

ARTS

# Singapore Art Week 2025: Can Singapore be a global art capital?

The city has achieved its goal of becoming the hub of South-east Asia's market, but ambitions beyond that prove tricky



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Presented by UBS, the premier art fair Art SG featured 105 galleries from 30 countries. PHOTO: ART SG

SINGAPORE Art Week (SAW) 2025 marks key milestones in the Republic's journey as a regional art hub: Sotheby's shattered records for South-east Asian artists in its latest auction, boutique fair SEA Focus keeps growing in strength and acclaim, and the Singapore Art Museum continues its role as a platform for regional talent. With these wins, the country's status as the centre of South-east Asia's art market is undeniable.

However, its ambition to rival global capitals such as Hong Kong, New York and London remains elusive, hampered by structural and market challenges that look unlikely to be resolved in the near future.



When Sotheby's concluded its Modern and Contemporary Art auction – held for the first time during SAW – it broke records for artists such as Singapore's Kim Lim and Indonesia's IGAK Murniasih (aka Murni) and Christine Ay Tjoe. Ay Tjoe led the way by fetching an impressive S\$2.9 million for her canvas. Works by Singapore's Chen Wen Hsi, Indonesia's Raden Saleh and Vietnam's Le Pho also shone by surpassing presale estimates.



Christine Ay Tjoe's 'Lights for the Layer' achieved a record-breaking S\$2.9 million at the Sotheby's auction in Singapore.  
PHOTO: SOTHEBY'S

But not everything glittered. The auction's star attraction, Marc Chagall's 1975 painting *La Danse Autour De La Corbeille* (starting at S\$1.35 million), failed to sell, as did a striking 3 m-by-3 m canvas by American star Mark Bradford, starting from S\$2.7 million. The auction's sell-through rate was about 80 per cent, suggesting buyer caution for higher-priced international pieces.

Meanwhile, SEA Focus, the boutique fair championing South-east Asian artists, delivered one of its finest editions yet. Curated by John Tung, the fair featured many standout works, including Natee Utarit's hilarious post-colonial paintings of a bespectacled Asian woman causing chaos in Western historical settings, as well as a thoughtful pairing of Sinta Tantra's abstract pieces with the late Murni's sublime creations.

Visitors were impressed – and said so on social media. During a panel discussion at Prestige Art Gallery, Chong Huai Seng, co-founder of the art space The Culture Story, took a moment to praise SEA Focus for its impact. He said: “SEA Focus should really look to doubling their capacity next year or in future years, because it has a lot of very interesting artists from the region showing their works there. And the cost of renting a space at SEA Focus is much cheaper (than that of major fairs), making it very attractive for exhibitors.”