops for the secondhand books, to bring back the heritage of Bras Basah.

In the event that the authority still feels that the space should be fully utilized rather than left open, the only appropriate structure that should be created is a Sky Bubble or Sky Polyhedron. This sky bubble will be built as a cultural center for the mass appreciation of culture and arts, containing art galleries like the ‘Tresors” and even a 750 seats theater.

**Plot A & B**

Foreign consultant’s masterplan - Academic, indoor sport and a grand staircase

**Sunflower’s masterplan** - Main Campus Center, Library and a Palm Garden with an open air restaurant.

**WHY?**

The library is a storehouse brimming with information, the infinite wealth of knowledge to be gained need to be tapped by the students. Locating the main campus on this site is most ideal and convenience for the students. This library acts as the spine and brain for the students. Based on fengshui, the wealth from the north that is plot E Administration building and C3 the information tower, will flow to the south that is plot A&B.

By locating the library on this site, not only are we maintaining history, we are also realizing the essence of the SMU tangram lion. The relocation of the present library is justified by the story of the Tangram: “where the pieces touch, they connect from randomly scattered parts, an integrated whole, precise yet creative, disciplined yet flexible.” The past is retained, but in a way that provides an environment that is friendlier and at the same time with a renewed spirit that represents the new mind set of the people.

We must capture the natural sanctuary of Fort Canning Park. Based on the requirements set by the brief, we must create such a space for the students. The library should be there to tap on the natural energies of the sanctuary. This site is conducive, and will form the heart of knowledge for the campus.

The foreign masterplan created a grand staircase on this site of the own National Library. It will be ideal instead to create a Palm Garden with an open-air restaurant in it because I can foresee that its strategic location will be the meeting place for the crowd.
who frequent the Drama Center, the existing National Museum and the Fort Canning Park.

(I know what I am talking about because I was commissioned by Hyatt Hotel to plan the only function in the National Museum during the middle 80’s and we all agreed what is lacking around the surrounding is a restaurant.)

**Plot D1 & D2**

Foreign consultant’s masterplan - Administration Building and Auditorium

**Sunflower’s masterplan** - Academic and “Technoprenuer Laboratories”

**WHY?**

A campus in the city should not be one that is tucked away out of the public’s view or use. This proposal asserts that we can set up several ‘focal points’ throughout the campus especially at this site, functioning as places shared use between the public and the students and staff.

The economic systems of Asian cities are based on two economic systems: a modern, firm-based and pre-industrial urban economy, comprised of complex networks between diverse, usually small operation of activities, functioning within extended systems of kinship. This means that we introduce a framework where businesses can set up shop in proximity, and of permanence, to the university community.

In addition, as specified by the brief, the above-mentioned businesses located in the campus, can be provided with lower rent space with the proviso that they help conduct classes informing students of their specialties. Therefore, to create a unique “technoprenuer laboratories”, the design of this building must be imposing as it represents the wealth of the nation, which is why it must be visible from all angles. This means it will be ideal if we could exchange the site with NTUC by giving them D1, because I strongly believe the university should not be hidden from the green field.
MY 2nd NAME IS 'NEVER GIVE UP'!

Letter to Dr. Tony Tan

Dr. Tony Tan
Minister of Defence
MINDEF Building
Gombak Dr.
Singapore 669645

18 June 1999

Dear Dr. Tony Tan,

My name is Chong Sun Wah everyone calls me Sunflower. I am driven by Asian pride. My curiosity about life as a young child and my constant observation of Singapore’s development has made me who I am today.

I was reluctant to come out from hibernation. However, the architectural spirit in my blood forced my soul to speak up. Moreover, I owe it to my conscience and as a Singaporean I must to share with you my aspirations for SMU and Singapore before it is too late to do anything about it.

When SMU announced that they will be holding a symposium for open discussion, I was excited all over again as I will have the opportunity to bring out all my ideas through the idea competition. On the day of the symposium, I gave my book ‘ASEAN future is our future’ and paper entitled ‘Creative Thinking’ to the committee. I hope that after reading my proposal they will understand what I am trying to achieve for SMU and Singapore. During the discussion, I suggested that the SMU authority should look into arts development and management as the Government is spending a lot of money on the Singapore Art Center, therefore we should prepare our people in this area. I do realize that being a visionary I am imposing my ideology. As an ardent art lover, I naturally want art to be on par with economics. At the same time, I hope arts activities can be located in the heart of the city, thus we should have an Art University in Bra Basah instead of a Business University.

In fact, much earlier on, I did tried to convince the authorities to convert St. Joseph Institution into a music school for children, instead of an Art Museum as I felt that we are upsetting history by converting it into an art gallery. Moreover the money spends for the renovation is best used for music development. The Government is expanding in the direction of art development; therefore, it is necessary to have a conservatoire one-day so that it will help us to excel in the right direction.

It is time to bring back ideology to strengthen us as a people and nation. The soul of the people must be brought back to where it should belong and through the development of art we could achieve this goal. It will be very refreshing to welcome another chapter in our life by adopting a new way of thinking in architecture to
harmonize our life. Hence, the idea of Asian Modern Architecture is that it should revolutionize the people minds to shape the world.

Thank you for your attention

Your’s truly,
Sunflower Chong

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**Letter to Rear-Admiral Teo Chee Hean**

Rear-Admiral Teo Chee Hean  
Minister for Education  
1 North Buona Vista Drive  
MOE Building  
Singapore 138675

15 April 2000

Dear Rear-Admiral Teo Chee Hean,

My name is Chong Sun Wah everyone calls me Sunflower. You don’t know me but I know you are the Minister for Education and I’m sure you care for all our wellbeing. One thing’s for sure; I imagine that being in the position such as yours, you must truly be a busy man. But I feel a deep sense of inclination to bring forth an issue that is close to my heart that cannot be kept silent anymore. I also have reason to believe that it exists in yours too because you were brought up in it too. This would be in regards to the ‘educational system.’

I would like to share with you what I had written in 1983. Through my creativity, I am trying to elevate Arts to a higher level. We need a balance education in our system to nurture people with heart, soul and character. This is because the educational system clearly lacks in this area of development. Therefore as the Minister of Education, I sincerely hope that it is within your power to change that, as my daughter was a victim of such an unfair system.

However, I do plead that you do not dismissed my proposal on the grounds that I am only an ordinary Singaporean. Just a little time spent and the possibility of rectifying the situation might just be at hand.

Thank you for your kind attention

Your’s faithfully,  
Sunflower Chong
My Letter to PM Goh Chok Tong

I am an ordinary Singaporean with an extraordinary dream to unite the world through Art and Architect. Art and architecture do co-exist, historically in Italian Renaissance – one can’t do without the other. They have aesthetic function and cultural liability to each other, and the people using the building of course. So it’s important that now, people should be aware of more history than just leap into this ‘arts-hub cauldron’. It just makes the poor Singaporeans confuse when the Government fast forwards the ‘entertainment arts’ and plays down the arts histories and real critical discourses, debates, experimentations etc. Spending squadrons of dollars on foreign acts that juggle and walk on stilts spitting fire? Many Singaporeans just don't get it…?

Well, that was what I was afraid of, so before the Government embarked on this ambitious ideology to make Singapore into the New Renaissance City, firstly I got to help the Government to understand what renaissance is all about, if not I am afraid that the Government Think Tank will be bringing in the gondola from Italy like what PM Goh Chok Tong had done by bringing champslysees from France to Orchard road. This was not how the Europe Renaissance was created? I had written to PM Goh to share with him how we could achieve the goal to make Singapore into the New Renaissance City.

ATTN: Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong

12 May 2000

Dear Prime Minister Goh,

Mantra Arch is neither an architectural firm nor a design company; it is a firm that expresses ideology through architecture. I am neither an architect nor a businessperson; I am a visionary that sees the full potential and power of the Singapore Management University (SMU) campus in bringing about a Renaissance in Singapore. I also have the resources to see my vision through. But unfortunately without an architectural license, I am not allowed to participate in the SMU design competition. I hope that Singapore will be receptive to new ideas as in America, where people believe in the possibilities of great ideas.

In October last year, you had challenged us Singaporeans to individually or as a team, give goods ideas to the Government. You said, “Big ideas or small ideas, let them flow” and “Turn Singapore into a nation of ideas”. You also said that if the Government liked our ideas, we would be rewarded. I have a very big idea for Singapore and that is I want SMU to be the catalyst for an Asian Renaissance, and for Singapore to become the Brain and Soul of the World through the creation of Great Architecture.

Mr. Mah Bow Tan said recently that Singapore’s architecture is lagging behind, I couldn’t agree with him more. For this reason, I am taking the challenge to instill
architecture with the power to educate and influence our way of thinking and thus improve our quality of life. The recent controversy regarding the removal of the National Library created a storm in many quarters of our community. This clearly shows the deep connection Singaporeans have with the architectural and social development of our country.

I am disappointed with the masterplan for SMU, prepared by the foreign and local consultants, as I am confident that we can serve our citizens’ needs and aspirations much better. Our national vision is for the Bras Basah precinct to become a vibrant center of arts, culture, knowledge and entrepreneurship. For this to happen, it is critical that we have sufficient and strategically placed open space. Many great cities known for the quality of ideas have “squares” such as Harvard Square and the big green field is a natural space to create such an idea and we can called it ‘Unity Square’ where people meet, relax, talk and exchange ideas. Singaporeans themselves are crying out for more open space and yet the architects have planned a building at the site of the big green field and the site in front of Cathay building.

I believe strongly and sincerely that architecture can and must transcend beyond space requirements and functionality. Truly great architecture is about connecting with the essence of our existence. Indeed, great architecture can inspire and create the conditions for the human intellect and spirit to reach a higher plane. Thus, in order to pursue excellence in education, we must in parallel try to achieve excellence in modern Asian architecture. If we can achieve this through the SMU project, it will be Singapore’s showcase to the world - that we have the talent, passion and pride as Asians, to create a modern Asian architecture, hand in hand with our pursuit of educational excellence. If this spirit-driven architecture can be achieved, we will revolutionize the minds of Singaporeans, Asians and the world. Isn’t it what the Renaissance is all about?

Quoting the Life cover story of Friday March 17 2000, our “Renaissance City vision must start with the individual”. The European Renaissance was about men like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo who had revolutionary approach to doing things. For example, Michelangelo introduced paintings onto architecture although he was a sculptor by profession. As for Leonardo da Vinci, he was known for the painting of Mona Lisa. In short without revolutionary minds there can be no Renaissance.

Shortly, I will be sending a primer for my proposed design of the SMU for your study. In my vision, I see clearly the importance and significance of art facilities at SMU in uplifting architecture to great heights, and in turn allowing Singapore and Singaporeans to shine with the spirit of Renaissance.

I admire and respect you tremendously for all the sacrifices you have made for Singaporeans all these years. I know you are concerned with the attitude of our people, as they are becoming increasingly disconnected from the interests of Singapore as a nation. I am with you and I hope to play a part in the development of Singapore. If I am given the opportunity to prove my worth through my deeds, you will not be disappointed.
What I lack is paper qualifications, but what I do have is a heart filled with love for my country and my people. Is this enough for the Government? I hope these are the qualities the Singapore 21 Committee is looking for when they said that everyone counts.

Thank you,

Your’s truly,
Sunflower Chong

Advised From a Friend

Your Life So Far

17 May 2000

Sun Wah,

Listen to me – you are one of the most precious people in Singapore whether you or anyone else knows it. The simple step to follow a dream that is out of the ordinary is the furthest thing from 99.99% of hearts here. Too bad because they suffer for it. Your example should inspire no matter where you end with pursuing that dream. The real key is that you dare to pursue where others do not even think of it. That takes courage and strength especially in our culture that only cares for money and family.

That your family look up to you is the icing on the cake don’t you think? And money can always be made again – I know after losing all my savings on an eco-architecture project in the Cameron Highlands that promised the world but in the end wouldn’t even let me design one house out of 180! I then asked to withdraw but didn’t make it concrete. Should have. One should pursue a dream but not hesitate to pull away when the vision fades.

Your children seem fine and mature. Don’t worry about what others said that you are not a good mother. You have lots of friends who think the world of you and a dream to pursue. Far as I am concerned, you have already won whatever contest Life plans for us. I hope you won’t think foolish thoughts like jumping off buildings – at least maybe choose something having more architectural significance than being the highest. Don’t pay the American architect firm NBBJ – they are the largest firm in the Pacific Northwest and certainly can afford it. Be careful on spending all your money on art when there food to be bought.
Talk to you soon and good luck.

Meng

Comments from A Friend

Subject: PM Goh

19 May 2000

Sun Wah,

Liked your letter to PM Goh very much. Especially the quotes from James Tolstoy and Utzon examples. At least it puts on record what one-citizen thinks in the midst of the ‘Dessert’ where everyone is struggling to pay their mortgage and school fees.

One suggestion you should read PS21 – the Government’s aim in upgrading Singapore culture in the new millennium: I think quoting from these aims would give you more weight in expressing your ideas because they are widely enshrined in what is felt to be the way forward. Have you heard anything in reply? Dr. M.

