



**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE MUSEUM (left)**  
**Where:** University Cultural Centre, 50 Kent Ridge Crescent  
**What:** The university's collection of Singapore art includes calligraphy by Pan Shou, paintings by pioneer artists Liu Kang and sculptures by Mohammad. It is also home to an array of sculptures, ceramics, drawings and paintings by the late artist and Cultural Medallion recipient Ng Eng Teng, who donated his personal collection to the museum.  
 Singapore art in the university's collection is displayed via exhibitions at the museum, which last between one and two years to coincide with teaching modules at the university.



Artist and Cultural Medallion recipient Goh Beng Kwan, 75, with some of his artworks displayed at the UOB Art Gallery. ST PHOTO: DELON HO

**UOB PLAZA ONE (left)**  
**Where:** 80 Raffles Place, lobby  
**What:** Works of art in the collection of the United Overseas Bank are shown at its art gallery in the lobby of the bank's headquarters here. The location of the gallery ensures that the art is accessible to public.  
 Works in the gallery are changed periodically. Currently, it showcases pieces by artist and Cultural Medallion recipient Goh Beng Kwan, including his mixed media work, The Dome, which won the inaugural UOB Painting Of The Year Competition in 1982. Winning works from this year's UOB Painting Of The Year Competition will be on show next month.



**SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY (above)**  
**Where:** 50, 50, 50 and 50 Stamford Road and 51 Victoria Street  
**What:** Visitors to the school and its administration buildings can view acrylic paintings by Jane Lee and oil paintings by Ian Woo.  
 A highlight of its collection are 10 paintings which make up the Street Scenes Collection by Chua Ek Kay (above). The 10 pieces were donated by the late artist and Cultural Medallion recipient to the university.

# Banking on million-dollar artworks

Corporate art collections include works by new artists, and are a crucial resource and record of Singapore's art history



**W**hen DBS Bank sold works from its multi-million-dollar corporate art collection recently, the sale could have rivalled that of a small regional auction house.  
 More than 800 works of art were snapped up by staff from the bank and for prices as high as \$8,000 a painting. Among the works sold were those by well-known Singaporean artists Ong Kim Seng and Tay Bak Koi.

The bank will also be donating close to 30 works from its collection, including paintings by pioneer artists Cheong Soo Pieng and Chen Chong Swee to The National Art Gallery, Singapore.  
 The sale and donation of works from the bank's 44-year-old art collection, which is worth more than \$2.5 million, is part of efforts to streamline its collection and facilitate the bank's relocation of its headquarters from Shenton Way to the Marina Bay Financial Centre.

The Economic Development Board (EDB), whose art collection comprises around 300 works by Singaporean artists, told Life! it is also considering selling some of its pieces to refresh its collection and support home-grown artists who have emerged in recent years.

The two are among several corporate art collectors here, apart from galleries and art museums, who are keen supporters of the visual arts scene here.

While corporate art collectors including business organisations and public institutions lack the flamboyance and high profile of independent collectors, they have been pivotal to the development of Singapore's art scene.

Not only are these deep-pocketed patrons willing to acquire art by upcoming artists without an established market value, their collections are also a rich resource and record for the community on Singapore's art history.

While corporate art collecting has a history that stretches to as early as the 1950s here, the past few years have seen a growth spurt due to the introduction of the Arts Incentive Scheme by the Urban Redevelopment Authority in 2005.

The scheme grants property developers of new projects additional gross floor area if they incorporate art permanently in the design of new commercial or residential buildings in the central area of Singapore.

Mr Tan Wei Ming, 36, partner of art consultancy firm Silver Hat that advises corporate art collectors, says: "The scheme lowers the barriers to collecting. Developers who have never thought of using art in their buildings have started

doing so or increased their art spending to phenomenal levels."  
 Art historian T.K. Sabapathy, 74, says corporate collectors who acquire Singapore art "may claim art as a kind of symbol of who they are in society and as an expression of their commitment to the social ground they operate within".

Ms Tan Ping Ping, 35, vice-president of group brand performance and corporate communications at United Overseas Bank (UOB), says its corporate art collection is tied to the bank's identity as a business with deep roots in Asia and a role to play in the growth and development of Singapore and the region.

She says: "Artistic aspirations play a vital role in the development of a society, which is why UOB has been supporting the local arts community through initiatives such as its art collection since the 1970s."

UOB's art collection boasts 1,500 paintings, calligraphy and sculpture, including pieces by prominent Singapore artists such as George Chen and Chua Ek Kay.

**"Having my art in corporate collections established my credibility as an artist. My art was recognised as having collector value."**

Well-known watercolourist Ong Kim Seng

Corporate collectors such as EDB have taken their support overseas by showcasing Singapore art in their foreign offices. Its office in Washington D.C. is home to painter and Cultural Medallion recipient Thomas Yeo's Brook Of The Mist.

Because corporate collectors are less focused on financial investment than in cultivating the arts scene, they have also helped to nurture Singapore artists.

Artist and Cultural Medallion recipient Goh Beng Kwan, 75, says UOB was among his earliest corporate collectors. It began acquiring his work in the 1970s, even before he became well-known.

