

EDUCATION

RESOURCE GUIDE

NTU CENTRE FOR
CONTEMPORARY
ART SINGAPORE

01/11/2018 TO 03/03/2019

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JEF GEYS

SINGAPORE

QUADRA

MEDICINALE



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NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

About NTU CCA Singapore

Located at Gillman Barracks, NTU CCA Singapore is a national research centre of Nanyang Technological University, supported by a grant from the Economic Development Board, Singapore. The Centre is unique in its threefold constellation of research & academic programmes, international exhibitions and residencies, positioning itself as a space for critical discourse and diverse forms of knowledge production. The Centre focuses on *Spaces of the Curatorial* in Singapore, Southeast Asia, and beyond, as well as engages in multi-layered research topics.

CLIMATES. HABITATS. ENVIRONMENTS. is NTU CCA Singapore's overarching research topic which informs and connects the Centre's various activities over a longer period of time (2017-19). Changes in the environment influence weather patterns and these climatic shifts impact habitats, and vice versa. Precarious conditions of habitats are forcing migration of humans and other species at a critical level. The consequences of human intervention are felt on a global scale, affecting geopolitical, social, and cultural systems. The Centre intends to discuss and understand these realities through art and culture in dialogue with other fields of knowledge.

Notes to Teachers & Educators

This Resource Guide is developed to supplement the Workshop for Teachers and Educators with a focus on the exhibitions at NTU CCA Singapore. It provides an opportunity for educators to learn how contemporary artists address issues and concerns of our times, as well as to explore new teaching strategies.

Here you will find resources specifically designed for teachers and students. The proposed activities are conceived to be used in a flexible manner: educators can select suitable activities and combine them to meet the needs of their students.

Before bringing your class to NTU CCA Singapore, it is recommended that you visit the exhibition, consult the Exhibition Guide and the Education Resource Guide, and decide which aspects of the exhibition are most relevant to your students. Customised guided tours for student groups led by NTU CCA Singapore curators are also available upon request.

Kelly Reedy, Educator, Art Therapist, Artist
Magdalena Magiera, Curator
Outreach & Education
Ilya Katrinnada Binte Zubaidi, Curatorial
Assistant, Outreach and Education
Nadia Amalina, Young Professional Trainee

About the Education Programmes

The education programmes promote contemporary art as a form of creative learning through exhibition tours, talks, and workshops developed by the Centre's education team. These accessible and inclusive learning experiences connect students and teachers with contemporary art and artists to encourage new ways of looking, thinking, and creating.

Crucial to our programme is the approach "bring your own story," which encourages students to connect the exhibitions with their personal experiences generating new meanings through playful strategies, peer collaborations, and group discussions.

Who would benefit from working with/consulting the Education Resource Guide?

The Education Resource Guide is conceived for teachers and educators working in secondary, tertiary, and university educational settings. It can also be a useful resource for general exhibition visitors as a tool to understand and enjoy contemporary art. Following the guided questions and activities, visitors are encouraged to enter the world of the artist(s) and reflect on what they experience in the gallery space.

How can the Education Resource Guide be used by educators and general visitors?

These educational activities can be used for pre-gallery, in-gallery, or post-gallery lessons. Teachers can choose which activities are valuable for their educational objectives, and are free to add on other related materials of their own. General visitors can also decide which ideas and content inspire them to further learn from and enhance their exhibition experience.

What is the goal of the Education Resource Guide?

We want to encourage people to discover and trust their own responses to contemporary art. We think contemporary art can be meaningful and relevant for everyone, but we also acknowledge that sometimes an exhibition can be perceived as intimidating and confusing. Hence, the resources we produce are conceptualised to build confidence in individual thinking to creatively engage with contemporary art.

Using a Gallery as a Site of Research: a fieldtrip to NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore

Theme:

CONCEPTUAL ART PRACTICE.
EXPERIMENTAL PEDAGOGY.
ARCHIVAL PRACTICE.

Cross-disciplinary subjects:

educational theory,
botany,
ethnobotany,
urban studies,
environmental studies,
social studies.