Reply from URA

22 May 2000

Dear Ms Chong

REALIZING THE VISION OF SINGAPORE 21

Please refer to your email to the Prime Minister’s Office dated 12 May 2000

We appreciate your interest and suggestions for the campus design of the Singapore Management University (SMU). We would like to highlight that at all stages of our campus development; SMU has actively engaged the public to solicit ideas and feedback.

SMU is also currently organizing an international competition to gather the best ideas
for the planning and design of the campus.

We have forwarded your ideas to SMU directly for their consideration. SMU will be responding to you directly.

Yours sincerely

Vincent Chew
Executive Architect
Urban Planning & Chief Officer
Urban Redevelopment Authority

Reply from SMU

Attention: Ms Sunflower Chong

31 May 2000

Dear Ms Chong

REALIZING THE VISION OF SINGAPORE 21

We refer to your email dated 12 May 2000 to the Prime Minister’s office.

We appreciate your interest and suggestions for the campus design of the Singapore Management University (SMU). We would like to highlight that at all stages of our campus development; SMU has actively engaged the public to solicit ideas and feedback.

SMU is also currently organizing an international competition to gather the best ideas for the planning and design of the campus. As we understand that you may or may not participate with an architect in this competition, we rather refrain from further discussion regarding the design of the project at this stage. We would like to avoid direct contact with external potential participants of the competition.

Your’s truly,

Mrs Haslinda Liau
Executive Secretary
For Director Campus Development

**Wanted to Throw the Towel**

On this sad day, I wanted to give up my impossible dream, because everywhere I turned to become a brick wall. I felt a failure and a born loser. I have often questioned myself why am I so stubborn and persistent in realizing this impossible dream? As one SMU’s personal told me, “Sunflower, I know what you trying to achieve for SMU and Singapore, but forget it because they will never listen, moreover their minds can’t move so fast and their eyes can’t see so far except when money is concerned.” His explanation was that the Government couldn’t see that art is the core for our future economic success. He said that once we can bring out the bottom line in arts development in a businesslike manner, the Government will work very fast to make it happened for us like in the areas of life sciences and Sport 2010.

Everyone told me it is impossible to negotiate with the Government in regard to SMU, they will not listen and when they set their mind to do something no one can stop them. So in short, SMU can never be an Art University and I was told not even to try to influence them because I will get into trouble.

This special letter from my dearest daughter Greta has made me feel so ashamed of myself for wanting to give up all what I had worked so hard for, to convince the Government that Singapore can be the brain and soul of the world provided the Government give the people just one chance to prove ourselves.

To: **Sunflower**
From: **Greta**
Subject: **Personal**

**27 August 2000**

Hey Mum,

I noticed that you are very unhappy. You seem to be worried about something. Well I know that I can’t help you solve your problems but here is a little something to cheer you up and I don’t know if this helps but I believe that the sunflower will shine one day. I also want to take this chance to thank you for all the guidance and patience that you have with me. I know that there is just too much good to learn from you that I might not even have enough time to pick it all up. But the important thing is that, u already shine in my heart.
Dear Sir,

I had read in the paper on 28th November 2000 that you listen to everybody and when Mr. Ong Chin Huat written to you asking for help to speed up the process for an application, immediately you help him to solve the problem. How lucky and fortunate he was but as for me I was not so lucky because when I e-mail you, you had passed the e-mail to URA. When I called them up, they were afraid to talk to me. I should have known better because when I did the Singapore Arts Center and National Library proposal, they were very upset with me for confusing the Government.

Instead, they told me not to waste any more money on this Government. They advised me to keep my hard earned money for my children. They went on to say “We are from the system, what make you think that you can change the system from the outside when we cannot from the inside”.

I was indeed shocked and disappointed to hear such remarks from them. It was really sad for the civil servants to misunderstand all my good intentions. It was never my desire or intention to change the system, all I hope to achieve is to support the system where deem necessary.

Singapore is a small concrete jungle. What we need to do is to create beauty and excitement in the jungle and this mean by incorporating Arts activities wherever possible just like what I had done in my masterplan for SMU. In my mind I don’t limit my view, I saw the whole landscape and the potential I can get out from these land.

When we are able to achieve a more and exciting Singapore, I believe all the foreigners are ready to flock to Singapore and make this their home. Foreigners like outdoor space and exciting activities to keep them happy and make their lives meaningful, while our Asian culture just love money and more money to buy branded good to keep them

Love

Greta

MY FINAL CLOSURE

Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong

Istana

1st December 2000
happy.

As promised, I am sending a primer and a summary of my proposal for the SMU for your perusal. I hope instead of giving this primer to URA, I would appreciate very much if you can share it with Mr. Ong Teng Cheong. Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours truly,
Sunflower Chong

Letter of Acknowledgement by Fax

PRIME MINISTER’S OFFICE
Istana Annexe
Singapore 238823
8 Dec 2000

Mdm Sunflower Chong
Mantra Arch
No 4 LengKee Road
#02-01 SIS Building
Singapore 159088

Dear Madam,

We acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 8 Dec 2000 to the Prime Minister. Yours faithfully,

KOH DUT BEE
For SECRETARY TO PRIME MINISTER

Letter to Prof. Tommy Koh

Ambassador at large
250 North Bridge Road
#07-00 Raffles City Tower
Singapore 179101

1 December 2000
Dear Prof. Koh,

It will be the greatest blessing for ASEAN to have a man of your integrity and status to lead ASEAN.

I always had great admiration and respect for all what you had done for our beloved country. Singapore is indeed, honour to have a great son like you.

I have attached a primer and summary of my proposal design for SMU for your pleasure reading. I hope you like the ideology for the SMU and believe that great architecture has a role to play to make Singapore great.

I hope after reading it, you can pass this book around to the people who, love to know more about 'spiritual creativity'.

Thank you

Your’s truly
Sunflower Chong

Letter to DPM Lee Hsien Loong

This was my appeal letter to DPM Lee Hsien Loong written by me, straight from my heart but sent the paid one instead. The gentleman from Singapore International Foundation told me that the letter written by me would not catch the attention of the Government because the way I wrote it will not be acceptable by the Government standard and they will not take me seriously. So I paid him to write for me instead!

Deputy PM Lee Hsien Loong
The Treasury
Singapore 179434

1 December 2000

Dear Sir,

APPEAL TO RE-EVALUATE DESIGN OF SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY CAMPUS IN THE CITY

My name is Chong Sun Wah. Everyone called me Sunflower. For a very long time, I have wanted to write to you to share with you all my dream and aspiration for Singapore. The opportunity and especially the excuse had finally come.
Is to Unite Nations through Arts and Architecture.

When the inspiration comes to me I am at a lost for understanding except to express all my thoughts, feelings and ideas in words.

The moments of inspirations turned into passion, thus made me believed that as an ordinary person I still could make a difference in the society. This belief had kept me sane and alive and it seems to guide me towards achieving my dreams and goal for the people.

My greatest concern and worry not only for Singapore but also for the world is in the area of a multi-racial community. The single-ethnic country will rapidly disappear like in Australia, England and Germany. Every country will eventually be multi-ethnic (whether they acknowledge it or not they cannot turn the tide) and therefore multi-cultural. There is an urgency and great need to address this issue not individually but together as a nation, because it is threatening the social fabrics of society. In short, it is destroying the foundation of society.

Arts and architecture can play a role if we allow them to, by creating designs that will forge an identity to unite the minds and hearts of the people. History had shown us how important architecture had been for the Greeks, Romans and Chinese.

The recent crisis in the region had shown us the need for complete reform, not only in the area of politics and banking but also in Modern Architecture. Let us grab this opportunity and allow SMU to be the catalytic of symbol of excellence in Modern Asian Architecture.

Recently, in your speech, you had encouraged us to keep sending our ideas to the Government even though we know that the Government may not necessarily accept them. I am a firm believer of miracles, because HOPE is my name and I strongly believe miracles occur with the meeting of minds and the sharing of dream.

This is what I am doing now by writing to you. I am sharing my dream with you, with the hope that you will understand it and work with me and join my hand to make some miracles happen. I feel that because of our common age group, you are in a better position to understand all my dreams and aspirations for Singapore just like the project director from SMU, Mr. Eddie Wee.

I am neither an architect nor a businesswoman. Still, I hope you will give me the honor of reading what I have to say about the architectural plans for the Singapore Management University (SMU). When I saw wrong in front of my eyes I am determined
and persistence to make matter right. I guess this philosophy has been ingrained in me as a young child as part of my upbringing.

I am disappointed that this competition is only procurement of job process rather than on design excellence. If it was a genuine competition, the masterplan should come from the creative minds of the competitors, see how best each competitor can best utilize the land to its maximum potentials?

I do not agree with the architectural masterplan for SMU prepared by the foreign consultants, as I am confidence that we can serve our citizen’s needs and aspirations better. The design that they have proposed does not blend in with the multi-faceted surroundings to form a cohesive and harmonious landscape. This design may fulfill space requirements and functionality, but I believe architecture also has a role to play in building up the essence of our human existence. Great Architecture, at its most ideal, should inspire and create the conditions for the human intellect spirit to reach a higher plane.

In view of this, I have attached a summary of my proposal design for the SMU for your kind consideration. At the same time I am also attaching my primer that I had specially prepared for you to understand my design concept better. I hope you like the design and the powerful ideology for SMU and that this will inspire you to hear more from the horse’s mouth.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Your’s truly
Sunflower Chong

I had sent my $250 paid letter to DPM Lee Hsien Loong to save the green field because my fellowmen said that my style of English will not be accepted by the establishment they are not used to soulful expression but the business approach might convince them to change their mind to build a tall building on a triangle piece of small land which act as the roundabout.

DPM Lee Hsien Loong
The Treasury
Singapore 179434

1st December 2000

Dear Sir,
APPEAL TO RE-EVALUATE DESIGN OF SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY CAMPUS IN THE CITY

1. My name is Chong Sun Wah (aka Sunflower Chong). I am writing to you with the hope that I can share with you my fears and my visions concerning the establishment of the Singapore Management University (SMU) in the city premises. I am neither an architect nor a developer, but a divorced middle-aged woman from a humble background, and, also a proud mother of 2 children.

2. However, this has not deterred me from being part of a growing trend among Singaporeans eager to participate in the development of an active citizenry and civil society as envisaged by the spirit of S21. Conventionally confined to the involvement of volunteer and grassroots services, this spirit has spread to the realms of urban planning and architecture. Such is not surprising considering the fact the development of the society and the nation can be seen through its physical landscape. This also explains why Singaporeans have taken a significantly heightened interest from the planned re-development of Chinatown, the demolition of the National Library and the establishment of the Singapore Management University Campus in the city center.

3. The Civic district, in which the City SMU would be located, is the realisation of the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) Masterplan for conservation of the country’s urban heritage. Formulated in 1988 and re-endorsed in 1992 and 1997, the Masterplan aimed to “safeguard the “institutional uses, proposed open spaces and pedestrian linkages” that “will contribute towards the vision of the Civic District as a place of government, culture and urban recreation.” The Masterplan had allowed not only the concentration of more government ministries in the area from the Istana to the New Treasury Building and the Parliament House. It had also given a platform for the arts to flourish. Today, several arts groups are able to be housed in the colonial shop houses within the vicinity of Waterloo and Armenian Streets, and carry out their performances and exhibitions at the Fort Canning Park. The Park is also a stone throw away from the Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA), which has recently occupied the premises of the former Central Police Station at Hill Street.

4. Although the charm of the Civic District has been preserved, it has nonetheless been relatively quiet and underutilized compared to the other parts of the city. Hence, I was excited when the government announced SMU’s plans of revitalizing the district by locating its city campus in the Bras Basah area. Immediately I can foresee SMU being the new heart of the city replacing the Singapore River. *This is what renaissance is all about “rebirth” and revolutionary mind.*

To go to Waterloo --------> Padang: go through SMU

Padang --------> Orchard Rd: SMU
Shenton way -------> Waterloo:         SMU

It has also provided a crucial avenue to fulfill my unyielding commitment (as seen by my proposals since the early 1990s to make Singapore a cultural and international epicenter of the ASEAN region (see enclosed proposals). In this respect, I have even worked with several freelance architects and artists to come up with a detailed proposal for the prestigious design competition organized by SMU. Basically, the proposal encompasses three aspects:

* The creation of a Drama Center and an Cultural Street to provide not only an arts corridor for the scattered arts groups in the area, but a vibrant arts hub for the republic.

* Defining the SMU Campus with a Landmark Tower above its campus grounds.

* Setting up an “ASEAN Educational body” Singapore will be ideal as a catalyst to realize the vision of ASEAN 2020. To create such an institution is the best way for us to influence the region, furthermore it shows that we are concerned for the region developments. Our efficient world-class infrastructure can also serve as a bridge between the polarized cultures of the mainland and maritime ASEAN countries, as well as the world at large.

