

【Press release】

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Benesse Holdings, Inc.
Representative Director and President CEO
Tamotsu Adachi

The 12th the Benesse Prize Awarded to Singapore Biennale 2019 Artist Amanda Heng

The 12th Benesse Prize was awarded to Ms. Amanda Heng of Singapore by Benesse Holdings, Inc. (“Benesse”: Headquartered in Okayama City, Okayama Prefecture, Japan; Representative Director and President, CEO: Tamotsu Adachi) and the Singapore Art Museum (SAM). The award ceremony was held at the National Gallery Singapore on January 11th, 2020.



The 12th Benesse Prize was presented in collaboration with SAM, the organizer of Singapore Biennale 2019 and was open to all artists participating in the Biennale. The following five shortlisted artists were selected by an international jury and announced at the SB2019 media conference in November 2019: Amanda Heng (Singapore), Dusadee Huntrakul (Thailand), Haifa Subay (Yemen), Hera Büyüктаşçıyan (Turkey), and Robert Zhao Renhui (Singapore). The final selection took place at Benesse Art Site Naoshima, where the winner was selected from the shortlist.

The prize is awarded to an outstanding artist chosen from the artists participating in the Biennale. The prize recognizes an artist whose work embodies an experimental and critical spirit, beyond conventional practice, and who demonstrates the potential of developing an artistic reflection around the theme of “Benesse” (Well-Being).

Ms. Heng will be commissioned to either create a work to be exhibited at Benesse Art Site Naoshima, Japan, or have her artwork become part of its collection in the future, in addition to receiving a cash prize of JPY 3,000,000 (including a visit to Benesse Art Site Naoshima) from Benesse.

Comments by Jury Members

Commenting on Ms Heng’s nomination, Ms. Akiko Miki, International Artistic Director of Benesse Art Site Naoshima, said *“From the very start, Ms. Heng has been an artist who has focused her art on the relationships between people, stimulating dialogue within local communities. Her performance series of ‘walking’ is fascinating. The simple, very human act of walking, was transformed into art in a straightforward way, reshaping the ordinary into an artistic rendition encompassing an Eastern worldview.”*

“Throughout her career, she has focused her gaze on others as well as her inner-self to create art that addresses particular social issues, as well as themes common to all humanity, such as aging. We anticipate that at Benesse Art Site Naoshima, she will have the opportunity to create her art, while deeply considering local or even global topics, inspired by the site’s rich natural surroundings and her interactions with the local people there.”

About the 12th Benesse Prize Winner: Amanda Heng

Amanda Heng (b. 1951, Singapore) received a printmaking diploma from the LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore and a BA from the University of the Arts London. Heng was conferred the prestigious Cultural Medallion for Visual Arts in 2010 and has exhibited widely. Selected exhibitions include: 'Ties of History: Art in Southeast Asia' at Vargas Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Manila, and Yuchengco Museum (Manila, the Philippines, 2018), and a retrospective, 'Speak To Me, Walk With Me' at Singapore Art Museum (2012). Heng's 'Let's Walk' series was also chosen as a conceptual anchor for the 14th edition of the Singapore Fringe Festival in 2018. She lives and works in Singapore.

Every Step Counts (2019)

Multi-disciplinary project: workshop, text work in public space, archival footage, video projection and live performance
Dimensions variable, Collection of the Artist, Singapore Biennale 2019 commission



Amanda Heng, Every Step Counts (workshop documentation), image courtesy of the Artist and Denise Yap



Amanda Heng, Every Step Counts, 2019 (along Bras Basah road), image courtesy of Singapore Art Museum

Amanda Heng invites participation and intimate conversations in her performative works. Often, she harnesses everyday situations to explore issues like the complexities of labor or the politics of gender. For her project at this Biennale, Heng revisits her 'Let's Walk' series, first performed in 1999. Drawing upon the act of walking, the artist moves forward, looks back, turns inward and ventures outward with others. In this piece, she returns to the seminal scene of the walk and facilitates a workshop with people who chart their own routes of walking, and with whom she walks. In so doing, she generates reflections and perspectives, as well as comes to terms with the limits and stamina of the aging body.

About the 12th Benesse Prize International Jury and Final Selection

The members of the 12th Benesse Prize jury jointly appointed by Benesse and SAM are: Ade Darmawan (Artist and member of ruangrupa /Indonesia), Eugene Tan (Director of SAM and National Gallery Singapore /Singapore), Gong Yan (Director of Power Station of Art China), Valentine Willie (Director of Ilham Gallery /Malaysia), and Akiko Miki (International Artistic Director of Benesse Art Site Naoshima /Japan). The final selection took place at Benesse Art Site Naoshima.

About the History of Benesse Prize

The Benesse Prize was established in 1995 when Fukutake Publishing Co., Ltd. changed its corporate name to Benesse Corporation, and it was first awarded at the Venice Biennale in the same year. It was created to recognize the artistic endeavors of outstanding artists and support those who embody the corporate philosophy of the Benesse Group, which is "Well-Being." Since 2016, the Benesse Prize has been the official award of the Singapore Biennale, presented in collaboration with the Singapore Art Museum.

