

# LET'S CHAT

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TWARDZIK CHING CHOR LENG

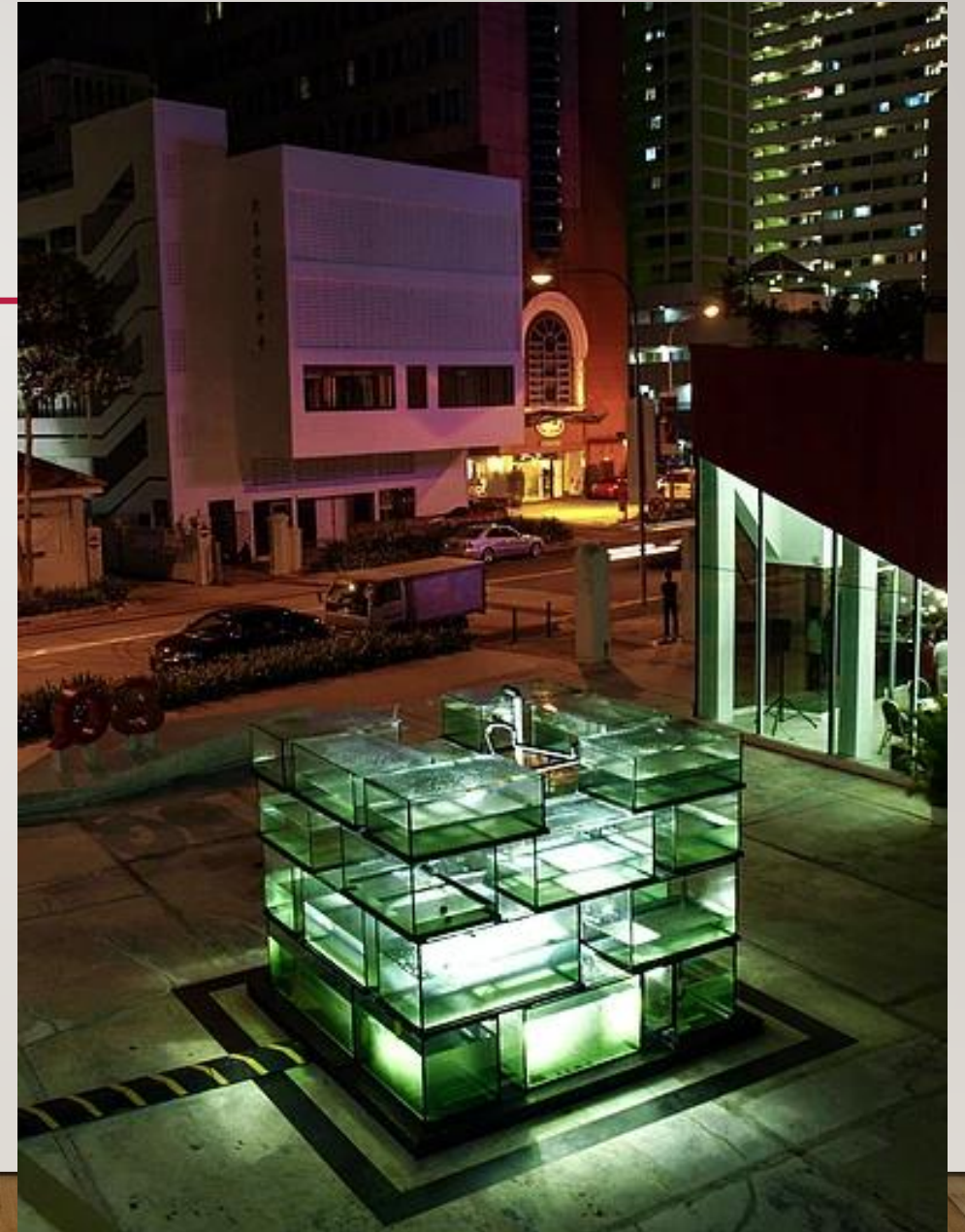


# INTRODUCTION

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Presentation on discourses student teachers had while attending Let's Chat, a performance by Amanda Heng

- change in Singapore happens at a rapid pace
- difficult for teachers to keep up
- Primary Art Syllabus 2018 includes 5 local artists
- PD courses need to address these issues



# BACKGROUND: PROFILE OF STUDENT TEACHERS

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- Generalist primary school teachers attending a 4 month long Advanced Diploma in Primary Art Education (ADPAE) course to become specialist art teachers.
- Most of them have no art background but have been tasked to teach art.
- This ADPAE course aims to upgrade their content and pedagogical knowledge in art.
- As such, their exposure to Contemporary Art is limited.