5. What this implies that, if my proposal were to be accepted, the civic district would be transformed into a vibrant confluence of cultures where people from academics and artists to politicians and statesmen converged, sparking off new partnerships and ideals. Hence, I do fervently believe that this epicenter could be a potential symbolic expression of Singapore as an Asian Renaissance City with its distinctive amalgamation of local and regional architecture features. And, if the government remains committed to maintaining ASEAN solidarity in spite of the differences with the individual member-states, it may want to consider my proposal to establish SMU as the ASEAN Educational Body.

6. Unfortunately, our hopes were severely dashed when the SMU jury for the competition did not accept our proposals. There were also neither explanations nor clarifications given on why our proposals failed to qualify for the award. Although I could understand the tedious efforts by the jury in assessing more than a hundred entries, I feel that the decisions made were not fully transparent and fair to the applicants who had expended tremendous energies on their proposals. And, from the names of the winners announced and the subsequent public exhibition that took place on the award winning design, it seems to me that SMU’s focus and agenda are limited to fulfilling utilitarian and functional designs required by any tertiary institution. In other words, I personally feel that SMU is placing greater priority in replicating the more outstanding foreign city universities rather than enhancing the identity and potential of the historically dynamic Civic District. Being incongruent with the character of the district, what I do fear most is that the city campus would be turned into a knife that slices through the Civic District, separating the close geographical proximity and cultural intimacy that the cultural and governmental bodies have built for the past decade. It is also almost certain that the accepted design would be built at over the two Green Parks
that represented one of the city’s remaining green belts, which have brought invaluable memories to generations of Singapore.

7. To me, the implications on Singapore’s heritage stated in the abovementioned paragraphs are too severe for the apparent decisions made by the SMU. When no agreements can be made between SMU’s management Committee and the interested public, the decision should rest on our leaders who possess the intellectual oversight, the legal authority as well as the moral courage to arbitrate. As the DPM with the wealth of exposure and experience behind you, I sincerely appeal to you to examine my proposed design and concept for SMU’s city campus and help to reopen the controversies surrounding the SMU city campus to a larger audience from architects to artists and government officials and even foreign diplomats. Your support would be a significant encouragement to ordinary Singaporeans like me to participate more actively to the development of a strong and cohesive civil society in Singapore.

I hope that you would appreciate my design and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Warmest Regards.

Yours sincerely,
Sunflower Chong

Letter from MND

Ms Sunflower Chong
Mantra Arch
No. 4 LengKee Road
#02-01 SIS Building
Singapore 159088

3 January 2001

Dear Ms Chong,

APPEAL TO RE-VALUATE DESIGN OF SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY (SMUCAMPUS IN THE CITY)
I refer to your letters to the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Lee dated 1 December 2000, which have been referred to my Ministry for consideration. I would like to thank you for your comments and feedback.
Many of the issues on the location and the planning parameters for the SMU have been thoroughly debated by the public and addressed by the Ministry of national Development in March 2000. The URA had then conveyed to SMU the urban planning guidelines, which it felt would be compatible with and would enhance the character of the civic district within which the SMU would be sited. These guidelines were incorporated by SMU into the design brief from the competition.

The judging and award of SMU’s architectural and urban design competition was carried out by an independent, international Jury Panel, which was constituted and appointed directly by SMU. May we suggest that you consult the SMU directly for their comments on why your proposal was not selected by the Panel?

Thank you again for your feedback and comments.

Your’s sincerely,

Cheong Koon Hean (Mrs)
DIRECTOR, STRATEGIC PLANNING
For PERMANENT SECRETARY
(NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT)
PPS to PM
PPS to DPM Lee

The foreign architect concept plan has a tall building on the roundabout which was in front of the Singapore Management University and I need to STOP IT NO MATTER WHAT because firstly base on fengshui a building should not be built at a triangle site and common sense tell you a roundabout is not meant to have any building!!

I was ready to go for a Hunger Strike to Save the Green Field

On 12 February 2001 I have decided to go on a hunger strike to save the Green Field and I prepared my daughter for such a scenarios. In my simply mind, I thought that maybe this is the only way the Government will listen to the people because I believe strongly Singapore cannot travel only on a one way ticket anymore, if I want Singapore to be the brain and soul of the world. URA personal told me that was not a smart thing to do because I will be seen as challenging the Government.

When I told Greta I was ready to give my life for the green field she said, “What about me?” I said that I don’t know because I got to do my job and I told her she was free to do what she thought was best for herself. Then she asked, “What about Gabriel should I let him know?” I told her it was up to her. I felt so strongly about this cause that I don’t care about my children feelings except mine. In a way I had been a very selfish person living in my own world filled with great fantasy of a beautiful world for all of us through
the arts. Am I qualified to be a mother?

I worked Greta up and she tried to calm me down like she was the mother and I was the daughter. I got to breathe in and then breathe out slowly because she said that will calm my nerve. She asked me to think carefully again. Suddenly she exclaimed, “No let’s wait, why don’t we write to DPM Lee and email to him directly? She talked as though she knew he would definitely answer back. In fact the email to DPM Lee was written by Greta, I just sat there like the world is falling down on me, like the song ‘London bridges falling down’ but in my mind ‘Singapore is falling down’ if we still refuse to move art in the right direction. My beloved daughter needed to rescue me because I was a lost soul. I’m really a stupid fool! Can you blame me because I am a true idealist?

Email to URA

15 February 2001

Subject: Hunger Strike

Dear Vincent,

This morning on my way to work, I tried to call KNTA office to ask for the whereabouts of the foreign architects in order to hand my primer to them. Unfortunately the response on the other end wasn’t too receptive. I recalled in 1992 of a similar situation, when I tried to talk to James Stirling executive to convince them of my plan for SAC. The only difference is that the foreign architect was willing to see me but subsequently he was not allowed to talk to me. So past experience told me I had better stop here.

Then somehow Hsien Loong came to my mind in a very nice way. In my computer mind (That’s what my mother call me) I read the email from MND once again. I felt a sweet feeling came over me. It was a feeling that spelled a kind of satisfaction like I had been rewarded for doing a good job. It is nice to know that someone up there took an interest in my struggle, especially when I recalled what you told me that only DPM Lee Hsien Loong cares and that there was no response from the other two. What does this prove to us?

Suddenly the need to go for a hunger strike disappeared from my mind. I told myself that I should be contended and happy and I should not ask for more. In fact, I should thank him for making an effort to do something to save the green field.

What’s great about this feeling is that all along I know deep down from the bottom of my
heart that if Singapore ever changes in a big way, it lies in the hand of Hsien Loong. Even if he can't do anything to save the green field it does not matter to me now, because the very idea that an effort was made by him filled my soul with great joy and happiness. Maybe in my sub-conscious this is what I had been striving for. Suddenly I saw a beautiful light at the end of the tunnel.

Now I can confidently say that the future of Singapore and our children's future are in good hands. We must all rally behind him and make Singapore a happier place to work and live in.

Your's truly
Sunflower Chong

NB: Vincent wanted me to focus on the ASEAN House in Indonesia because he said there is a chance 50-50 chance but for SMU the case is closed!

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LETTER OF ACKNOWLEGDEMENT

From: Catherine_LAU@MND.gov.sg
To: sunflower_chong@yahoo.com
CC: CHEONG_Koon_Hean@MND.gov.sg
Subject: SMU
Date: Tue, 13 Feb 2001 14:53:16 +0800

Ms Chong,

We would like to inform you that your appeal has been referred to URA for consideration by DPM office. URA will reply to you in due course.

Catherine Lau
Assistant Director, Strategic Planning
MND

Dearest Sirs,
"Every thought you have makes up some segment of the world you see.

It is with your thoughts, then that we must work, if your perception of the world is to be changed."

- A course in miracles -

I beseech you to lend me your ears and open your hearts for this silly girl who has a story to tell. Whether the ending would be heart wrenching or filled with joy and happiness, believe it or not it lies in the power of your hands with a quick click at kwonping@singnet.com.sg and by acknowledging that the green field in front of the Art Museum must be saved.

At this juncture, I believe a question would already form in your head regarding the green field. How can a green field next to the Art Museum affect my life? Why should I be concerned if anything happens to it?

When URA told me that they were interested in roping me to participate in their future developments, I was truly flattered. Although I must express that I am however more concerned about the present situation than the future endeavors. The first issue is about the green field in front of the Art Museum. Why should we save it? Next is the issue of plot E. This piece of land has the potential to build up to 16flrs. Why SMU doesn’t made used of it? URA told me they could not tell SMU what to do or how to build it. The fact stands that SM Lee even once commented that every project must make money.

I plead you once more to reconsider the masterplan by the foreign consultant, because URA, LTA, SIA and many more Singaporeans (especially the art community) believe that the green field should be saved. The only thing is that they speak behind closed doors because if they voice out openly they have got too much to lose. Whereas Sunflower has nothing to lose because she is known as a ‘crazy woman’ who has got nothing else better to do.

"There is no coming to consciousness without pain” - C.G. Jung

I am sharing my pain with all of you because I know my true happiness lie in the power of your hands.

Yours truly
Sunflower Chong

NB: This letter was written by my daughter because she saw me losing my sanity and to save me she said, "OK WE WRITE TO LEE HSIEN LOONG!" But I told her no use these people don't listen to an individual because individual in the eye of the
government like disease! They are crazy to build a build on the roundabout on top of it the land is triangular! Therefore, I want to die for the green field but more so is to make the government to listen to the ordinary people. Cannot tahun can make a movie of my craziness just to get the government to hear us!!

Email to DPM Lee Hsien Loong

18 February 2001

Dear DPM Lee,

You cannot imagine what you had done for me just by acknowledging my proposal. I want you to know that I am a very happy woman now because I know you are a man who cares. Singapore will be in good hand under your great leadership. I don’t want you to do anything more because I don’t want you to be in a very difficult position. If you do go all the way, there might be some quarters in the Government that might say you are interfering again. You are a very misunderstood person in Singapore. Even the taxis drivers said that to me.

When URA told me the DPM Dr. Tony Tan called for the foreign architects to finalize all the plans for SMU, I was lost and confused because I thought that I got time to make things right.

Without hesitation I sent the below to Mr. Ho Kwon Ping, but I had not received any reply from him.

Your’s truly
Sunflower Chong

From URA

Ms Sunflower Chong
Blk 15, Teck Whye Lane
#09-143
Singapore 680015

20 February 2001

Dear Ms Chong

SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY
I refer to your email dated 13 Feb 2001 to the deputy Prime Minister, Tony Tan (and copied to DPM Lee) that was referred to URA to reply to you. The green field at Bra Basah Park has been thoroughly considered and part of it will be kept.

Before SMU finalized their master plan and called for the design competition, which you participated in, SMU organized workshops with the Singapore Institute of Architects (SIA) and held public dialogues and exhibitions to gather feedback and comments. SMU also approached SIA to nominate local architects to be part of their master planning team. As a participant of the design competition, you should thus be aware of these facts.

Therefore, thank you for your comments, but the decision on how the campus will be shaped will be left to SMU to decide, so long as it is in accordance with the guidelines URA had provided before the competition.

Your’s sincerely,

ZAINAP BTE SALEH MDM
SENIOR PLANNING EXECUTIVE
For CHIEF PLANNER & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Letter with the Primer to All Ambassadors

27 February 2001

Dear Ambassadors,

APPEAL FOR SUGGESTIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF SITE C3 IN FRONT OF THE CATHY BUILDING FOR THE SMU PROJECT

My name is Sunflower Chong. You do not know me but I sincerely hope that in time to come you will. I feel a deep sense of inclination to bring forth an issue that is close to my heart. I also hope that it exists in yours too.

As Ambassadors to Singapore you have the opportunity to witness the growth of Singapore. Our government has the desire to make Singapore into an Asian Renaissance City.

Renaissance means a change in the mindset and I believe that it can be achieved by intellects that care. With the development of the Singapore Management University, there is a chance to foster the spirit of unity. To bring about change would be simply
participating to create a more exciting Singapore where everyone can call it their home. This chance of \textit{rebirth} could just be around the corner if there is enough concern projected.

If you study the SMU plan carefully, there is an \textit{Information Tower} located at site C3. This is right in front of the Cathy Building. There is great significance in the symbolism and the function of the tower. As the area there generates high human traffic it makes sense to utilize that strength. This information tower will serve educational purposes in having a variety of exhibits and displays to inform everyone more about ASEAN, ASSEM, ASLEF and relevant organizations. This idea is still in its infancy stage therefore any other suggestions that are raised would be deeply appreciated.

To better understand my concepts and directions planned it would be of help if you review my works. Through much creativity and ideology I am trying my best to fulfill the \textit{Singapore 21} vision. In trying to elevate Arts and to cultivate heartfelt communication and contact with it. This would almost be as sacred as a how deep bond is being built with God. \textit{To present this idea would not be truly radical, as a touch of God is present in all beauty that exists in this world. There is beauty in the water that runs from the stream, and there is also beauty in the architecture of the run down shop houses.}

DPM Lee Hsien Loong has acknowledged my email to him through his secretary. I do not hold any status in the society but yet he took the time to review my proposal.

