

Mapping the Multidisciplinary: the inaugural Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur – round-up

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Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur (GWKL™) was held from 25 to 27 November 2016.

GWKL™ provided audiences with a unique insight into the Malaysian art scene, with a rich programme of exhibitions, events and talks around town.



National Visual Arts Gallery, Malaysia, as part of Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur, 2016. Image courtesy GWKL.

Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur (GWKL™) is envisioned as an annual event, much in the same guise as other Gallery Weekends taking place around the world, such as in Berlin, Brussels, Paris, Barcelona, Mexico City and Istanbul. With its inaugural edition launched in November 2016, GWKL™ will return in 2017 from 8 to 11 December.

GWKL™ was founded by Shalini Ganendra, a veteran in the local art scene and founder of her own independent art space focusing on her vision of cross-cultural engagement. The Gallery Weekend was established on the same basic principles of engaging the wider community with art, as well as multidisciplinary projects.



Hanif Kara's lecture 'Design Engineering: A third culture?' at the Islamic Arts Museum, Malaysia, as part of Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur, 2016. Image courtesy GWKL.

In an interview with *Randian*, Ganendra **explained that the idea of creating the Gallery Weekend came by**

Wanting to create an impactful voice for Malaysian art practice initially—the idea of a Gallery Weekend came up through discussions with art colleagues in London. The platform really lends itself to fostering local community encounter, cultural tourism, and capacity-building for a variety of cultural stakeholders. Gallery Weekend–Kuala Lumpur should also develop a credible and positive business impact for galleries.

Entitled "Mapping the Multidisciplinary", the inaugural GWKL™ presented a unique programme tailored specifically to the cultural and urban terrain of Kuala Lumpur and the geopolitics of Malaysia.



Islamic Arts Museum, Malaysia, as part of Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur, 2016. Image courtesy GWKL.

Exhibitions comprised exclusively Malaysian and Southeast Asian artists, both established and emerging voices. There were five institutions involved, such as Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, National Visual Arts Gallery and the National Textile Museum, among others, and 11 participating galleries, selected for their outstanding practice and output over the last five years. Among the participants were Richard Koh Fine Art, HOM Art Trans, Galeri Chandan, Shalini Ganendra Fine Art and Gallery Taksu.

Artemis Art presented an exhibition entitled **"Presence"**, with the work of ten Malaysian artists, including Jasmine Kok and Dennis Liew. Talking to *The Art Newspaper*, **Jamal Al-Idrus of Artemis Art said of the Gallery Weekend:**

We believe that this sort of exposure is important for Malaysian art to be recognised as an important component of the burgeoning south-east Asia art scene. [...] Certainly one of our expectations is to be able to meet new collectors, particularly those attending Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur from abroad.

Galeri Chandan, who presented **"Matter at Hand"** with drawings by Malaysian artist Mohd Fuad Arif, told *Art Radar* about the inaugural event:

As it is an inaugural edition, we can say it is a good exposure for the private galleries to work together to make this happen. It is a first time that all of us gathered and discussed in detail regarding the programmes. It is well done and scheduled but it will be better by experience and

practising. So far no sales from our current exhibition but we received new and foreign visitors; it must be from the promotion of GWKL in the media.

Continuing on the importance of such a gallery weekend in Kuala Lumpur, Sahrifah Maria of Galeri Chandan said:

This event can bring us all together to promote the Malaysian art industry to the society and sooner to an international level, at the same time expanding the network and relationships between the galleries, art enthusiast, society, government and foreigners. It's definitely a good programme that we should polish and review for a better programming in the future. Malaysian art is a small industry, we have to work together to be visible by others, especially to the local [communities], to create an awareness in appreciating art in every context – art visual, performance, music, fashion, architecture, etc.



"Carbon Copy" on view at G13 Gallery, as part of Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur, 2016. Image courtesy GWKL.

