

Singapore Biennale: Rainbow Circle by Suzann Victor

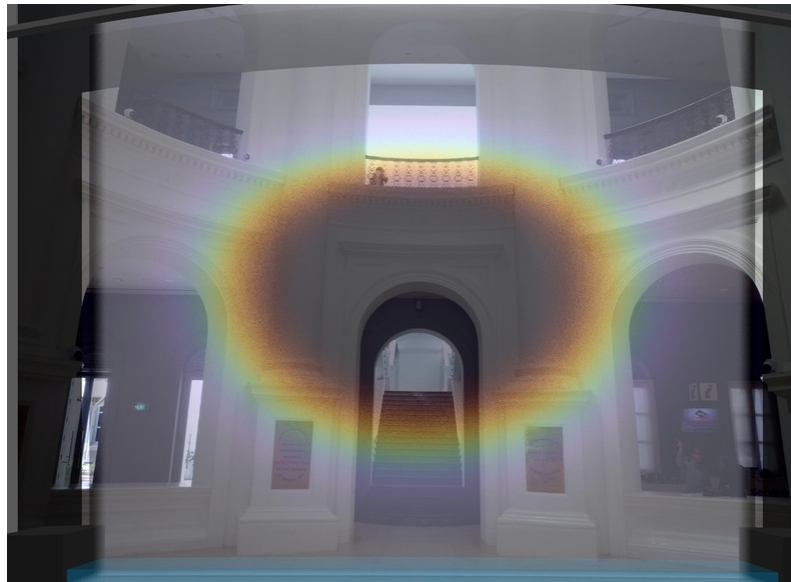
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Best known for her conceptually sophisticated and visually striking installations, Suzann Victor is regarded as one of Singapore's leading contemporary artists. The Singapore-born, Sydney-based artist will present *Rainbow Circle 2013*, a site and context specific work at the National Museum of Singapore's rotunda, commissioned for the 2013 Singapore Biennale, which will run from 26 October 2013 to 16 February 2014.

Rainbow Circle 2013 is an objectless art which induces a natural outdoor phenomenon to appear within an enclosed space. A convergence of art and science, natural elements such as sunlight and water droplets are used in this technically complex work in conjunction with a heliostat, a mirrored device that tracks the sun's movement and optics to manifest a full circular rainbow spanning 8 meters in diameter.

In response to the theme of this year's Biennale, "If the World Changed", Victor's installation draws attention to the fragility and beauty of the natural environment. The work engages viewers to reflect on the wider discourse on the environmental sustainability by encouraging them to imagine a future where a rainbow could become so rare that it can only be seen as a precious relic housed inside a museum.



Suzann Victor, *Rainbow Circle: Capturing a Natural Phenomenon*, 2013, mixed media installation: sunlight, water droplets and modified heliostat, dimensions variable, project engineer: David Marsh, artist collection. Singapore Biennale 2013 commission. Co-commissioned with National Museum of Singapore as part of its Art-On-Site series. Image Courtesy of The Artist.

A graduate of LASALLE College of the Arts, Victor started out her career as a painter and went on to become the Artistic Director of the now defunct 5th Passage, an artist-run space in the early 1990s. In what is one of the darkest moments in the history of contemporary art in Singapore, the artist run space was closed down following a notable media controversy surrounding a 1994 performance art event held at 5th Passage's art space in which local artist Josef Ng snipped off his pubic hair – an event which led to the government's decade-long ban on state funding for performance art.

In 1996, Victor left for Australia to complete a BA at the University of Western Sydney on a scholarship. A recipient of numerous research scholarships, Victor was awarded the prestigious New York-based Civitella Ranieri Foundation fellowship in 2009 following the completion of a doctorate on an Australian Postgraduate Award at the University of Western Sydney. She was also the Singapore Pavilion's first woman representative at the 49th Venice Biennale. Victor's ability to articulate complex ideas in striking forms has earned her international critical acclaim and her works have been widely shown on the international circuit.

Reflecting on how her experience in Australia has shaped her work as an artist, Victor said, "The great support from the institution and the government translates into approximately eight or nine years of immersion within the Australian tertiary environment and inbuilt within this journey, a learning curve that is both academic and cultural, in other worlds, in terms of how one can test ideas, re-frame politics of engagement, perception and experience – in short, the validity of peripheral vision."

"This is applicable within the immediate local context geographically, i.e. in Sydney and in the larger picture, i.e. from outside Singapore looking in. I see this process as an ongoing framing and re-framing of the concept of Self, identity, subjectivity and more importantly, inter-subjectivities to do with modes of apprehending, seeing, participating in a reading culture via signifying practices such as the visual arts and writing," she added.



Suzann Victor, *Rainbow Circle: Capturing a Natural Phenomenon*, 2013, mixed media installation: sunlight, water droplets and modified heliostat, dimensions variable, project engineer: David Marsh, artist collection. Singapore Biennale 2013 commission. Co-commissioned with National Museum of Singapore as part of its Art-On-Site series. Image Courtesy of The Artist.

Commenting on what she feels can be accomplished with installation art that cannot be achieved with painting, Victor said, "I believe that installations work at the sculpting of space to offer a more embodied experience for the seeing subject. By this, I refer to how one can construct an architecture within an architecture which expects, induces, invites, or 'embraces' the seeing subject in terms of his or her as an embodied being, i.e. with more than a pair of eyes."

"I qualify this as a comment that does not demean nor limit the experience of painting as a creative experience or painting as a visual experience. Painting can offer the sublime in its own way because at the baseline, we value the quality of the experience and not necessarily the mode of its deliver," she added.

Rainbow Circle 2013 will be the largest natural circular rainbow to manifest within a building. Symbolically, the rainbow is widely associated with luck and happiness, but its intangible and ephemeral quality also alludes to the very idea of pursuing dreams – the idiom of 'chasing rainbows'. Victor's work therefore considers a world where change and hope are entwined with inertia and indifference.

When asked about her hopes for the local art scene, Victor said, "I hope that the Singapore art scene will become more visionary."

The fourth edition of Singapore Biennale (SB 2013) will be held from 26 October 2013 to 16 February 2014. SB 2013 will take place across multiple art spaces in the Bras Basah-Bugis precinct.

TEXT BY YVONNE WANG