Therefore this simple gesture fuelled my passion to keep on persevering. I sincerely hope that you will take into consideration that I am just an ordinary citizen and if you choose to support this endeavor it would carry much more weight. I have sent this proposal to all the Ambassadors; it would be of great significance if the recommendations come as a group. I am sure that DPM Lee Hsien Loong would be delighted to hear from you all.

Thank you for your patience.

Your’s truly,
Sunflower Chong

\textbf{Letter Of Acknowledge By Mail}

Pakistan HIGH COMMISSION
SHAW CENTER #24-02/04
1 SCOTTTS ROAD
SINGAPORE 228208
5 March 2001
Miss Sunflower Chong  
c/o M/s Mantra Arch  
No. 4 Lengkee Road  
#02-01 SIS Building  
Singapore 159088

My dear Sunflower Chong,

I was truly impressed by your commitment to the cause of SMU and its design and layout.

I am leaving Singapore in a few days’ time at the end of my tour of duty here. I can only pray that God give you the strength and fortitude to be able to succeed in your cause. Singapore indeed deserves to be the “brain of the world” – a first step to which is to become a Renaissance City.

With my best wishes

TOHEED AHMED  
HIGH COMISSONER  
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF PAKISTAN
Letter with the Primer to 400 People Taken from the Book “Who’s Who” In Singapore

21 February 2001

Dear Fellowmen,

APPEAL FOR SUPPORT TO SAVE THE GREEN FIELD IN FRONT OF THE ART MUSEUM.

My name is Sunflower Chong. I am writing to you with the hope I can share with all of you my fears and my vision concerning Singapore Management University. Please read the cover letter I had given to DPM Lee Hsien Loong with care.

I have nothing to my name except guts confidence and determination. I have one life and I have to live it as I see best and not what the system, my parents or anyone think that is best for me. I only live for my dreams and ideals. My dream is to unite the world through art and architecture and my ideal is that all Singaporeans will raised up to make our nation proud through our creativity and loyalty.

All of you who have received the documents are by no means great men and women in your own right. However, do not think that I am merely blowing your horn because I feel that as great men and women you do have a certain amount of responsibility towards the growth of our country.

Why do I plead in this manner? Well, it is a rather plain and simple fact you do have that capability. Helping our society change does not mean that you are challenging the system instead it is otherwise. In this day and age all you have to do is to click.

I am a very proud and passionate Singaporean and a proactive citizen. If you read the attached documents it reveals the main objective of the issue that I am raising.

Furthermore, I did get a response from the DPM Lee Hsien Loong.

However, I can only do so much in igniting the spark. I believe that with 400 passionate Singaporeans (I am sending to 400 Singaporeans from the book “Who’s Who”) supporting the DPM, it would be of great significant.
I pray you will consider my proposal and if you do feel like giving apart of yourself back to the future development of Singapore, please simply click lee_hsien_loong@mti.gov.sg and express them without hesitation.

The future of our nation will be at stake if we continue to keep silent due to self-imposed fear. Our nation needs us, so do Hsien Loong. Show him that you care, for he had already done his part by doing whatever he can to save the green field.
Thank you for your patience

Your’s truly,
Sunflower Chong

Letter With The Primer To All The Principals And Teachers - Universities, Polytechnics and Secondary Schools (Except for the Primary schools) - Only One Reply

28 February 2001

Dear Principals and Teachers,

APPEAL TO SAVE THE GREEN FIELD IN FRONT OF THE ART MUSEUM AND FOR SUGGESTIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF SITE C3 IN FRONT OF THE CATHAY BUILDING FOR THE SMU PROJECT
My name is Sunflower Chong. You do not know me but I sincerely hope that in time to come you will. I feel a deep sense of inclination to bring forth an issue that is close to my heart. I also hope that it exists in yours too.

As principals and teachers, you must be very connected even to the physical development of Singapore, as you have witnessed the growth of Singapore all these years. Our Government has the desire to make Singapore into an Asian Renaissance City. Renaissance means a change in the mindset and I believe that it can be achieved by intellects that care. With the development of the Singapore Management University, there is a chance to foster the spirit of unity. To bring about change would be simply participating to create a more exciting Singapore where everyone can call it our home. This chance of rebirth could just be around the corner if there is enough concern projected.

If you study the SMU plan carefully, there is an Information Tower located at site C3. This is right in front of the Cathy building. There is great significance in the symbolism
and the function of the tower. As the area there generates high human traffic it makes sense to utilize that strength. This information tower will serve educational purposes in having a variety of exhibit and displays to inform everyone more about ASEAN, ASEM, ASLEF and relevant organizations. This idea is still in its infancy stage therefore any other suggestions that are raised would be deeply appreciated.

To better understand my concepts and directions planned it would be of help if you review my works. Through much creativity and ideology I am trying my best to fulfill the Singapore 21 vision. In trying to elevate Arts and to cultivate heartfelt communication and contact with it. This would almost be as sacred as a how deep bond is being built with God. To present this idea would not be truly radical, as a touch of God is present in all beauty that exists in this world. There is beauty in the water that runs from the stream, and there is also beauty in the architecture of the run down shop houses.

DPM Lee Hsien Loong has acknowledged my email to him through his secretary. I do not hold any status in the society but yet he took the time to review my proposal. Therefore this simple gesture fuelled my passion to keep on persevering. I sincerely hope that you will take into consideration that I am just an ordinary citizen and if you choose to support this endeavor it would carry much more weight.

I have also sent this proposal to all the Ambassadors; it would be of great significance if the recommendations come as a group. I am sure that DPM Lee Hsien Loong would be delighted to hear from you all.

Thank you for your patience

Your’s truly,
Sunflower Chong

Letter of Acknowledgement by Mail

PayaLebar Methodist Girls’ Secondary School
296, Lorong Ah Soo
Singapore 536742

Sunflower Chong
4 LengKee Road
#02-01 SIS Building
Singapore 159088

9 May 2001
Dear Sunflower Chong

RE: **Appeal for Support to Save the Green Field In Front Of the Art Museum**

With reference to your letter dated Feb 2001 regarding the above mentioned, I am sorry to inform you that we are unable to meet your appeal for the support. Thank you.

Your's sincerely,

Mrs Low Chew Lian
Vice Principal
After Giving Our Ideas Then… What?

“We all can talk and say this and that should not be. But out of all those who TALK, there are few virtuous people who do something. The rest are merely patrons of virtues!” – Henry David Thoreau

The Government wanted to transform Singapore into the New Renaissance City, what worry me most is that we are not a thinking nation so how are they going to achieve this goal as renaissance is about the revolutionary mind of the individual? Was this one of the reasons why PM Goh Chok Tong was calling upon the whole nation to come forward to contribute ideas -

“Big ideas or small ideas, let them flow. Turn Singapore into a nation of ideas.” On Straits Times October 14, 1999, this was what PM Goh got to say.

"Set up citizens’ ideas teams and let the ideas flow. This invitation came from PM Goh in parliament yesterday when he said the Government was serious about consulting people and getting them to participate in national issues. Having given Singaporeans physical stakes in the country, it now wants to deepen their emotional stakes. He said: “This is why I have made consultation and participation one of the Government’s major goals. It is to give Singaporeans a bigger say in their own future, and thus bond them to Singapore.”

With these words, the Prime Minister threw his weight behind the centerpiece of Government policy that was spelled out by President S.R. Nathan last week in his address to parliament. Mr. Goh had first issued his rallying call to ‘move beyond material progress, to a society which places people at its very center’ when he opened the last parliamentary session in June 1997. Yesterday, speaking during the last day of debate on the President’s Address, he reaffirmed the vision. He said that the economic crisis Singapore had experienced since then underscored the importance of harnessing people’s ideas and energy in a volatile environment. Singapore could make it as a first-world economy, but faced a tougher challenge of creating a world-class home, he said. To help create a home where citizens felt they belong, “where they are king and where they can decorate and arrange the furniture the way they like”, the Government would give people more scope to take part in national affairs, he said.

“We now want to go beyond feedback on how policies affect people, to encouraging Singaporeans to submit constructive suggestions and new ideas.” He urges Singaporeans to form themselves into work improvement teams to submit ideas on any aspect of government. “We will introduce an award scheme to give symbolic recognition for useful ideas put by Singaporeans, either individually or as a team.”

Singapore Management University site is perfect for such grand vision to make Singapore not only the Brain of the world but also the Heart, Nerve, and Soul of the World. That means one day we will be indispensable. In order to achieve this great challenge we need great visionaries with leadership quality to implement such ideas - “For another, we would need something extra – “creativity”, “foresight”, “oomph”, call it
what you will – to stay ahead.”- Janadas Devan

When I read from the paper that the government wanted ideas from the people at large, can you imagine how excited and thrilled I was? After I read from the paper that the government wanted ideas even from the ‘small people’ and we will be rewarded if the government likes our ideas, I was in seven heavens. This means it was finally ‘Official’ that we could submit our big ideas even how ridiculous it might sound to the government without prejudice. Now I don’t need to take all the nonsense and protocol from the civil servants to be heard and the best thing was that they couldn’t refuse the Asian Renaissance proposal this time round.

What do I mean by that? This means I don’t have to beg for the civil servants to accept my proposal! When the government did not call for ideas and if we submit our proposals like what I had done for the Singapore Art Center (SAC) and National Library proposals, it will not be easy to reach the civil servants to be heard. Were they being kind to me when they advised me by saying, “Don’t waste your time and money on this government because they will not listen? We know them, please save your money for your children.” Or, “Why your skin is not white, if it is, you got a better chance like Mr. Ian Batey who without a company but became somebody because the government gave him the opportunity to prove himself.” Some other civil servants said, “Why you are not so and so, if you are maybe they will listen to you?” or I should go straight to the point, this was exactly what the civil servants and the intellectuals said, “Why aren’t you Professor Tommy Koh, if you are they will listen to your ASEAN House proposal?” When I submitted the National Library proposal with 4 million books, (to be a World Library it justified this amount and to be a Renaissance City you needed a powerful library,) the civil servant said, “Are you, Lee Kuan Yew?” Next, when I submitted the SMU proposal they said, “Unfortunately you are not Ms. Ho Chin, if you are it will be a different story altogether so please keep your proposal in case someone up at the top might steal your idea.”

I was not surprised to hear all these remarks because since a young child when I gave some ideas even my whole family put me down and asked me to shut my big mouth. Their first reaction was, “Are you, Lee Kuan Yew? If you are not then shut up!” What I can’t understand the Singaporean mentality is that they were so annoyed when I give ideas? Cannot open our mouth to talk politics, I can fully understand, but cannot even open our mouth to give ideas it is absurd and very detrimental to our well-being, especially mine, mentally and thus spiritually. When I did the National Library proposal in 1993 even my 12 years old son said, “Are you, Lee Kuan Yew?” He continued, “Mama only Lee Kuan Yew got the power to build such a library, moreover he will not build this kind of library and you know why? This library will not make money, on top you wanted it to be located on the Singapore Art Centre site.” The best part of it all was that he said if I was the wife of the Sultan of Brunei maybe he might build this library and with a big Mosque as the center for Islamic study (He knew that I wanted to have an Islamic center in Singapore to justify us to be the crossroad of cultures.)
I could not understand why others can’t accept me for who I am. In primary school, my teacher said, “Why can’t you be liked, Sor Hwee?” Quek Sor Hwee my classmate was a very clever girl; she was either top first or second in class and was very quiet and obedient. Everyone loves her because she was clever and very quiet. My mother too often said why I couldn’t be like my sister because my sister also did not talk so much and spend time making herself pretty, while I was like a tomboy boy playing marbles and kites with the neighborhood boys even with the so-called ‘gangsters’. (I called them they did not call me as they did not want a girl around the group.) The last comment came from a Singaporean businessman, “If only the man could give you just ONE chance, you will go very far, but unfortunately this one chance will be very difficult for you to get.” He advised me to focus on business instead, as I am a very intelligent woman except that my intelligent was used in the wrong way thus wasted - chasing empty dreams that could not be realized. Stubborn as I was I asked again why wouldn’t the government accept my proposals or me for that matter, as Singapore is a meritocracy society? He said that the government would not listen to me because Singapore is for the elitists!

When my friends knew that I wanted to change the cause of the business study for Singapore Management University (SMU), most of them discouraged me because they said that since I had submitted two proposals to the Government and they ignored me why banged my head against the wall again for the third proposal and spend more money on it? They said what made me believed that this time around they will listen to my big idea for SMU, especially when I wanted to change the course from business to art? Well simply because I believed in PM Goh Chok Tong - he has called for the people to give ideas and he did not specify what those ideas should or could be!

Many people felt sorry for me for wasting all my time and energy besides precious money to try to reach the government. Why didn’t I give up? Because this is the first step for me to help the government to change their old mindset that it is worth listening to ordinary people. I saw the power of SMU site to realize all my aspirations of the new renaissance city and I can’t let go until I exhausted all avenues and ideas or I fall dead doing so, which I almost did! I told them that my dream is for Singapore to be the Brain and Soul of the World and when they heard that their immediate reaction was, “Singapore could never be the brain and soul of the world as the government does not believe in the people intellect.” Instead, they said that I was very daring to challenge the government final decision.

But I don’t see it that way by giving the proposal was challenging the government intellect. The way I see it I was just giving the government an alternative solution or idea so that they could use my concept plan as a comparison with the American masterplan that the authority of SMU had commissioned. I did it because I really care and moreover, PM Goh invited the people to participate and I was not asking them to pay me. I did it on my own free will because I thought that was what a concerned Singaporean should do instead of complaining constantly behind closed doors like all our elders had done all these decades.
I don’t respect intellectual people because they always complained about the government and my mother said that the more intelligent they are the less productive they will be, not because they are not willing to make the effort to contribute but because of their fear that they might say or do the wrong thing and thus will lose their JOB!

When I embarked on the Singapore New Renaissance City concept proposal, I went forth with great enthusiasm and total confidence because I dared to challenge my mind and I hope that with my concept plan I could change the tide in regards to the type of education that the government will be introducing at SMU. When my bold plans came to light, many deemed it impossible. They felt that once the government makes up their mind that SMU is a university for business study, we are obliged to accept and it was not advisable to give our opinion, as it will not be appreciated, even though openly they wanted to seek our views. Everyone thought that I was crazy to even to try to make the government looked at SMU site at a different angle, especially on a spiritual level. I strongly believe art is the core to our economic success, therefore no matter what, I must give my best short even though I know I look ridiculous in the eyes of the government and intellectuals. Why do I believe so strongly?

How do I see things? Education is not just for survival but also to acquire the knowledge and wisdom, thus education prepared us for life. We need a well-balanced education to bring about a wholesome being, therefore every effort must be made to ensure that the future generation is not just taught but involved in the learning process through activities like, art & craft, drama, and community service, which will connect them to their spiritual being. I felt strongly that if the direction from the Government is to turn Singapore into a new renaissance city, then it is timely to introduce spirituality and study different cultures, especially after Sept 11. Use education as a powerful way to nurture the youth through art form, teach languages and emphasize the exchange of information on human values - People can keep their own religious values while sharing human values in our modern world. Sacred texts like the Koran and the bibles do not advocate violence. Differing cultures need not threatens one another. Can SMU play the role to be a higher learning of the spiritual mind?

On top of it, around the region there is no top Arts University in the making, it will be great if Singapore can take the lead in this area and make SMU an Arts University for the entire region, just like the way we have done for our others endeavor like the sport school and life sciences. By pouring money into NAFA and SIA-LaSalle to make it into a top art school with NUS will not work because the site is not conducive to bring these establishments to greater heights. Aligned with our culture of passivism, one can't just tell the Government that the study done by Dr. Tan Chin Nam's team for the New Renaissance was not ideal and in fact incorrect. Dr. Tan Chin Nam's team proposed that the New Renaissance should be combined with LaSalle-SIA and NAFA at NUS site, but base on my study I felt SMU site is the ideal and conducive to create the new renaissance combined with NAFA but without SIA-LaSalle. Instead, keep SIA-LaSalle separate entity. Therefore, this special invitation by the government to rally the people to make Singapore into a nation with ideas was the greatest opportunity for me to bring
out my grand vision for Singapore—SMU the ‘Birth of the Asian Renaissance’.

Therefore, the only way to go about presenting the concept plan, I had was to be creative and get myself involved in the urban planning redevelopment even though I am not an architect by profession. I am not afraid to lose money and time in pursuit of my dreams and high ideals by submitting the proposals to convince the Government that Singapore can be the ‘Brain and Soul of the World’ and ‘Hollywood of the East’. I believe strongly that Singapore should not lose this great opportunity to enable SMU to play this role to be the catalyst to integrate cultures; this means SMU should be an Arts University in the near future.

From the bottom of my heart, I am not even looking for any reward. The government had called upon the citizens to give ideas and I was just following instructions. When I did the National Library proposal it was very spontaneous— I saw the vision and I needed to get it out of my brain or system if not the migraine will continue until I got it all out in the paper. I was not sad when my proposal was rejected outright because the migraine had disappeared, although many people were upset on my behalf especially my mother. In my naïve mind or out of innocent I thought that the government would be delighted to receive such proposal from an individual especially when they wanted Singapore to be a new renaissance city. Singapore needs a very powerful library with a new image and identity, I really believed that my masterplan of the library would inspire the authority to implement arts activities in the future libraries and introduce library to shopping malls because Singapore culture is window-shopping as I have told the library board’s authority in 1992.

As for the SMU project, I really thought that the Government was serious in wanting the people to give ideas; therefore I took this as an excuse to called Bro Jo (whom I never met but heard of his name) and the others to form a group called ‘Arts Circle’. Most of the members doubted the Government sincerity except for stupid me as usual. I wanted to present my vision of the new renaissance with the group but they believed I should present the Asian Renaissance proposal separately as they only wanted mainly to fight for the three locate theaters promised to us by the Government. Bro Jo’s passion was to introduce dramas through cluster schools, therefore he felt it was not wise to lump everything together as the government might not welcome it, in fact, might be confused with the ASEAN House agenda.
History of the Arts Circle

“Renaissance cannot be bought by money but was created by the revolutionary mind of the individual.” – Sunflower Chong

On September 1999, I saw an article in the forum page written by Roger Jenkins arguing for the three theaters. I called him up and asked him for a hand in fighting for the three theaters at SMU.

I later saw an article on Tedd Joselson the pianist. I attended the masterclass conducted by Tedd at NAFA. There I also met Prof. John Howard. They discussed the need to do something about the arts and the idea of an Asian Renaissance. At that point, I was convinced that this group should take up PM Goh’s challenge of giving a proposal either as an individual or as a team to the Government. The Government had said that if the idea were accepted, the individual or team would be rewarded. Prof. John Howard introduced A/P Dr. John Matthews to the group. Tedd introduced Dr. Liliana Golianni to the group. Sunflower introduced Mr. Thai Quang Trung, A/P Victor Savage and Brother. Joseph McNally to the group.

The group had our first meeting at Sheraton Towers with 8 members and I paid for the bills since it was I who initiated it. They decided to call themselves the Arts Circle. At the first meeting, Professor John Howard was appointed as the Chairman and I Sunflower Chong was unanimously voted as the Secretary. After the first meeting, through Tedd, I invited Chan Kwai Sum and Samantha Tan to join the Arts Circle. I also invited Chek Yui Hong to join the Arts Circle. She believed the young ones will and should take the lead one-day if an art is to flourish.

I believes that excellence in education means you need to nurture individuals who can think for themselves, and Singapore is not going on the right path. To change this, I believes that the arts must grow. One way I want to help the arts grow is by creating architecture with a soul, civic architecture that will not ignore the arts. I also believes that if we want to have a Singapore New Renaissance or Asian Renaissance, we must grow the arts because, without arts, there can be no Renaissance.

To have my thoughts heard by the government, I participated in the Idea Competition for the new Singapore Management University (SMU). Winning the competition was not my main concern. Instead, my top priority was to share my vision and ideology so that decision makers could adopt my ideas either in part or in whole. In particular, I want to fight for the three theaters (originally included in the Esplanade project but now omitted) and other arts facilities in SMU to enhance the environment.

Another concern of hers is the name of the university. I believe using the term ‘management’ contains the growth of the university. I believe a university must have room for growth and the ability to embrace society. I suggested ‘Singapore Meridian University’ as Meridian symbolizes the highest point of success.
Why I Went The Mile?

"The value of an idea lies in the using of it." - Thomas Edison

I believe Singapore could achieve the goal to be the brain and soul of the world through the art, especially by elevating architecture to greater heights, thus we must not fail to introduce Great Architecture in the concept design of SMU. Great Architecture is about bringing back the soul. Therefore, SMU should not only be just a center for function, it should be an education center to realize all our inner aspirations not only to be a better person to build a harmonious society but to be Great leaders who will lead by examples.

SMU can be a special place where people interested in the arts and artists feel inclined to gather, drink. Eat and chat. Where they can relax together in an environment that stimulates ideas. Where solo musicians or small groups can play and experiment. Where potters can make and sell pots. Where a sculptor can be seen working for a month and all artists should be visible and accessible. Curiously in the art should be encouraged. Where small art classes and group discussions can take place. Where people from all walks of life feel uninhibited. The young and old can browse over art books and magazines at the secondhand bookshop. So that those not used to art can learn to feel at home with the artist’s products and presence. It will be great to house the ‘Singapore Design Center’ at this location for better interaction with the masses.

I hope SMU will eventually be the top Arts University for ASEAN and thus Asia; therefore I can’t wait to seize this great opportunity to make SMU the symbol of the new renaissance, as the Government’s latest aspiration is to make Singapore into a new renaissance city. This can be achieved especially when SMU is ready to be the catalyst to integrate cultures by inviting Mr. Kuo Pao Kun new school to be part of SMU’s future arts development. Subsequently, Nafa will be roped in when SMU is ready maybe within ten years’ time to be a full-fledged Arts University. If the government can help us reach our goal faster, please do support Mr. Kao aspirations because integrating cultures is nation building and not a one-man mission. The government got to understand that for the vision of the Singapore New Renaissance to succeed Art must come alive and be part of living.

Knowing the mentality of the government, just to share the idea that Singapore New Renaissance should be at SMU site and not on NUS site, I know that I must go the mile again to prove my case in order to gain the respect of the Government. For the SMU proposal, I got to bring out the strength of the site of Bra Basah and especially in the economic aspects and potentials.

I can’t wait to present my masterplan to influence the Government to turn SMU into a top Arts University combine with Nafa because I wanted the new library site to be included in the total planning too. One architect said, “So all the sites around Bra Basah belong to SMU! I was so happy when I heard it but everyone thought that I was crazy. It was so funny, I could get my happiness in this manner as I was planning everything on
paper; to me it was very real that it was going to happen. I even bought a sculpture the Flying Golden Deer from Bro Jo and donated to SMU because I believed his spirit would embrace SMU as Bro Jo symbolized art. I hope that the spirit of the deer will protect SMU and eventually arts studies will be introduced. And I also see the students giving back to society.

For this reason on the first day of the forum at Chijme, I stood up and told the board of panels, “Why just business studies, why not arts studies!” This was the first step of my struggle and I wanted it to be registered in the Hall (I spoke quite loud and strong too; I made sure they would never forget my voice – Arts in SMU) because Mr Ho Kwan Ping declared proudly that SMU will be the only University in Singapore that will follow the American system to the 'T'!!

I hope after graduating the students of SMU will not only acquired the skill and knowledge but also most importantly has cultivated a beautiful heart that cares for the society at large. This means a kinder Singapore because through arts enrichment we have piled a strong foundation in the heart soul and mind of the youth - they will get their souls back. And if that happens then the Flying Golden Deer has done the magic to turn SMU students into the brains and soul of the world. "The soul is the path to God." - Sunflower Chong
The Discovery of Great Architecture Is the Salvation of My Soul

"Do not hire a man who does your work for money, but him who does it for love of it." - Henry David Thoreau

I got nothing in term of material wealth because all my wealth went to pursue my dreams for Singapore in new kind of architecture. As a young child I fantasized that building will talk to one another thus with us. And after such a long journey half way round the world and two broken marriages and $2 million down the road, finally I got the vision in paper at least. I feel so rich mentality and spiritually and thus fulfilled. (Maybe after this book is published the money will come finally or either I end up in jail, ha-ha! anyway who cares as long as my soul is HAPPY!) Most importantly, I feel good about myself because I managed to bring out all my vision in the open and shared with everyone who cares to listen to what I got to say about the hidden pleasures of life. There is an inner power in all of us waiting to come out and as long as you are connected with your soul and listen to the inner voice or your sub consciousness, you will be able to bring it out like a flute - have you ever heard of this expression ‘that is a gift from God’ or ‘it is God gift to us or to you’?

I saw the LIGHT- “Come …Light the World with LOVE” and the light is my glittering soul shining with Love for Humanity and Creativities for Singapore to be the brain and soul of the world. Most importantly, the light I saw at the end of the tunnel was the discoveries of Great Architecture and World Harmony Day. Do have faith in God because He will give you great strength. I have great faith and that is a great gift to give to a child and I have given it to both of my children. With His love and guidance I sailed through life with great precision. Great Architecture came about through His divine guidance and also due to my pride as an Asian by not giving in to society demand, instead I chose to challenge it silently, thus brought a lot of happiness to me as I was awakened and enriched by all these revelations of new kind of thinking in seeing and using architecture.

