



prep-room

Yang tidak lupa
The one who did not forget

“(A)rtists saperti kami merasa kenyang dengan melukis!”
(Translation: “(A)rtists like us feel full with just creating art!”,
Rohani Ismail to Georgette Chen, 9 June 1964, Georgette Chen’s Archives)



Yang tidak lupa
Microsite



Yang tidak lupa
Zine

About YMPT

The Young Museum Professional Trainee programme supports recent graduates seeking to embark on a career in the arts and museum sectors. It is a one-year museum intensive, structured as an on-the-job training where the trainee contributes to ongoing museum work and curatorial methods. This immersion leads up to a self-directed project in the NUS Museum.

Yang Tidak Lupa is a prep-room project initiated by Nurul Kaiyisah, the NUS Museum’s inaugural Young Museum Professional Trainee (YMPT).

As the Museum’s YMPT, she works closely with the curatorial team in assisting other prep-room projects such as *Intimate Landscapes*, facilitating Outreach programmes that activates the exhibition space and producing curated material as guides for the Museum’s permanent exhibition, *Radio Malaya: Abridged Conversations About Art*. Having graduated from the NUS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) History department, Kaiyisah’s interests lie in examining possible interventions in canonical histories, within the intersectional, contemporary lens of gender and museology. The *prep-room Yang Tidak Lupa* is the final stage of her YMPT journey that observes the interaction between her research interests and engagement with the Museum’s collections, as informed by her traineeship at the Museum.

About *prep-room*

Envisioned as a site for the exploration of curatorial methods and the development of content and scopes in the lead up to various upcoming projects, the *prep-room* allows audiences to observe the exhibition-making process, engage with the subject matter, and begin a sustained interest in the development of a project. Its primary tools of deployment are archival materials, artworks, and artefacts, activated by a mix of curators, researchers, artists and interns.

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Image: Ng Eng Teng, *Portrait of Rohani*, oil on board,
73.3cm x 60cm. Gift of Ng Eng Teng.

Hopes of reading plurality in narratives on art in Singapore were first unravelled in my serendipitous encounter of intimate correspondences between artists Rohani Ismail and Georgette Chen. In efforts to possibly expand on the canons of Singapore’s history of art, I had turned to the realm of the archives, within which, hold idiosyncratic worlds of their own. In every letter exchanged between Rohani and Georgette, the capacity to unpack the subjectivities of both these artists was compellingly latent and I found myself asking, “Was this a meaningful way to read the histories of (women) artists?”

This YMPT *prep-room* project *Yang tidak lupa* was then birthed with the longing to read a multiplicity of realities in art history. It conjures a space for archives and selected artworks from the Museum’s Collections, to be read intertextually, contingent on their temporal-spatial dimensions. The archives, tailored to each work in the *prep-room*, pose an exercise for visitors to comprehend socio-historical environments in the production and consumption of the work itself. In echoing the subjectivities involved in the process of creating, materials such as artists’ statements, sketches and excerpts by sitters even are part of the display of these artworks. On the other hand, archives that unravel the modes of reception and encounters with these works consist of art writings on it, its exhibition histories and catalogues can be found next to these works as well. Here, it invites us contemporary beings to learn the vernacular of the archives by piecing together these contextual clues, formed from our intertextual reading of both artworks and archives. Comprehending the language of the archives facilitates a nuanced way of reading histories of art.

With this, the feminist praxis presents itself as fecund grounds for the *prep-room* to explore creative modes of reading. Within the space too, there are nascent interventions staged in the form of annotations, urging us to (re)read these artworks from an intersectional, contemporary lens. Unveiling patterns of an exclusive system entrenched, these annotations become a bridge for one to begin unpacking how the situatedness of the archives informs us of gendered structures in Singapore’s world of art. Have the histories we have been gestating, suffice in presenting an art world that has a diverse spectrum of interlocutors? How do we then start viewing these artworks, with these intervening queries in mind, and work towards modes of writing histories that are inclusive and intersectional?

In *Yang tidak lupa*, the paradoxical visibility of the ‘feminine body’ in art, and subsequently, in writings and histories, is posited as a starting point to comprehend these nuances. The *prep-room* unravels the ‘feminine body’ and their visibility on two (but not limited to) fronts; visual depictions of the ‘feminine body’ as a subject matter, and the embodiment of artistic labour carried out by these ‘feminine bodies’, in the likes of women artists. It is evident that treatments of these gendered bodies on these two fronts are not equal. While visual depictions of the ‘feminine body’ throughout the history of art in Singapore are manifold, a reflection of their artistic labour is disproportionately presented in conventional narratives. With this, while *Yang tidak lupa* odes to the endearing conclusion of intimate exchanges between Rohani and Georgette that has greatly inspired this project, it too embodies the nascent state of remembering as the primary step to (re)reading and (re)presenting these gendered bodies in narratives of art.

In efforts to embrace multitudes within the term ‘feminine’, works selected for *Yang tidak lupa* are meant to expand the definition of the ‘feminine body’, and of its porous boundaries, especially in the works’ plausible re-readings. Should there be ‘feminine bodies’ present within the *prep-room* that echoes essentialist caveats found in gender binaries, it will only serve as prompts for an in-depth, revised analysis on our part, as present beings entering the space. Here, engendering the term ‘femininity’ in our contemporary interpretations is intended to delve into the extent of gender binaries and sexual differences entrenched in structures within Singapore’s art worlds and moving forward, allows us to broaden the liminal bounds of gender. Anchored by the archival realm in *Yang tidak lupa* and undergirds the works’ modes of production and consumption, it welcomes all to inquire further on the complexity in mobilizing these gendered bodies in art – beyond mere renderings of a gendered being as ‘muse’, solely for their gender, racial and class identities.

For this iteration of the *prep-room*, the exploration of a rich ecology of artistic networks between (women) artists is articulated through the continuous growth of the archives and dialogues surrounding it. The realm of the archives then encourages the many methods of reading women and their positions as collaborative interlocutors in Singapore’s history of art. It builds upon narratives that are relational; underlining idiosyncratic realities that are also actively interacting with one another and also, the worlds residing in Singapore’s art scene from the 1960s to 1990s. In *Yang tidak lupa*, specific attention will be paid to Rohani Ismail, whose archives, albeit fragmentary prior to this prep-room, demonstrate a promising potential for us to understand and pursue writing inclusive histories that encourages constant revisions.

Yang tidak lupa, thus, aims to embrace a palimpsest nature – ever-evolving and learning in the presentation of archives and staging of investigative questions set to expand Singapore’s histories of art through the lens of gender. It hopes to encourage the tracing of feminine identities that emphasizes collaboration and connections and (re)readings of the complexities in visual languages entangled with the ‘feminine body’.

As the state of being ‘feminine’ is a site in constant flux, informed by its particular contexts and broadened with discourses on gender, then let this be a space of recalibration and interventions.

Yang tidak lupa,
Kai