

A CLASS OF THEIR OWN

IT SURE SEEMS LIKE AN EMPOWERING TIME TO BE STUDYING THE ARTS. THIS AUGUST, THE FIRST GOVERNMENT-BACKED PRIVATE ARTS UNIVERSITY HERE, THE UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS SINGAPORE, WILL WELCOME ITS INAUGURAL COHORT. ACCORDING TO *THE STRAITS TIMES* IN A SEPTEMBER 2023 REPORT, OUR COUNTRY WILL CONTINUE TO INVEST IN ARTS EDUCATION, WHILE THE NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL'S LATEST POPULATION SURVEY ON THE ARTS SHOWED CONSISTENT GROWTH IN INTEREST IN THE SECTOR AND AT LEAST TWO-THIRDS OF SINGAPOREANS RECOGNISING THE BENEFITS OF ARTS AND CULTURE ON THE COMMUNITY. ULTIMATELY THOUGH, PURSUING THE ARTS AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE REMAINS NICHE (THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND YOUTH'S SINGAPORE CULTURAL STATISTICS STUDY IN 2022 SHOWED YEAR-ON-YEAR DIPS IN FULL-TIME ENROLMENT IN TERTIARY ARTS COURSES BETWEEN 2016 AND 2021). HERE, SEVEN YOUTHS SHARE THEIR INTENTIONS, ASPIRATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNT IN HAVING EMBARKED ON THIS PATH LESS CHOSEN.

TEXT AND ART DIRECTION KENG YANG SHUEN
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ALL INTERVIEWS HAVE BEEN EDITED FOR BREVITY AND CLARITY.
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HEE KER RU, 19, YEAR ONE STUDENT IN LASALLE COLLEGE OF THE ARTS' BA (HONS) FINE ARTS PROGRAMME

Her academic background: "I graduated from Raffles Institution prior to coming to Lasalle. I took H2 Art. In a very funny and ironic twist of fate, I got 5 As and 1 B for my A levels, and that B was for art." **Most common response towards her field of study:** "Often, people assume I must have come from polytechnic, so when they find out I was in junior college, they then assume I had dropped out. When they realise that I had in fact graduated with good grades, the response tends to switch to one of utter confusion and pity – that I've 'downgraded' my future. The fault in our highly utilitarian society is that many Singaporeans disparage the arts ... I just say that I'm pursuing my dreams, and how many people actually get to chase what they love?" **Her aspiration:** "The eventual goal is to be a full-time artist, but I admit that's quite an idealistic dream ... I'm content to become a teacher or lecturer for the income while continuing my art practice simultaneously. If all else fails, I'll photocopy my degree ten thousand times and build my own BTO with it." **If she didn't study fine arts ...** "I don't think I'd be alive if I wasn't doing art."

HAIR TAN ENG CHONG/KIZUKI+LIM MAKEUP KEITH BRYANT LEE, USING SHU UEMURA



SUPASSARA HO, 21, YEAR THREE STUDENT IN LASALLE COLLEGE OF THE ARTS' BA (HONS) FINE ARTS PROGRAMME

Her parents' sentiments about her field of study: "My parents are supportive of my choice and in return, I've promised to help out with the family's recycling metals business after I graduate. When they were my age, my parents wanted to pursue the arts, but their parents didn't allow them to because of the lack of money as well as misconceptions about studying art among the older generation. So when I told them that I wanted to study fine arts, they understood and supported me. I feel very lucky and grateful to be born to parents who try to give me what they never got growing up." **Biggest misconception about fine arts students:** "That we're all good at art. I can't speak for others, but if I was already good at doing art, I wouldn't be here." **On the local art scene:** "As a foreign student from Thailand, I feel like the art scene in Singapore is very active and diverse ... I also like that art education is encouraged across ages. All of this helps me feel inspired to continue my art practice."

HAIR TAN ENG CHONG/KIZUKI+LIM MAKEUP FOR SUPASSARA KEITH BRYANT-LEE, USING SHU UEMURA MAKEUP FOR JACKIE BENO LIM, USING GUCCI BEAUTY



JACKIE ANG, 21, YEAR TWO STUDENT IN THE NANYANG ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS' BA (HONS) FINE ART PROGRAMME

Why study fine arts? "I wanted to be exposed to as many different art forms as possible." **Biggest misconception about fine arts students:** "That artists are useless." **Toughest thing about her programme:** "Critiquing others and taking criticism. If you can't handle judgement, you can't be judging others. Learn how to accept this by letting go of your own ego and taking the most enormous step back. I feel that in doing so, it makes one more empathetic." **Her aspiration:** "To make an impact on culture and society." **If she didn't study fine arts ...** "I would've gone to culinary school and become a chef. I was at the At-Sunrice GlobalChef Academy for a few months to learn more about the food and service industry. It was very fun, but I got low-key bullied at the cafe I was doing my placement at."