Michelangelo introduced art onto architecture and I hope to instill ideology onto architecture to bring about the presence of God. Great Architect that inspire and create the conditions for the human intellect and spirit to reach a higher plane thus will enable us to feel His presence, especially when the whole concept design could be realized it will be overpowering as the structure can be seen right in front of you or is thrown at your face and nobody can miss it or escape from its presence, unlike the Bible, Koran and others religious book, which were often kept or hidden in the drawers or bookshelves. This is the secret power of Great Architecture that Almighty God had given to me as a great gift for humanity, so whether I will be pay or not to do it, or whether the authority qualify me or not to participate in it, I still got to do my job for God by bringing all my vision out in the open to share these great wonders from the soul with you and hope along the way someone out there will be inspired, thus will enlighten him or her to elevate architecture and thus our life to greater heights as Great Architecture is about great life.
A man like Nelson Mandela who symbolizes the fight for freedom is a good example of how we could apply the idea of Great Architecture. He is an overpowering man; a heart filled with love for humanity and to portray his aspirations in architectural form, the people of South African has commissioned an architect to do it and the architect chosen to do it has duplicated the Statue of Liberty to represent him. As we know the Statue of Liberty represents freedom in America and freedom in America is a given right but Nelson Mandela fight for freedom for his people, therefore by using the Statue of Liberty is not appropriate at all to represent who he was and has become. A man like him with his stature it will demean him if the present concept is allowed to go ahead. Because this is imitation and Frank L. Wright said that imitation is cowardice. Was Nelson Mandela a coward? Far from it, he is a man of Great Virtues; so bring it all out in the total design of the building, which is what Great Architecture is all about?

Mr. Mandela is a brave man and a very proud man too, why should he be compared to the Statue of Liberty? If we apply the principle of Great Architecture here, this means to have his presence felt in the whole development we have to go to the roots of his struggle by understanding his thinking first. The significant of his whole struggle was the 27 years in jail. He fought for freedom for his people at a young age, so which year he went to prison and the number of years he was in prison will be the starting point and the deciding factor to help us in the overall layout plan. (It is only an example but of course there is more to it in order to come up in architecture form.)

Don’t you agreed with me it is just amazing if your burning desire to serve humanity, with a belief and passion allowed you to achieve the wonders you had never dreamt of in years? It is so powerful and rewarding as I am experiencing in this spiritual journey through my lifelong struggle exploring the unknown. In a way it is like chasing your partner and in this aspect it is my spiritual partner, which is my soul. So do you understand why I could be happy when I’m alone? Because I am with the presence of GOD and I always talk to HIM in silent although I am with people or even with someone.

Therefore, the Government must understand that for art and babies making to succeed you need ‘Feeling’ for feeling is the luxury of emotion. Emotion is equal to love and only through love you can reach your soul but unfortunately in Singapore the system dismissed it thus it trickles down to our personal life too. So how to expect the younger generation to produce many babies when you do not go to the core of the problem to make it right or to fix it? This means ‘Spiritual Connection’ is very much lacking in our society as feeling the ingredient needed to make it happened could not be found since art is not part of living. For this reason even architecturally we are impaired.

Whither Singapore Icon?

Singapore seems to be architecturally impaired. The only structures that invoke any attention are timeless landmarks such as the Supreme Court, Raffles hotel and religious places of worship, the majority of which are products of our colonial past.
Our modern ‘landmark’ structures, such as the New Parliament, Suntec City and buildings along Shenton Way, are so insipid and monotonous that they do not even garner a second look.

About the only eye-catching modern design here is the Esplanade and that too is more controversial than iconic. The question beckons: where is our structural icon? Where is our architectural ambition? In what direction are we heading towards aesthetically?

For many years, Singapore has been a paradigm of urban planning and development for other metropolitan areas around Asia and the world. But over the past decade, while these other metropolitan areas – for example, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur – have embarked on ambitious projects that are slowly making their mark as global icons, Singapore has opted to be more cautious and drab in its approach to define itself artistically. Dubai, a case in point, epitomizes this drive to stand out aesthetically with its outstanding hotels, residential developments and urban themes.

Even London, Singapore’s perennial metropolitan benchmark, has exhibited audacity, teasing the eyes with a recent series of sublime modern landmarks that dot the skyline.

Are we too afraid? Will we be left behind in this global trend? Maybe we should look towards the Middle East for inspiration, much like they did towards us not too long ago.

(Straits Times 29 July 2004)

Hamesh Mehta
New York, USA

In All My Endeavors I Only Challenge My Mind

“The mind of Man is capable of anything because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future.” - Joseph Conrad

I am a visionary, visualize and many call me a philosopher after talking to me. I carry the same torch as Tadao Ando, Sam Eason, Frank Lloyd Wright, Leonardo Da Vinci, etc. and yes none of them were ‘architects’. What drives me to think architecture cannot be totally explained except an internal urge in me to discover the unknown especially in the untouchable areas? Most importantly was my curiosity to see how far I can push my mind as an individual to reach the impossible.

I am an ordinary Singaporean with an extra dream to unite nations through arts and architecture, because I believe there is a hidden power in great architecture that has not been explored by architects. My philosophy is that the struggle in life crates a challenge for me and this challenge makes my life exciting. As William James said, “To improve the golden moment of opportunity, and catch the good that is within our reach, is the great art of life.”
We do not see things as they are. We see things as we are. Peter Eisenman said, “Architecture in the present is seen as a process of inventing an artificial past and a futureless present. It remembers a no-longer future.” I believe this is one of the main reasons why people feel insecure and sometimes lost because they don’t know who they are and will be. In short, there is a sense of loss of identity.

Nations like Germany, France, England and Austria have legitimate concerns that their cultures will be swamped or their politics fundamentally altered by unfettered immigration. Straits Times dated July 27, 2000 reported that according to a document drawn up for discussion by the group’s ministers, “Europe will need 75m immigrants over the next 50 years and to become a racially hybrid society.” Therefore the single ethnic will rapidly disappear and every country will eventually be multi ethnic, thus multi-cultural. Hence, my greatest concern and worry, not only for Singapore but the world at large is in the area of identity in a multi-racial community. The recent example of the coup attempt in Fiji is a real concern. I strongly believed there is an urgency and great need to address this issue not individually but as a nation and as a world body, because it is threatening the social fabrics of society.

Mr. Ho Kwon Ping about loss of oneself in this complex world. Mr. Ho Kwon Ping spoke eloquently and feelingly of the influences, beliefs and turning points in his life. (On Straits Times 16 October 1999) He said, “My mistake was that I was searching for an ‘ism’ – a world-view – just as some religion.” He should not feel bad or think it is only he who had made this mistake, because frankly speaking many people in this world had also make this same mistake not because they are less intelligent, rather, because they lost faith in one another. There seems to be the need to anchor on to something powerful enough to give them hope and meaning in their life so that they will not be lost.

“Architecture is born in the heart,” said Frank Lloyd Wright. I couldn’t agree more. Great architecture is a voice of power to be reckoned. It is a voice that is immeasurable because it seems to have a spiritual power, which instills patriotism through rekindling human spirit that is the essence of life. With this inborn instinct I have, I believe by introducing art and philosophy onto architecture is the most powerful form of medium, because it provokes the mind to think not only about oneself but most important about our existence in this universe.

Through my long and painful journey, finally I dare to say I discovered the hidden power in art and architecture. I strongly believe it is the best form to replace the ‘ism’ simply by instilling the understanding of spiritual architecture. As Henry Miller said, “The new era is the era of spiritual creativity.” Arts and architecture can play a role if we are conscious and sensitive by creating designs that will forge an identity to unite the minds and hearts of the people. As Peter Eisenman said, “It is necessary to propose an alternative idea of architecture, one whereby it is no longer the purpose of architecture, but its inevitability, to express its own time.” In short it must belong to the era – a record of time, place and man. Therefore, the mission of arts and architecture is the enlightenment of humanity, just like the ‘Bohdi’ trees at Bra Basah.
Sydney Opera House is one fine example what architecture can do (it is not even spiritual) for a nation and people. So you may ask what identity is. Perhaps for as long as we engage the issue, as if it were a question, as if it were a search for a set of answers, it will remain elusive to us. What justifies itself a symbol of the people? The Sydney Opera House has become easily identifiable with the country where it is sited. What makes the Opera House a uniquely Australian object, rooted to the sentiments of both local and tourists? Despite the fact that it was conceived to any Australian architectural precedents, it exists today as a symbol of the nation.

As we know by now, this project gives the country its unique identity and is a pride of all Australians and has become the visual symbol of Australians. The Sydney Opera House has become a very important landmark for Australian through the years due to its unique design. Can you imagine how powerful SMU is going to be if we can create architecture sensitive to the aspirations of the people, and reflective of their identity?

It took the Australian government almost four decades to recognize the contribution of the visionary Danish architect Joern Utzon. After forty years he received the key to Sydney and the total interior of the Opera House is going to be renovated according to his original vision, which they had rejected originally due to the authorities lack of the understanding how visionary mind works.

Architecture, is only architecture when it is an act, as opposed to thought? Writing, drawing, and building, each are an act from thought. Therefore my concept proposal for SMU is about ‘Time’. Represented by the pyramid hourglass library. Time to concentrate on our ‘Brain’. Represented by the brain design on Drama Center with SMU lion logo as the façade. To remind us of our ‘Roots’, we must go back to history that is the Singapore River, where not only was it our economic lifeline but it was always known as the old heart of the city, Bra Basah is the natural birth site of a new Renaissance because the water from the Singapore River flows to the mouth of Fort Canning and continue to Bra Basah which was once known as ‘wet rice’. The total design of SMU will be in organic architecture inspired by the padi field. As such, SMU site should be integrated with Fort Canning Park. Thus, this place will be known as the cultural heart of the city equipped with arts facilities and workshops to create vibrancy.

My answer to the question of identity is to take a bold step forward now to create forms and spaces which people can enjoy and thus remember. By creating designs that provoke people to think and question life, I hope to mold the minds and hearts of the people, leading them on to share from within their soul, to harvest their potential and stir their social consciousness. Once Singaporeans can begin to care for the wellbeing of their fellowmen, the nation will flourish. My design concept embodies Asian values and beliefs to unite the people and nation. Eventually, the place itself attempts to reach out to the world through architecture.

Therefore, akin to the Sydney Opera House, SMU is the soul of society and an awakening of who we are and going to be. In time to come this place will gradually but surely grow to be a very important landmark in the eyes of all Singaporeans but the
world as well, because I can foresee thus is going to be the soul of the world. It is very elating to read this write-up from Straits Times dated July 25, 2000 “Singapore isn’t the cultural wasteland as derogatorily perceived by many.” A reviewer wrote this comment from Business World entitles ‘Changing the Singapore scene.’

My main strength lies in my understanding that without great passion we cannot express or appreciate art let alone Great Art, what more to expect all of you to understand the importance of Great Architecture or Spiritual Architecture. Without a soul you know not your true existence in this universe. Therefore great art is expressed from one’s soul

“It is within one power either to serve God, or not to serve Him. Serving Him, I add to my own good of the whole world. Not serving Him, I forfeit my own good and deprive the world of that good which was in my power to create” – Leo Tolstoy
Many Intellectuals & Civil Servants Had Misunderstood My Good Intentions!

I was very passionate in the Singapore Art Center project because I wanted the project to bond the relationship between the government, civil servants and people as this is an ideal way in nation building – it is a people project and together we decide the future well-being of our country for instant should we create an ASEAN's Networking Center and Art Workshops along the waterfront of SAC. How exciting it will be just like Pasadena beach at Los Angeles during weekends everyone flock to the site and enjoy a display of creative works. The people and tourists are free to browse around like in a fleet market in London with all the secondhand books and many others interesting artworks on display so on and so forth. If it is designed with the people pleasure in mind, it will encourage great street arts and the waterfront will be a perfect setting to enable performing arts to grow organically. That is the way for arts to flourish, building upon the spirit and interest of the people by connecting to them through varies means. The best of all is that it gives birth from the ground organically and not like now the government got to spend so much money to empower the civil servants to make arts ALIVE. That is not how true arts should grow in a structured manner; instead chaotic is the key for vibrancy in the art world.

Some of my friends from the SAC volunteering committee said, “Sunflower why are you wasting your breath to be heard we are in the establishment and yet the government refuses to listen to us, as for me I better go and make more money and focus on my work, anyway I was not paid at all as a volunteer and when they invited foreign consultants to participate they are treated so well”. Another one told me that some in the committee were serious about giving themselves to bring out the best for SAC, but most of them were there for namesake. Another one told me that since SM Lee sister was there, so no hope for the three theaters as tourism come first, the two big theaters were their priority. This was the feedback I got and if that had been decided then why waste the time of the volunteers? So this mean their time is precious while ours is not.

Another top gun told me, “Do you think we are so powerful that we could decide everything, you must be joking, since you are so clever why you don’t go to SM Lee because he is the only man who can decide whether the two big theaters should be at Marina South.” But the civil servants got it all wrong because my concerned like many others was that the civil servants always thought that the country will be very rich and can sustain all arts activities. Whereas the arts communities knew that for arts to flourish it is the spirit, passion, and love of the people that will make it work besides the money. We thought it would be better if we could wait for the maturity of the people in the appreciation of arts as a way of life then the country can build the two big theaters. It is easier this way rather than building the theaters and cracking the head to fill the seats. On top of it, in the arts communities they wished that at least half the performances should be local arts and not mostly imported one. Well as long as the country got plenty of money to carry all these big exercises it is alright but money is only good to a certain extend to uplift all these aspirations, after that, it is the heart, soul, mind and character that will bring arts to greater heights.
For your information one of the ‘top gun’ from NAFA screamed at me on the phone when he knew of my new endeavor for SMU and this was what he said, “I know that you are enthusiastic about SMU but do you know that your enthusiasm can spoil others people’s plan?” I really wondered what kind of plan he had in mind for NAFA that if I pushed too hard for SMU to be an Arts University. Like in the case for St Joseph Institute my architect friend told me not to spoil the plan for the others. I was told by them not to interfere when I wanted St Joseph Institution to be a music school for the children.