A brief introduction

Jef Geys (1934–2018) was a Belgian artist known for his conceptual art practice and experimentation in the field of pedagogy. He carved out a unique path both as an artist and educator, insisting his daily life and art were not separate. He employed a variety of media including film, installation art, painting, performance-related works, urban interventions, photography, publi-



shing activities, sculpture and even plants from his garden, yet the interdisciplinary nature of his practice was never limited in terms of their format. Throughout his career, he also meticulously documented and preserved all of his artistic endeavors in a private archive, as well as collected texts and objects from his everyday life.

After graduating from the Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp, Geys chose to settle and work in the small provincial village of Balen in the Kempen region of Belgium. His art production is often based on references to this location, which he described as the *terroir* or territory, reflecting the region's history, language, social structure and natural environment. There he also taught art in a state school for almost 30 years. His pedagogical approach, called "positive aesthetics," emphasised a focus on the awareness of the world around us as well as quotidian happenings. It encompassed using his own classroom as the site for his projects and exhibitions. Yet throughout his life, Geys was also consistently engaged in broader critical issues important to art, politics, and society at large.

His work has been shown internationally in galleries and museums including, the Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art, Ghent (2015), WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels (2013, 2009), Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp (2011), Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition (2009), Skulptur Projekte Münster (1997) and the São Paulo Art Biennial (1991). In 2000 he received the Flemish Culture Prize for Plastic Arts and in 2008 the Plastic Arts Prize of the Province of Antwerp.

NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore

Jef Geys. *Quadra Medicinale Singapore*

Geys's influences can be traced to the Dadaist movement, as well as artists such as **Joseph Beuys** and **Marcel Duchamp**. Social critique was at the heart of their practices and the belief that anything can be art, if an artist so intends it. Thus Geys's conceptual art practice became rich in experimentation, spilling naturally over into his work as an educator. His deep interest in society and politics led him to tackle prickly social issues through his art, as in his *!Women's Questions?* written in the early 1960s. Still valid today, these questions were meant to engage his students at a girls' school in real life matters. He was also not shy about taking on the art world itself. In his *Colouring Book for Adults* (1963–65), he endeavoured to teach himself how to be an artist, after having just graduated from art school. The book poked fun at how the art world expects an artist to produce individual one-off works of genius. Geys's way of perceiving the world made him question the hierarchies of control, meaning-making systems, and the dissemination of knowledge, both inside and outside of the classroom and art world.

The exhibition at NTU CCA Singapore highlights Geys's contribution to the 2009 Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition where he represented Belgium. His work, *Quadra Medicinale*, brings together many of his long-researched artistic and conceptual inquiries in the form of a collaborative project, including a manual serving as a practical guide to foraging in the city and as an archival document.

Geys's use of plants in his art practice stems from his being an avid gardener. For this project he asked friends and colleagues living in various urban locations (Villeurbanne, New York, Moscow, Brussels) to map out a one- to two-kilometer square space, keeping their home or workplace in the center. They were then to explore this area, looking to find and photograph 12 random street plants (or weeds) growing there. Next they were to document, classify and research these plants, seeking out their medicinal and/or other properties. In Venice, Geys displayed the photographs and research information, as well as prepared a user manual in the form of the *Kempens Informatieblad*, a former local newspaper in Kempens that he took over for the purpose of archiving his own work. One hope for the outcome of this project was to give homeless people more knowledge about how to take care of minor ailments through medicinal herbs and make use of accessible food growing in urban areas.

Pre-gallery visit activities:

1. Prior to the gallery visit, discuss the definitions and concepts expressed in the vocabulary list below.

Archival –

Biotope –

Conceptual art –

Dadaism –

Ethnobotany –

Foraging –

Inventory –

Medicinal –

Pedagogy –

Plant –

Positive Aesthetics –

Territory –


Terroir –

2. What information sources do you use to find out more about something that interests you? For example, where would you look if you wanted to learn the botanical names and classification systems of plants or if a plant found growing on the street is safe to eat?

3. Are you sure that the sources of information you choose are reliable?
Who do you think writes that information?

4. How do you usually document the information you want to remember on a daily basis? Where do you store it? How do you share it?

5. