



Character Reference

Left: Outside the Ocean Financial Centre, *Singapore Soul* by Catalan sculptor Jaume Plensa pays tribute to the city-state's multicultural milieu in a figurative composition of letters and ideograms from Singapore's four official languages: English, Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil.

WELL SCULPTED

Can't wait for Singapore's hotly anticipated National Gallery to open in late November? Then consider exploring its public art installations instead—an impressive cast of international talent awaits. **BY KIM INGLIS**

With the pace of change accelerating in recent years, it can be hard to keep up with developments in Singapore. One noticeable difference has been the new commitment to art and artists; in addition to the soon-to-open National Gallery, a packed calendar of art fairs, and even some officially sanctioned works of graffiti, the city-state's streets and parks are now home to some spectacular sculptures.

A surprising number of these can be found in the central business district, some sponsored

by industry, others by the government. Take the recently built CapitaGreen tower, for example. Here, real estate giant CapitaLand has bequeathed some evocative works by international artists to enliven the glass-and-steel behemoth. At the entrance is Danish artist Olafur Eliasson's installation of 60 root-like steel columns and illuminated polyhedron spheres called *Above Below Beneath Above*, which gives way to a pair of Carrara marble figures by Antony Gormley and French artist Etienne's *La Rencontre*, a verdigris bronze depicting three men in conversation linked by a swirling torso; the bird flying through their middle represents freedom of expression. In a totally different vein, a stroll round the corner reveals an everyday group of 10 life-size figures by veteran Taiwanese sculptor Ju Ming. Part of his ongoing *Living World* series, the roughly cast forms range from a pair of pink-frocked ladies to lone businessmen with an umbrella.

Across the road at Finlayson Green, *Momentum*, a 44-ton, 18-meter-high Christmas tree-type sculpture by Israeli artist David Gerstein, stands as Singapore's tallest public sculpture, while nearby Raffles Place is home to works by Anish Kapoor, Aw Tee Hong, and Jaume Plensa, to name a few. More homegrown is the award-winning piece in stainless steel by Singaporean Tan Wee Lit. Titled *All the Essentially Essential*, it was originally designed as a site-specific work for East Coast Park and looks like an unassembled frame from a giant plastic-model kit, with parts that include a gym bag, bicycle wheels, cutlery, even a pet dog. The artist describes it as a "tongue-in-cheek take on the ever-efficient Singaporean packing for a day trip to the park," and viewers are welcome to step inside the frame to add a deliberately excluded human element to the composition.

The obvious place to head next is Boat Quay, where outside UOB Plaza Colombian figurative artist Fernando Botero's plump *Bird* has



Public Display

Above, from left: One of the 10 figures from Taiwanese artist Ju Ming's installation at the CapitaGreen tower; Olafur Eliasson's *Above Below Beneath Above* is a cluster of sinuous columns inspired by the aerial roots of trees.

delighted visitors since 1990. Here you will also find **Homage to Newton** by Salvador Dalí and one of the largest bronze sculptures ever created by Henry Moore, all donated by industry. More recent is a series of bronzes by pioneering Singaporean sculptor Chong Fah Cheong, dedicated to the early migrant people who lived and worked along the Singapore River. One of my favorites is **First Generation**, a group of boys seemingly jumping into the river in front of the Fullerton Hotel; their expressions of naive gusto provoke feelings of nostalgia for the past and a delight in the simple pleasures of childhood.

Singapore is rightfully proud of its "City in a Garden" status—surprisingly, about half of its 700 square kilometers of land is dedicated to green space—so there's plenty of sculptural eye candy to be found among the foliage as well. The Botanic Gardens, recently awarded UNESCO World Heritage status, is justly celebrated for its innovative approach to conservation and biodiversity. What is not so well known is its

commitment to public art. The latest addition to its 20-plus collection of sculptures is an expressive piece by James Surls called **Fifty Wings**, donated this year by one of Hong Kong's richest couples to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Singapore's independence. The work features the artist's interpretation of dipterocarp seeds found in the gardens, with each of the 50 wings representing a year of achievement.

Back in the Marina Bay area, Gardens by the Bay is also home to some significant works. Stroll through the waterfront park's Meadows area and you'll come across **Planet** by British artist Marc Quinn. Originally installed on the lawn of Chatsworth House in Derbyshire, England, in 2008, it's a gigantic white sculpture of Quinn's baby son that seems to float above the grass. The seven-ton bronze-and-steel infant is meant to say something about the illusion of weightlessness, but it could equally serve as a metaphor for the new life that has been injected into the city's art scene. ☉