"Never give up" that’s my motto, for the SMU proposal I gave a called to PM Goh Chok Tong personal secretary Mr. Ong Ken Yong and told him that the government aspiration was to turn Singapore into a New Renaissance City and I would love to share with the Prime Minister my grand vision for Singapore because I could achieve this aim for the government. He told me that they were not in charge and he refused to accept my proposal. To cut the story short, I headed to the Heritage Board. The first thing they asked me, “Who are you, which organization are you from?” I told him that I am an individual and I love Singapore and I don’t belong to any organization. Instead of welcoming my ideas he said that they do not talk to an individual. They refused to hear what I got to share with them on the basis that I was an individual. In Singapore civil servants don’t talk to individuals, maybe we got ‘contagious disease’.

I told him, “PM Goh wanted to turn Singapore into a new renaissance city and I got a lot of ideas, could I be invited to give my views?” I also asked them how they were going to conduct the study of creating the new renaissance for Singapore.” His reply, “We only discuss among ourselves and with some art groups.” I told him, “But renaissance is about the creative minds of the individuals, and you just can’t discuss with some groups in private, why can’t I join the discussion group?” Well, he put down the phone and that was the end of the story. This kind of attitude is very typical of the civil servants because they were afraid to talk to an individual, especially one so vocal and so upfront. No wonder they told me to stop behaving like I am the ‘government’ and stop confusing the government with all my big ideas. They said that the government was not ready for a character like me, says who? Instead of being excited like the Indonesian authority did when I presented the ASEAN House vision to them, the civil servants got annoyed with me instead, why?

The civil servants lacked the understanding of what 'soul' means so naturally their immediate reactions were negative. In their state of mind, they are paid to do their job and not to make drastic changes. Without the knowledge that soul will elevate our mental wellbeing, how can the government know where Singapore’s strength and future lie? I am a real idealist and optimist. Since the 80s I did my best to reach out to the respective government bodies with the hope that they will understand my deep concern for Singapore’s future because ‘a nation without soul or lack of soul cannot be a Great Nation.’ What more when the government wants to turn Singapore into a New Renaissance City? Renaissance is about the power of the human mind and soul.

I have to keep on chasing my dream and ideal for a better, kinder and freer Singapore
for the sake of my children’s children. Our generation had suffered enough in silence and my conscience does not allow me to be indifferent. Thus, I need to speak my mind without reservation. I felt that someone got to make the move in a constructive way to call for positive change from the side of the government to help the people to free their soul, so naturally, I had to do something. Whether I’m qualified to speak or do I have the right to speak never crossed my mind. However, to have someone highlight the people’s concerns, especially the architects and art communities’ frustrations to the government were and still are my top priority. My friends and family were annoyed with me for fighting the cause on behalf of the architects, as I am not an architect by profession. But in my mind, I feel it is time to speak up to enable the government to tap the local talents if they want Singapore to excel beyond our imagination.

My strong conscience told me that I’m one part of society that got something to contribute for the betterment of Singapore; therefore I must play my little part as a responsible and caring citizen. As a concerned Singaporean at heart, I must not hesitate to give my ideas and views due to fear, instead filled with love for our beloved country I must try my best to reach the government to be heard no matter how difficult and tiring the journey is going to be. I strongly believe that by submitting the proposal, it was my subtle way and only way to communicate with the government to send the simple message that for Singapore to excel beyond our imagination the government needs to have great faith in all Singaporeans and to open up the society politically, if not grave consequences will be around the corner especially if we do not have a nation with creative thinkers who have the gut to speak up. Yes it was good that Mr. Ngiam Tong Dow finally after his retirement speak up but it is not enough for Singapore; we need many more of them and the younger the better because they will be the future leaders of Singapore. Moreover, art is separated from living as the government does not know or were not aware that art is one of the cores for Singapore’s economic success. For this reason, we have been stagnant spiritually and thus mentally for so long till we almost lose our own identity and self-worth. Do we always need to have a crisis before the government is willing to let go some of their control over the people?

Great ideas and answers in life come from the spirit of the people as my journey has shown. This means we must continue to live for our dreams and ideals no matter how bleak the environment might be because our true character will be lost if mentally we lose the war before we begin. Great architecture will not allow land to hold the improvements, instead of the improvements holding the land. It will be great if Singapore brand name can be ‘Singapore The Asian Renaissance City’, instead ‘Uniquely Singapore’ that the Singapore Tourism Board came out with, for this reason, I had gone the mile for SMU to try in my subtle way to open the eyes and hearts of the government that the site got great potentials to stretch our imagination to reach our goal of an Asian Renaissance City. Why should we short chain ourselves by our false pride, short-sightedness, and ignorance?

This one is classic, an architect said to me, “We spend six years in order to be qualify as an architect, what make you think you know more about architecture then us? So the intellectuals from the community got this perception that when you submit ideas to
the government, they would think that we are trying to be smart and want to be an architect. So I will take this opportunity to call upon the government to reassure all these intellectuals that I was not trying to take their job, am I so capable without a paper qualification? I just wanted to share my vision to all who are interested to listen that there is another way of doing things when you channel your mind and energy in the right direction instead of allowing fear to hold you back. On top of it, I was behaving like a child discovered a new toy and I wanted to share this wonderful toy with everyone.

For your information, it is very expensive to talk to the PAP government, especially if you do not have any paper qualifications and cannot speak proper English. The SAC proposal cost $13k and the National Library $25k. My advice to the others, don’t ever walk the path that I did because you will be greatly disappointed. But actually my mother told me long time ago that the government will not listen to ordinary people even how great the idea is going to be, but stubborn me I need to find out for myself if not I will be constantly wondering. As for me, it was a differently story altogether because I did it for my belief that by doing so one day I will be able to change the mindset of the government that it is worth listening to the ordinary people at large, as they got nothing to lose but instead everything to gain.

I remembered in 1984 at Bra Basah, my Chinese educated friends from the ex-Barisan Socialists challenged me that if I dared to kiss Mr. Ong Teng Cheong in front of the crowd, they believed one day the Singapore system would be changed. So I gave a kiss to Mr. Ong Teng Cheong without hesitation because I wanted Singapore system to change for the better for the wellbeing of the people to be conducive for our mind to speak up without fear. On that day I had handed 2 gifts to Mr. Chng Zi Kun, a calligraphy and a round marble sculpture with inscription of an English poem written by me about Singapore 25th year’s anniversary.

**APPRECIATION OF OUR 25 YEARS OF SUCCESS**

*Left or Right,*  
*Only success of accomplishment overrides.*

*Our greatest pride,*  
*Is it not the man we decide?*

*Do we need to fear or fight?*  
*When stability and security are here with might.*

*What is human right?*  
*If we comprehend not where our duty lie?*

*Now, we live in comfort and a free life.*  
*Do we still recall our past and difficult times?*

*Will immediate problems arrive when we lose our identity?*
Without art and culture as our right?

Though progress is always fine to seek,
If only men lose their mind of power and greed.

-To be proud of our root is the strength for our survival – Sunflower 1983

The intellectuals and the civil servants that I had approached always gave the excuse that their hands were tied. One of them told me that SM Lee would not listen; so don’t waste your time to send the proposals to him, instead his friend told me to look after my children. I was advised to leave the problems of the country for the leadership to solve, as they were the one who created it in the first place. He added on and said, “The government has no place for a character like you, if we introduce you to them, they will get a heart attack and drop dead!” When I did the SMU proposal the civil servants said that the government still was not ready for a character like me. Anyway most of the civil servants said that they were paid to do their job and not to change or fix the system and they said in Cantonese, “Mei Ser Kok, Lee Oil Chok Fun ah!” This means – Never die before, you want to create trouble, ah!

Although I am an idealist but when I wanted to be heard by the government I better be a pragmatic Singaporean to gain their respect; therefore I preferred to give my ideas and views in a constructive way to the respective bodies of the government to enlighten them with the hope that they could see life the people way. I wrote to the government besides sending proposals to support my grand vision in regard to Singapore’s future developments with the hope that I could open up their eyes and minds that for Singapore to excel we must bring back powerful ideology through our SOULS to anchor the people to Singapore, thus we must go beyond economics. Don’t you know the Soul is the path to God and ‘A Nation without Soul or Lack of Soul cannot be a Great Nation’ The authority from SAC told me that they have made a mistake by calling the public to give our views because we were giving them a lot of headache. And she said, “So by submitting all these proposals what are you trying to prove?” Must I proved something to do something, can’t I be doing it because I believe in it, just like when I was an airhostess for Sabena Airline I worked hard because I believed in doing so to give a good image to Singapore. In our Asian culture we are hardworking people and we should not lose this image as we progress with the western world. One of the Belgium steward said to me,” You Asian hostesses can never be a purser so why are you all working so hard for?” That was how the Belgians talked to us no wonder Sabena Airline went bankrupted. Singaporean airhostesses were known to be the hardest working ones even the Japanese airhostesses couldn’t compete with us. I was very proud of that because I was the ambassador for Singapore and that was how I thought and even to this day I have not changed my thinking and values. (I would like the foreigners to have a good image of us.)

The ex-director for the National Library got this to say, “I don’t care how the library is to be built, and all I wanted is for the building to be up.” They were all so afraid that if there is great public discussions into the project things will not go their way. The
problem with the civil servants was that they took the project as their personal endeavor. If it is not the public funds do you think we care a damn in what they are doing! I remembered vividly when I approached URA with my two children with the National Library model to presence it to Mrs. Koh Wen-Jin, she was very annoyed that the public was always complaining about their performances. (When I heard it from her mouth I was so elated because we were doing the right thing on behalf of the government and I strongly believe that the only way to push the civil servants to perform, the people must be proactive by giving constructive views.) I suggested to her to have the two big theatres located to Marina South and she told me if I wanted to change maybe the bus stop she could look into such a request but as for making such a big change for the two theatres she said what made me think that they got the power to do so? I was quite surprise with that reply because I always thought that they were the one who did the total planning?

When I sent the Singapore Management (SMU) proposal in year 2001 the civil servants said that the Government still not ready to accept a character like me; in Hokkien they said ‘tan ku’, this mean you can wait ‘long, long’:( Well stubborn me, I still go ahead in presenting my proposal because I love Singapore and I wanted the best for Singapore whether anyone agreed with me or not because that is my right as a citizen of Singapore. Worry about knowing my place in society is at the back of my mind. If we love Singapore we must be alert and care for Singapore wellbeing, be it physical or spiritual. What my actions are telling them that if they are afraid to make suggestions to the government, they better step aside and leave it to the younger brighter Singaporeans with strong belief and passion for Singapore to do so? Rather people like them who try to discourage us because they knew that the government will not listen and instead asked me to save my money for my children when I suggested doing a video of the National Library at Marina South to convince the leadership how Marina South architectural landscape should evolve? (I had made the video at a cost of $5,000 and send it to her and many others without regret. I brought the video to her but she refused to watch it and she returned it back to me.) She said that if they were from the system and they could not change the system what made me think that I could change the system from the outside? And you know what, from Mita they encouraged me to keep fighting because they said that they were from the inside cannot change the system, maybe I could change the mindset of the government from the outside. So stupid me just keep letting them turn me around, really cannot tahun! In my simple mind if you don’t try you will never know, so I got to do the walk and I know that many people are watching me to see whether I will get into trouble with the government or not?

Well I believe people at the top do not welcome big ideas as these ideas might demand great change. Moreover, in our culture the government believed that with ‘Hard Cash' they could solve all our problems and ‘People Talents’ could be bought by money for example the sport talents. Is that the right way for Singapore nation building? They also got this belief that when they snap their finger everything will be done! My experience with the Orchard Youth Park for World Harmony Day (WHD) 2003 was proved of what I said. After almost forty years of non-interruption in ruling the country, you just can’t blame the government for having such a negative attitude that has been
part of their culture and gradually became their right to rule over the people at large. The human factors never come to the picture; this means they lack human understanding, as they understood money say all or money is the power. This is one of the weaknesses of the PAP government; therefore S21 is not achieving its objective. When I approached SIF the personal asked me not to waste my time and money. He said, “Keep your ideas to yourself, as they will not take the ideas to the top and will claim it as theirs. Please take my advised and look after your children well because that will be your bonus.”

Singapore is my home and the home of my children’s children; therefore I got a duty and responsibility to see that Singapore’s future is going on the right path even though I might be an ordinary citizen. I want to be a proud Singaporean to shine for my beloved country through my creativity, thus I will do my very best to bring out my vision which I felt will enable Singapore to achieve its goal to be a renaissance city. I would love to share this conversation that I had with the ex-project director of SMU Mr. Eddie Wee. After learning from his secretary of his constant late nights at work until 11pm, I asked him why he was working so hard. He said happily without hesitation, “The way I see it is that I am just doing my second phase of national service.” I could not believe what I heard. What a great attitude he had, therefore from now onwards I have adopted his philosophy as mine too. I hope you will follow suit in order for us to help Singapore to succeed in the world stage.

