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Isea 2008 Singapore report



[ISEA 2008 photo set](#)


More than one doubt was raised with the choice of Singapore as host city for [ISEA 2008](#). Indeed, William Gibson's description of the city, coined in Wired mag a decade ago springs to mind: "Disneyland with death penalty". In this almost spotless urban environment, freedom of speech problems are part of life, and any piece of art that criticises the government is not publicly tolerated - even if it enjoys local support. The most paternalistic government in the world aims to turn Singapore (together with Japan) into

the most important hub for creative enterprise and new media in Asia. Their "Media Development Authority" is currently investing vast sums in this area. This year's ISEA was backed up with unprecedented institutional support. The two big universities - the Singapore Management University and the Nanyang Technological University - provided at least six parallel lecture sessions over a four day period that produced plenty of interesting hints and some unexpected performances. With such an information overload it was necessary to consult the advice of friends in order to make some of the most interesting lectures, which would be more often than not missed by accident otherwise. Summits and sessions were also an important part for the almost 300 guests in attendance. The General Inter-Society for the Electronic Arts (ISEA) meeting gathered the ISEA board and some of the most active academics (among them a majority of women). One of best moments was when during the break participants were "ordered" to talk with somebody they didn't know. ISEA now has become annual - the 2009 symposium will take place in Belfast, and there's already a bid to host the 2010 one in the German Ruhr area. The popular Kurator panel addressed new (open) curatorial forms, which have been enabled by social technologies. It tackled controversial issues and was able to push boundaries. The "Mini Summit of new media art policy and practice" funded by the Asia-Europe Foundation was very promising, gathering academics, artists and organizations in order to discuss opportunities for serious ethical developments in the area. Finally, the Luminous Green session was quite crowded, and focused on the relationship between art, technology and environmental sustainability via a brainstorming session which allowed people to switch from one group to another. This provided a fresh way of meeting new people, sharing concerns and communicating sophisticated visions, in a sort of therapeutical yet idea-rich session. Of the different exhibitions, the juried one was hosted in the big National Museum, and it sported projects developed with prestigious international collaborations, during a 3-month residency program in Singapore-based high tech and research labs. These projects were quite often rooted in various South-East Asian cultural backgrounds. Among them, "Sourcing Water" by Shiho Fukuhara and Georg Tremmel approached the water supply problem of the city state. Singapore owns no water resources, and mainly imports from Malaysia. They revived the esoteric practice of dowsing - equipped with GPS and motion sensors - and finally compiled a map of "suspected" water sources in the underground. Jodi Rose's "The Global Bridge Symphony" was a sonic connection with connecting urban infrastructures (bridges). The tension of cables

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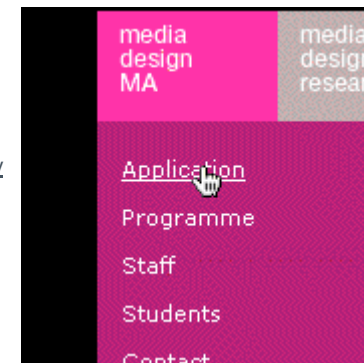
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