Past Benesse Prize Winners

1st Benesse Prize (1995): Cai Guo-Qiang (China)

2nd Benesse Prize (1997): Alexandros Psychoulis (Greece)

3rd Benesse Prize (1999): Olafur Eliasson (Iceland, Denmark)

4th Benesse Prize (2001): Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller (Canada)

5th Benesse Prize (2003): Rirkrit Tiravanija (Thailand)

6th Benesse Prize (2005): Tacita Dean (UK)

7th Benesse Prize (2007): Adel Abdessemed (Algeria, France)

8th Benesse Prize (2009): Hans-Peter Feldmann (Germany)

9th Benesse Prize (2011): Adrian Villar Rojas (Argentine)

10th Benesse Prize (2013): Anri Sala (Albania, France)

11th Benesse Prize (2016): Pannaphan Yodmanee (Thailand), Soichiro Fukutake Prize: Zulkifl Mahmod (Singapore)

* The 1st through 10th Benesse Prizes were hosted by the Venice Biennale. (The 2nd Benesse Prize was hosted collaboratively.)

* Since the 11th Benesse Prize (2016), Benesse Prize has been hosted by the Singapore Biennale. (in collaboration with SAM.)

About Benesse Art Site Naoshima

Benesse Art Site Naoshima is the collective name for all art-related activities conducted by Benesse Holdings, Inc. and Fukutake Foundation on the islands of Naoshima and Teshima in Kagawa Prefecture and on Inujima island in Okayama Prefecture. Our fundamental aim is to create significant spaces by bringing contemporary art and architecture in resonance with the pristine nature of the Seto Inland Sea, a landscape with a rich cultural and historical fabric. Through contacts with art and nature, sceneries and inhabitants of the Seto Inland Sea region, we seek to inspire visitors to reflect on the meaning of Benesse's motto, Well-Being. In all our ongoing activities, we are committed to foster a relationship of mutual growth between art and the region, aiming to make a positive contribution to the local communities. To learn more, visit <http://www.benesse-artsite.jp/en/>

About Benesse Holdings, Inc.

Guided by the corporate philosophy, "Benesse = Well-Being", the Benesse Group conducts business in the fields of education, language/global leadership training, lifestyles, and senior/nursing care, helping every customer to nurture their desire to learn and to solve problems throughout their lives. Group companies include Benesse Corporation which runs Shinkenzeni: correspondence courses for children from preschool to high-school ages, Shinken Simulated Exams and student pocketbooks; Benesse Style Care

Co., Ltd., Japan's leading operator of senior and nursing homes; and Berlitz, the world's largest language school. Benesse Holdings,

Inc. has been working on community development utilizing art for more than 30 years at Benesse Art Site Naoshima, together with Fukutake Foundation. Benesse Art Site Naoshima and the Benesse Prize are activities consistent with the Benesse Group's sustainability vision and they will contribute to create a sustainable future.

To learn more, visit <https://www.benesse-hd.co.jp/en/>

About the Singapore Biennale

The Singapore Biennale was established in 2006 as the country's pre-eminent platform for international dialogue in contemporary art. It presents and reflects the vigour of artistic practices in Singapore and the region within a global context, and fosters productive collaborations and deep engagement with artists, arts organisations, and the international arts community.

The Singapore Biennale cultivates public engagement with contemporary art through a four-month exhibition, and its accompanying public engagement and education programmes that include artist and curator talks and tours, school visits and workshops, and community days. It complements achievements in other areas of arts and culture, collectively enhancing Singapore's international profile as a vibrant city in which to live, work and play. The 2006 and 2008 editions of the Biennale were organised by the National Arts Council. The NAC commissioned the Singapore Art Museum to organise the 2011, 2013, 2016, and 2019 editions.

About the Singapore Art Museum

Singapore Art Museum is a contemporary art museum which focuses on art-making and art-thinking in Singapore, Southeast Asia and Asia, encompassing a worldwide perspective on contemporary art practice. SAM advocates and makes accessible interdisciplinary contemporary art through research-led and evolving curatorial practice. Since it opened in January 1996, SAM has built up one of the most important collections of contemporary art from the region. It seeks to seed and nourish a stimulating and creative space in Singapore through exhibitions and public programmes, and to deepen every visitor's experience. These include outreach and education, research and publications, as well as cross-disciplinary residencies and exchanges.

SAM occupies two buildings: the old St Joseph's Institution on Bras Basah Road, built in 1855 and now a National Monument; and SAM at 8Q, a conservation building across the road on Queen Street that was the old Catholic High School. The museum buildings are currently closed for a major building revamp, with museum programming continuing at partner venues until the buildings re-open.

SAM is the organiser of the Singapore Biennale in 2011, 2013, 2016 and 2019. SAM was incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee on 13 November 2013, operating under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. To find out more, visit www.singaporeartmuseum.sg

[For more information regarding to publishing or press]

Benesse Art Site Naoshima

Press office: Stenlund, Hiraiwa

+81-87-892-2887

BASN-press@mail.benesse.co.jp

[For other information]

Benesse Holdings, Inc.

PR office: Miyamoto, Hagiwara, Saito

+81-42-357-3658