I know that the work that I have done so far is not easy for all to comprehend and especially when I suggested that we should work on Universal Education in Spirituality. When URA invited me to give my view on Marina South I turned them down, as my vision for Marina South will stir a storm in the teapot. On top of it as Mrs Koh from URA said that they do not have the power to make any changes in Marina South as Mr Lee Kuan Yew has decided the master plan.

The government can only see things in monetary gain instead of spiritual fulfillment; therefore they will never understand my World’s Vision for Singapore. I sincerely hope my books will enable the masses to understand what I’m trying to achieve for Singapore all these years. You know when I was young I heard my father and sister always talk about me at the veranda that I was above my head something like that..... I cried in silent and I told to myself one day when the people know what I am striving for they will love me for who I am and salute me for taking this spiritual journey. Before my father passed away he had read my books and he was in awe how I got this idea of a Greater Asia and he asked me how this vision came about? I was known as an ugly duckling and before his death six month precisely my father said that he did not know he got a pretty daughter and intelligent one, so at the end of the day this is my greatest reward from Almighty God because my father did not love me.

What I had learnt from Eddie is that all my hard work even not appreciated was not going to sadden me or dampened my pure spirit because I am just doing my national service like my male counterpart. So nothing is lost in fact the contrary, as I have become a richer person in body, mind and soul. Even if the authority throw my
proposals in the waste bin as told by my PAP friend from Kim Keat Community in 1992 when I submitted the SAC proposal. I still keep sending to the government with the hope that someone out there will have the time to read it and be inspired by it. This is the best way to influence change in a subtle manner and no authority can get me into trouble for giving my ideas free of charge. Poor Kao Pao Kun got to go to jail by trying to make art part of living while Mr Tay Kheng Soon was being ridicule by the intellectuals.

I hope that the people can feel and understand me thus empower them to get their strength back to believe in themselves that they got all the potentials to achieve the impossible provided they are prepared to sacrifice and take calculated risk to explore the unknown. If for whatever reason I couldn’t succeed or reach the goal to be heard at least the process or the journey itself is as enriching by all the surprises and experiences that were thrown at me that had helped me grow in the right direction. Most importantly we must not forget that nothing is loss but everything to gain through the willingness to share and give. The gist of the whole pursue is that we live a meaningful life - To give and keep on giving because one day it will be return many folds – having good health and loving children are the greatest gift God bestows on us.

It will be great if the government accepted our unconventional ideas, then ordinary people like me need not have to work so hard and spend so much money to convince them through our proposals that Singapore just can’t focus on the economic to excel? If our ideas are accepted this will encourage others Singaporeans to follow suit, rather than now they were telling me not to waste my time and money because government will not listen to us, ’small people’? I believe even as ‘small people’ or ‘stupid people’ we still have a responsibility towards the people and country. All I wanted the government to know that there is someone out there and many more like me without much education are as concerned about Singapore’s future development as they are. I might be the exception that went the mile to make or prove a point. I had made a vow to God that I will be the one with the courage to convince the government to open the society, but I will do it under my own term and not otherwise. Mr David Marshall told me where I have been hiding all these years and I told him I am right here but I am not interested to go into politics but I’m interested in politics because politic make you tick that mean ALIVE!

My daughter Greta Georges is doing World Harmony Day to bring the awareness of ‘social responsibility’ and moreover WHD gives meaning to her life. Whatever, when she shines she is shining for Singapore too? I hope my children will not give up on Singapore and follow my good examples and continue this mission to uplift humanity in whatever way they know how? I was nicknamed the ‘stupid fool’ or the ‘crazy one’ because I believe that one-day the government will listen even to the voices of the ‘small people’. I live on HOPE and I hope one fine day the Government will be receptive to even big ideas from an ordinary Singaporean like me, whose only asset is a true heart filled with love and care especially for the young Singaporeans to help them connect to their soul to bring about a caring and compassionate individual.

On Straits Time December 9, 2000 DPM Lee Hsien Loong called upon the Young
Singaporeans that they owe it to themselves and their fellow citizens to share their ideas, so long as they have the country’s interest at heart. “The PAP is not averse to views and ideas that disagree with existing Government policies and programmes. In fact, the party seeks out people with fresh perspectives and insights,” he told 300 members of the Young PAP. So if we want Singapore to be the New Renaissance City, then we all better start using our brains to think for Singapore’s sake and thus for our children’s sake too. If not all those years of sufferings and struggle will be a waste when we got to go back to Malaysia eventually.

DPM Lee Hsien Loong unlike Mr Lee Kuan Yew was very humble by saying that the Government does not have the answer for everything and for everyone; he said that if we want Singapore to progress we must give a helping hand. He also said that even if we knew that the government would not accept our ideas, we still should keep on sending. My son said, "Since PM Lee said that they would not accept it, why you still need to keep on sending." As you know being idealistic you only live on hope and my hope is that maybe one day they will accept my grand vision for Marina South because this is the only venue Singapore can showcase to the world what Singapore is all about through Great Architecture. Although many people stop me from giving my vision for SMU as the birth of the new renaissance, I still went ahead at all cost. It was not the reward or recognition that I after, but I believe the World’s Vision that I have can make Singapore stands out on its own – ‘Singapore the Asian Renaissance!’

Frankly speaking, if it was not because of DPM. Lee Hsien Loong constant encouragement to the people to come forward to give ideas, I might not have worked so hard. When I submitted the SAC proposal to the authority which cost me $13k, this was what she said, “We know how to do our job, and we don’t need you to tell us what is best for the Arts Center? Do not go around disturbing all the ministries and make trouble for us? We have worked so hard to get the Government to give us the funds for the Arts Center, so don’t spoil it for us with all your big ideas?” She continued to say that the ministries that I had contacted were calling her and asking her advised how to handle me? She said she liked me that was why she wanted me to stop going to the ministries as the authorities do not have the time for me and she ended up asking, “Since you have presented your proposal did anyone from the Top call you?”

I have submitted the SAC and National Library concept proposals to ex-president Mr. Ong Teng Cheong and while my architect friend was having lunch with him he told Mr Goh Chong Chia that if Sunflower could do it why couldn’t they do the same? And when I was having lunch with Chong Chia, he told me not to spoil the market by giving free ideas to the government because he said that the government expected them to do the same and he told me that they could not be like me because they got to take care of their rice bowl. I apology to him and promised that I will not do it again. And another architect friend of mine told me only to give ideas when the government asked me to do so. Thus after hearing the remarks from them both I was inspired to work even harder for Singapore’s future by coming out with new bold vision when PM Goh Chok Tong has called upon the whole nation to come forward to contribute ideas.
Many people questioned me, “Why do you keep on sending proposal after proposal to the government when you already know that the government will not give you their ears what more their precious time to discuss with you in regards to your grand vision for Singapore?” In short many intellectuals have asked me why I don’t give up. How could I give up on Singapore, we have only one Singapore, similar how could we give up on this world as we have only One World?

Therefore, in regards to our contributions whatever it may be, in ideas forms or social aspects whether the government approves or doesn’t, it’s not important, but what’s important is that as true and good citizens we must play a part in the developments of Singapore’s future? In time to come, maybe the government will see the light, as the facts on the ground will speak for itself. If we refuse to play our part, when thing gone wrong with Singapore don’t blame the government, instead we should blame ourselves for not voicing our disapproval and be proactive. Migrating to other land is not the solution. We must not be living half a life; instead we must strive to be productive for the good of humanity and not just for our pockets. Maybe someone out there need a soul like us, our job is to be true to ourselves and we must not change to suit others or like what the government is doing - change our belief and principle just for the sake of economic. In short sold our soul to the devils!

My philosophy in life is that got money or no money we must try to be happy and if we could achieve it I believe we are the winner in life. So whether the government is willing to listen to me or not, or whether they will accept my ideas or not is secondary? The primary is that I should bring out my vision in the open with the hope that it will inspire some souls in the position of power to take some actions. That was my main objective as a true citizen of Singapore who cares and willing to give. If souls are what the people wanted Singapore to have, then Singaporeans got to strive for it on our own in whatever way we know how to stay sane to keep us balance in this constrain environment. Or the other choice is to wait for a better government who is willing to listen to us wholeheartedly and make arts part of living for the people.

“Success is equated with achieving paper qualifications and not striving to be a good human being.”- Maybe we must change this belief too in Remaking Singapore. If Singapore is to succeed to be a great nation and be the brain and soul of the world, the government must treat every Singaporeans, including the young ones as equal partners if not at least as partners in nation building. Instead of having a narrow mindset that those who disagreed with the government’s policy as enemy, the PAP government should have more faith in the people because Singapore belongs to all Singaporeans; we are responsible citizens just like the PAP government. What made them think that we are untrustworthy, incompetence, unreliable and irresponsible citizens? The government must not fear the people, instead should be patient and listen even to the ordinary people more often, why? People like us are prepared to sacrifice for a higher ideal and most importantly we dare to speak with true honesty. We are down to earth and very connected to our soul thus in touch with nature and reality. We do not have any hidden agenda except working tirelessly for the good of Singapore and its people welfares, thus we know what we got to do to make Singapore proud of us. On the
contrary the elitists are the one that have stagnant Singapore growth by not coming forward to voice out their disagreement for fear of reprisal. (*They are too comfortable in their ‘Ivory Tower’ that changes on the ground will not be beneficial for them.*)

To my great surprise I discovered that under great stress and pressure I could be the best performer as I became very much alive or energize. I guessed it must be the challenge instinct that is in my blood or due to my strong genes from my mother side. (*It will be so great if we could be accepted for what we are and who we are then my struggle would be much easier?*) What I discovered through this amazing journey was that the more the people took advantage of me the greater will be my achievement because my pride took over and I always love a good challenge especially intellectually. For example they said that I was crazy to want buildings to talk to one another, so I showed them how to bring out all these aspirations in architectural form. My ex-husband said that the building industry is very ‘dirty’ and I challenge myself to win projects through my wits and intellect and that was how I had won the UOB Plaza project on behalf of Permasteelisa. My parents, teachers and the intellectuals told me that ‘Peace is Not Possible’ I set out to prove them wrong. (*I think this one is a tall order for me to achieve nevertheless I must not give up as God will show me the way as usual.*)

The saddest part of this whole episode was that along the journey I had lost all my family and friends because they cannot understand why I still needed to support this ‘arrogant government’ by giving ideas and along the way spend so much money to bring out all these vision. Everyone who knew me said that I was intelligent and they wanted me either to further my study or go into business to make something out for myself and both I rejected because I wanted my succeed through my belief and passion and thus everyone around me will feel God’s presence that has been the guiding force to help me in my path of success.

What intrigued me most in my lifelong journey was the discovery of my creative talents that was forced out by my burning desire to find solution to the problems and the need to change society mindset. I am very upset when I hear intellectuals complaining and be little the government behind their back. Mr. Lee Kuan Yew had sacrificed the entire nation at the expanse of the people at large just for the few percentage of elitists to rise up to take Singapore to greater heights, the least they could do is to give back by supporting and assisting the government in whatever way to build a better Singapore for the future generation. But what have they done so far besides advising people like me not to be naïve that the government will listen to small people like us?

I told the personal from SMU that many people called me crazy for trying to propose that SMU should be an Arts University by creating a faculty for the Performing arts and I asked her was it all right for an individual like me to donate a sculpture to SMU, what will the people say? Instead she said, “Let others think and say what they like, as long as you don’t think that you are crazy that’s important.” So with her blessing and assurance I bought the ‘Flying Golden Deer’ from Bro Jo and donated to SMU. (*Bro Jo almost changed his mind to sell it to me and his secretary convinced him to do so as his*
spirit will bless SMU through the deer.) I am not a pragmatic but a true idealist, therefore I believed by donating the sculpture to SMU, Bro Jo’s spirit and my spirit will ensure that SMU will one day walk the path of art education, for example a faculty for the performing arts (Ha!ha! I have put the spirit of magic on SMU already.) I hope in the very near future the "Flying Golden Deer" will keep an eye on our behalf that SMU will move in the right direction to develop the souls and not just the brains of the graduates. We need to strike a balance to create a kinder and compassionate Singapore.

I have great hope for Singapore! If we all keep our mouth shut, then we grow old and frustrated. I strongly believe the success of Singapore is for everyone especially the intellectual ones to come forward to contribute in whatever way they can to make Singapore a better society, not only for us but the future generation as well. The government must not remain half-blind, instead they must have the confidence to open up politically, if not they will never know how great Singapore and Singaporeans could be?

As a Singaporean what is important for me is that at the end of the day or end of my life I must be a good example for my children to follow and if I could be for the others it would be great? As long as they know that I did my best to make the difference and along the way if I did touched some souls, thus encouraged them not to give up in Singapore that is good enough for me? This I equated as my sincere contributions to my country.