# BACKGROUND: AMANDA HENG (B. 1951)

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- pioneer of Contemporary Art in Singapore
- feminist issues, cultural identity
- performance art banned in Singapore (1994-2004)
- During the ban, Heng performed Let's Walk (1999)
- awarded the Cultural Medallion in 2010
- clear indication of the cultural transformation that Singapore is undergoing



# BACKGROUND: LET'S WALK, 1999

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- example of the kind of performance work unique to Singapore

**Amanda:** At that point of time, I was asked not to do performance in my studio space, so I was not allowed to do. So I was telling myself, ok, if I can't, I can't do my performance in the studio, then let's do it outside. So I put a chain, you know, on the stool and then bring it out. Put roller and then bring it out to the street.





# LET'S CHAT, 2017

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# HOUSEWORK AS ARTWORK

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- Ortner (1974) - perception of women's work in the domestic arena as lower-level work
- Southeast Asian context such perception is still prevalent
- Let's Chat 'raises' the status of food preparation to that of artwork which resulted in discourses on art, life and gender politics
- Artist Suzanne Lacy - the goal of Feminist art was to influence cultural attitudes and transform stereotypes
- Feminist Theory - examine the recorded conversations during and after the performance
- conversations capture diverse opinions
- a site for embracing and sustaining cultural transformation.



# EXCERPTS OF CONVERSATIONS DURING THE PERFORMANCE

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# HOUSEWORK NOT FOR THE PRIVILEGED

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**Amanda:** So do you guys have to work... to do like this at home?

**All:** Yes.

**Mrs A:** When we were younger.

**Amanda:** When you were younger, so your grandma...

**Mrs A:** It brings back memory because my grandma looked after me. Yeah, so I will miss her doing this.

**Ms G:** My grandma too.

**Mrs A:** While doing this I'm thinking of her.

**MS G:** But I'm forced not to do it. Like I used to help my maid right, then she will scold me. 'Go and study!'

**Mrs A:** You will break the whole thing up.

**Ms G:** No, she just doesn't like me to do housework.

**Amanda:** Okay, you are very privileged one, yeah?

**Leng:** Yes, that's right.



# EXCERPTS OF IN-CLASS DISCUSSION AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

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## IS PLUCKING BEANSPROUTS AND DOING HOUSEWORK WORTH HIGHLIGHTING?

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**Mrs M:** I didn't know performance is such a manner...because initially we said performance so I thought it was stage or somewhere on the ground. There's a boundary but... and then it's actually we are inside it. Yeah, I didn't... it was... it just opens up my perception about... yeah, performance. Yeah.

**Mr S:** I think before that we were talking about the Tiger Whip was one of the guy who did right? It's like...

**Leng:** Da Wu.

**Mr S:** So dramatical but... because hers is really simple everyday life and it's still very effective.





# HIGHLIGHTING MALE VIRILITY IN A DRAMATIC MANOR

## TANG DA WU, TIGER'S WHIP, 1993

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# FEMALE PARTICIPANTS: QUESTIONED VALIDITY OF THE WORK...TOO MUNDANE TO BE ART

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**Mrs S:** I thought that the essence a bit lost after being for very long. Because you already understand the whole experience, but after that the next question is, so what else to it? So I felt, as an audience, okay, I'm done, I want to move on. I don't know whether the rest have the same perception but I felt that, okay, **what's next, can we see?** Can Amanda Heng like talk more about other works apart from that experience itself. Yeah. So I thought, yeah, there was an impact, but **the impact couldn't be sustained for me, personally.** So that's my take.

**Mdm I:** Actually it's the same for me as well. Sorry. Yeah, because I guess **the world is fast paced.** So to sit there, you know is a... and I start thinking like... **what other mundane things that I can have or create that and call myself an artist,** to do such things. Like an old man playing chess, is that considered, you know, a work of art in the void deck? So I start thinking about all the common activities lah...





## MALE PARTICIPANT: RECOGNIZED OBJECTIVE OF THE WORK AS A PLATFORM FOR OPEN DISCUSSION

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**Mr R:** No, I thought that, uhm... I don't know, my point of view I thought it was relatable to the current time. Because for me it's establishing a link with the audience what you're doing, so... I mean it brings me back to a time when... I pluck dao gei and it creates conversation. I guess that's the... the topic, let's chat. But something that we take for granted and in the current society, I mean...kids gathering around the table, they are so preoccupied with the iPads they forget how to talk. You know, so... I mean it... I think draws links to... current time, the time that we are in. Uhm... in a sense, it's something maybe we take for granted, you know. **I didn't like... plucking dao gei, I think it's a waste of time but now... I mean I see it as a chance to have a discussion, to communicate.** But like right now, in modern time, we... there's so little time for all these.





# MALE PARTICIPANT: USING NEW FOUND KNOWLEDGE FOR NEXT ARTWORK

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Mr A: The other thing also is... is... kind of asking myself could I create something like that? Like... what... what entails a performance piece? What will I do? And what medium will I use? And how I do want to engage my audience? Yeah. To me now it's near impossible because I haven't thought of something to answer that question. Yeah.



# FEMALE PARTICIPANTS: EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

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Mdm A: For me it's more like an **emotional kind of connection** when I was there experiencing the act of... you know, dao gei thingy. Because it reminds... **it reminded me of what my late mum** used to tell me to do before she...yeah, so mine is more of that emotional connection more than anything else and I... right now when I'm saying it, I'm also in touch. (starts tearing)



Mrs A: To me, it never happen to me also until I was... **I got emotional I almost cried.**

Mrs M: Same.

Mrs A: Because **I thought of my grandma.** Yeah.



# HOW IS ALL THIS RELEVANT?

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Headline: Men face dirty truth  
Source: *The Sunday Times*, Lifestyle, p6 & 7  
Date: 6 June 2010

## Men face dirty truth

**The fact is, real men can do chores. Research shows those who clean and cook at home enjoy better sex lives and are less likely to divorce**

Sandra Leong and Nicholas Yong

**I**t started with a letter to *The Straits Times* Forum page, addressing the problem of Singapore's flag-

households where both partners work.

"In contemporary households, the stress is on women," she says. "They have the 'double shift' and are expected to take on multiple responsibilities. The stress sometimes becomes too much."

When a blissful couple pledge at the altar till death do they part, who does the dishes and changes diapers is the furthest thing from their minds. Yet, for many marriages, it can be a deal breaker.

In her study, titled *Marriage Dissolution in Singapore*, Associate Professor Straughan also found that an unequal distribution of housework could expose

### Who does the housework?

Housework is still considered the responsibility of the woman, according to a recent study by sociologist Paulin Tay Straughan on marriage dissolution here.

The survey divided men and women's participation in 19 domestic chores into three categories – childcare, homecare and supervision and eldercare.

Women reported that they carried out an average of 8.8 of these 19 tasks, compared to an average of 2.7 for men. Men took the lead in only three tasks: household repairs, washing the car and paying the bills.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

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# MORE TIME IS NEEDED TO TRAIN SPECIALIST ART TEACHERS

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- The Art curriculum - offers opportunities for implicit and explicit teaching of values, affective competencies and 21st century skills...If students are exposed to artworks that respond to social, economic, political, philosophical, environmental or cultural issues of today, they have the opportunity to learn beyond just art content. (PAM research report, 2016, p.46-47)
- In the art world, contemporary artists...can respond to their personal histories, physical environment as well as social and cultural issues...Contemporary art-making is often an “open-ended process of investigation, speculation, imagination and experimentation” (Exploratorium, 2013), and this serves as a viable way to learn about other subjects. (STAR, 2016, p.62)

# DISCUSSION ON FEMINIST ART AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Housework  
Project  
(2003)





# JUDY CHICAGO THE DINNER PARTY, 1979

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# POWER TO CHANGE THE WORLD

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- each individual have the power to change to world by what they do everyday
- e.g. routine of cleaning up in the art regardless of gender
- relate ideas to ones' own life
- not some big theoretical ideas from a foreign culture, these issues affect individuals on a personal level
- recognize that certain cultural 'norms' that are 'standard practice' may be unjust
- work towards eradicating injustices

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# THANK YOU

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# AMANDA ON 'LET'S CHAT'



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**Amanda:** This...this form of art of course is very different from using materials, the traditional forms of a sculpture. Yeah. With this work, it's actually... the dao gei (beansprouts) and all these is just the material. The dao gei, the set-up, the table and all that, is the material. My interest is not on the material, my interest is a platform to encourage engagement, to encourage conversation. That's why this is called Let's Chat. Yeah. So... the difference between this kind of work and the more traditional sculpture is that... the traditional work offers you something in the physical form. Yeah, so the object is there or the sculpture is there. These works offer you an experience. So you'll experience for yourself and then, you know, you think about that. Yeah, so the conversation that you share, perhaps with some stranger, could be something quite meaningful. Yeah, but of course not always the... not always meaningful. Sometimes some people just sit down, oh... I come here because I have to do a report. You know, lecturer's... order, you know, that kind of thing. Yeah. So it all depends. Yeah. And I like the fact that... I like the fact that... it is just a platform but anything can happen. So... whether it is a very brief greeting or a deeper, vigorous discussions and all that, they are all contribution to this work. So you'll notice that actually if I have no audience participating in this, this work fails. So... the audience participation actually complete the work. Yeah.