G13 featured the preview of **"Carbon Copy"**, with works by six printmakers from Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia. Richard Koh Fine Art held **"Malaysian Art, A Special Preview"** with works in various media by seven young Malaysian artists. Shalini Ganendra Fine Art launched **"Look to See"**, with the work of two established Malaysian artists, Bibi Chew and Zac Lee, and a newcomer, Mok Yee.

Speaking to *Art Radar*, Kenny Teng of G13 commented:

A programme like GWKL was a good first time experience for us. Overall, the programme was properly managed. One of the aims of the programme of bringing more people to art spaces and galleries was successfully achieved. We spotted quite a number of new faces stopping by our

gallery during the programme. We recorded a fair share of both local and foreign visitors. Some are relatively new and potential clients and some are art dealers who have never been to our premise before.

The importance of a programme such as GWKL is highly appreciated since the only time for galleries to be on the same platform is during a local art fair. In short, this programme kind of brings people (especially in the art industry) together. One of the advantages of GWKL is every gallery has the advantage to perform their best in respective turfs of their own. It also gives new visitors [the opportunity] to be involved in a physical gallery rather than peeking in from outside or via online inquiry. When it comes to the topic of benefits, one can never measure from the monetary perspective per se. Honestly, it is a win-win situation to all. We are looking forward to the next installment of GWKL.



Christopher Phillips' lecture 'Unbounded Arts' at the National Visual Arts Gallery Auditorium, Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur, 2016. Image courtesy GWKL.

Part of the programme was the Luminary Pulse Series of talks, endorsed by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, which featured discussions on cross-disciplinary work in the arts, architecture and culture sectors by luminaries including Hanif Kara (Founding Director AKT II, United Kingdom, and Professor at Harvard's Graduate School of Design) and Christopher Phillips (contemporary curator, International Center of Photography, New York). Phillips commented on the event, as quoted by GWKL™:

The inaugural Gallery Weekend KL provided visitors like myself with fast-track access to the city's rapidly growing art scene. Well-organized and including a wide range of events, it offered many opportunities for in-depth conversation with local artists, gallerists, collectors, curators, and museum directors. Gallery Weekend KL opened my eyes to the unexpected riches of KL's artistic culture.



Leeza Ahmady, Shalini Ganendra and Christopher Phillips at Marini's on 57 for the launch of Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur, 2016. Image courtesy GWKL.

In a conversation with *Artnet News*, Founder Shalini Ganendra, preceding the weekend, said that GWKL™ was a celebration of **"the diversity of contemporary culture and the lineage from where it originates and to which it refers"** and was a direct response to the development of the art scene in recent years, with the opening of an increased number of galleries as well as auction houses fuelling the financial side of the art scene.

Championing culture is at the core of Ganendra's idea for the Gallery Weekend, bringing more attention to the art and culture scene of the city and allow for new explorations. Quoted in the press release, Ganendra commented on the first edition of the event:

This year's inaugural GWKL is the gold nugget that will start the gold rush, providing a platform for meaningful exploration and discovery of a new region, Malaysia, with its contrasts, compliments, controversies and distinctiveness.



“Look to See” at Shalini Ganendra Fine Art
as part of Gallery Weekend Kuala Lumpur, 2016. Image courtesy GWKL.

In a statement to *Art Radar*, Ganendra expanded:

With varied content, free programming and strong information flow, we achieved a goal of attendance by mass audience and specialist alike (as reflected in the attendance), in addition to developing vital connections between cultural stakeholders. As a measure of success, there are more galleries/ projects interested to join the GWKL 2017 and participating institutions will also increase. The GWKL Luminary Pulse program will continue. Bespoke tours, dining and stay will continue as important components with our quality partners. We would certainly like to see government support and more corporate support for the 2017 edition.

As an inclusive aesthetic platform, based on quality delivery, we see the GWKL growing to be a distinctive, international art marquee, presenting a varied palette of quality contemporary and heritage aesthetic disciplines. GWKL is at once a platform for discovery, development and distinctiveness – and for engagement by global and local of a Malaysia as a dynamic (and controversial) Emerging Region and a bridge to Southeast Asia!

C. A. Xuan Mai Ardia