His prestige rose after he won the inaugural UOB Painting Of The Year Competition in 1982, started by the bank to promote interest in local art.

He says the bank continued to be his patron through the years and although his paintings have attracted independent art collectors since, the bank is the only collector to have sponsored a solo exhibition for him. It was held at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts Gallery in 2005.

Well-known watercolourist Ong Kim Seng, 67, says the consistent patronage he received from corporate collectors such as government institutions and local banks in the early years of his career allowed him to quit his day job as a graphic technician in 1985 to pursue art full-time.

"Having my art in corporate collections established my credibility as an artist. My art was recognised as having collector value."

tions established my credibility as an artist. My art was recognised as having collector value," he says.  
 "There were times when independent collectors asked to buy my works as they saw and liked my paintings displayed in the offices of corporate collectors."

Art in corporate collections are commonly displayed on the premises of corporations and the exposure benefits not only artists but also the masses who get to enjoy the pieces and grow to appreciate local art.

This is unlike the art collections of independent collectors, says art consultant Lindy Poh, 42, which tend to be kept in private spaces such as the collectors' homes or warehouses.

The public, for example, can feast their eyes on art in the Tang Holdings collection at Marriott Hotel, which it owns. A highlight in the collection is a 14.9m-long abstract ink painting, Homage To Verdi's Requiem, by artist Chen KeZhan that hangs on the second floor of the hotel in Orchard Road.

Corporate collections are also stores of Singapore art and artefacts with historical and research value; museums here and overseas have knocked on the doors of corporate collectors for exhibition loans.

Pieces in the collection of the National University of Singapore (NUS) travelled to Paris' Musee du Quai Branly in 2010 for the Baba Bing show by the Asian Civilisations Museum.

Works by Anthony Poon and Cheong Soo Pieng in UOB's collection were included in the retrospective of each artist at the Singapore Art Museum in 2009 and 2010.

And Tang Holdings' Rock Over Mountain Series 1998 by Chen KeZhan was part of a solo exhibition at the



**MARRIOTT HOTEL (above)**  
**Where:** 320 Orchard Road  
**What:** The hotel houses works in the Tang Holdings art collection, which comprises more than 100 pieces, most of them by Singapore artists. The art is on view in the hotel's lobby and corridors, executive lounge and Wan Hao Chinese Restaurant. A highlight is the 14.9m-long abstract ink painting by artist Chen KeZhan, created for the 2001 Venice Biennale. The piece, Homage To Verdi's Requiem, as well as Homage To Verdi's Requiem Series II (above), is displayed on the second floor.

Honolulu Academy of Arts in Hawaii in 2001.  
 Research and education are, in fact, the cornerstones of corporate art collections owned by public institutions such as NUS and Nafa.

At NUS, the art collection is managed by the NUS Museum, which traces its roots to the University Art Museum at the then University of Malaya in Singapore. The museum was started in 1955 to facilitate the teaching and study of art history. It continues to be an archive for scholars to interpret the history, culture and heritage of Singapore.

Non-cultural reasons also drive corporate art collecting.  
 A spokesman for property developer Wing Tai says the art in its collection, which is displayed in its properties such as residential buildings, helps to transform the spaces as well as enhance the value of its developments and make them stand out in the market.

He adds that Singapore art features in its collection because local artists are able to "create a connection to local cultural values" in their works that people here can relate to easily. Its collection includes sculpture by Vincent Leow and photographic prints by Russel Wong.

A team led by Wing Tai's deputy chairman Edmund Cheng, who is also chairman of the National Arts Council, works with curators, galleries and artists to build up its collection.

For Poh Tiong Choon Logistics, acquisitions for its art collection is spearheaded by chief executive Poh Choon Ann, an avid supporter of the arts. Others such as Wheelock Properties rely on a team of executives to manage the collection.

Because of the varied needs and tastes of different corporations, the type of art in corporate collections spans a wide spectrum.  
 Contemporary ink paintings are popular with Wheelock Properties as they are versatile and able to fit in the spaces of different developments.

The collection at Poh Tiong Choon Logistics, on the other hand, is focused on works by artists who paint in the traditional Nanyang style unique to South-east Asia because Mr Poh, vice-chairman of Nafa's board of directors, has a soft spot for such art.

Mr Larry Lim, a UOB risk management group executive in his 40s, who bought three still life paintings by Nafa graduate Soh Chee Hui at the bank's art sale recently, was glad to own a piece of the corporation's history. The paintings depict Chinese tableware and foods, including a teapot and rice bowl.

He says: "The paintings are meant as gifts for my three children, aged five, 12 and 14, to serve as reminders to them of their Chinese roots and to come home for dinner often."

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**DBS SHENTON WAY BRANCH (above)**  
**Where:** 6 Shenton Way, DBS Tower 2  
**What:** This branch is home to a selection of art in the bank's collection, including paintings by artists Thomas Yeo and Tay Bak Koi and sculptures (above) by ceramicist Iskandar Jailil.



Poh Tiong Choon Logistics' chief executive Poh Choon Ann with works in his corporate art collection. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN