

Along the lines of artists responding to their surroundings is a young collective which goes by the name of dmr. Short for ditchmyroutine, and made up of artists Deb, Man and Ryf, the collective's inaugural exhibition is currently still on at Lasalle College of the Arts, until June 13. Titled 'we are dealing with some **serious** matters', the installation



Artwork by the Vertical Submarine. 'Shopping for a Personal Letter' at the Wheelock art gallery.

confronts visitors as soon as they enter the institution's lobby. Monkeys made of wood, and then painted in colourful plates, hang and 'swing' around on the internal beams and pillars of the building, creating some sort of a jungle against the modern architecture of the building. If what the collective envisioned was chaos, they definitely achieved it with the strategically-placed installation.

However, beyond their mischievous installation (which includes a signboard warning: "Do not feed us monkeys"), dmr's underlying message is one of social cohesion and negotiating ourselves in an increasingly impersonal world.

Negotiating through spaces – physically or through our imaginations – was another theme dealt with the collective, Artists Caravan. Their inaugural exhibition 'Unversed Roles' in 2008 saw four artists, Chan Mei Hsien, Joey Soh, Ong Xiao Yun and Wei Tian Feng, journey into neighbouring Malaysia and taking residence in a small fishing village in Selangor state. There, these artists from different backgrounds created artworks in response to their interaction with the local communities and their surrounding environment.

Early this year, the nomadic group was the artists in residence in Sculpture Square. With a different line-up (Michelle Tan joining the founders of the collective – Joey Soh and Ong Xiao Yun), the three of them utilised the four weeks offered during the residency, getting acquainted with the environment and historical significance of the Bugis district. The results of their observations and experimentations culminated in the exhibition 'Urban Playground' held at Sculpture Square last month. Though the artists in Artists Caravan may change, their commitment towards the process of creation that revolves around the elements of 'self', 'others' and the 'environment' paves the way for exciting new projects that we can all look forward to.

Looking at these young collectives, one can sense the urgency in their outreach to a local audience still grappling with the nature of contemporary art. But, rather than viewing it as a lost cause, these artists should be lauded for seeking alternative ways, either through social critiques or engaging with public spaces, to share their viewpoints on the society we are living in.

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