LUCAS TAN, 23, YEAR THREE STUDENT IN LASALLE COLLEGE OF THE ARTS' BA (HONS) FINE ARTS PROGRAMME

His parents' sentiments about his field of study: "When I was around 11 or 12, my mum was against me pursuing the arts in school. At that time, the movie *Dolphin Tale* also happened to come out. It's about a reclusive young boy who rescues a dolphin with a broken tail, skips school to treat it at an animal hospital, and finds his passion and enthusiasm for working with animals there. My mum watched it and was so moved, she cried and changed her mind ... I'd be lying if I said I'm not worried about my future, but with encouragement and support from my family and peers, I've become more inclined to take risks and grasp opportunities." **Most common response towards his field of study:** "Many would either say it's cool to see someone pursuing their passion academically, or show concern over the financial stability of this industry. To the latter, my response has been to explain that I do have experience outside of the fine arts. I don't mind such opinions. I just think that standing firm on the choices that you make in life is very important and helps others see how seriously you take this." **Biggest misconception about fine arts students:** "I think many people think that we took up fine arts because we didn't know what to do in life. The truth is that many of us are very serious in our practice. I can tell how passionate my peers are based on my encounters with them as they discuss their works."

HAIR: TAN ENG CHONG/KIZUKI+LIM | MAKEUP: LEITH BRYANT/LEE SING SHU UEMURA



DIVYA DHASHINI, 25, YEAR TWO STUDENT IN THE NANYANG ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS' BA (HONS) FINE ART PROGRAMME
Her academic background: "I have a diploma in nursing from Nanyang Polytechnic and worked full-time as a nurse for three years before deciding to switch fields. I don't have a formal arts background prior to enrolling in the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts." **Why study fine arts?** "My experiences as a former nurse have taught me that life is short and unpredictable, and that we can't let fear stop us from pursuing our passion. I wanted to surround myself with like-minded people as well and being a self-taught artist limits how much one can improve his or her skills. Going to art school has also become a great way to build new connections and find more opportunities in the art world." **What she hopes to achieve with her degree:** "A better understanding of myself and my art practice. And a job." **Her plans post-graduation:** "I'm exploring various fields such as art curation, teaching and community art. I'm also interested in medical illustration because it combines my interest in both biology and art."

HAIR TAN CHONG/KIZUKI+LIM MAKEUP BENO LIM, USING GUCCI BEAUTY



ELISA TAN, 19, YEAR ONE STUDENT IN LASALLE COLLEGE OF THE ARTS' DIPLOMA IN FINE ARTS PROGRAMME
Her academic background: "I was in the Singapore Sports School doing fencing, not art!" **Why study fine arts?** "I knew I wasn't going to be happy in a normal collegiate programme. I wanted to find a community of artists to immerse myself in so that we could better ourselves and one another. Art school seemed to be the simplest solution. I also wanted to solidify my foundational skills since I've never undergone formal art training till now." **If she didn't study fine arts ...** "I'd have studied political science, philosophy and economics (PPE). It was my long-term dream to work with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the United Nations, but it seems that my calling has led me elsewhere." **What fine arts students need more of:** "I'd love to have more opportunities to submit to open calls. Beyond just what's graded in school, which is based on a rubric, I'd like to better understand what would be accepted into galleries and shows. Funding to go on overseas exchanges with art spaces would be great too."



HAIR: TAN ENG CHONG/KIZUKI+LIM MAKEUP: BENO LIM, USING SUCCI BEAUTY

DALISHA FARIQ, 20, YEAR ONE STUDENT IN LASALLE COLLEGE OF THE ARTS' BA (HONS) FINE ARTS PROGRAMME

Biggest misconception about fine arts students: "That our work is easy and that it doesn't require much thinking or effort, which is absolutely false." **Toughest thing about her programme:** "Sometimes, I have an idea or expectations about how I'd like my work to turn out, but with our deadlines, it's hard to achieve them." **Her plans post-graduation:** "I hope to do residencies both here in Singapore as well as overseas ... I also like the idea of opening an art studio where people can come to see artists at work and attend workshops." **On the local art scene:** "While the industry is trying to be more inclusive, there's still a sense of exclusiveness and opportunities are not widely open to every artist or art style, especially those that are more experimental. This can make it discouraging for those who want to pursue the arts as an academic discipline or profession, but I'm hopeful for change that will come with the next generation of artists."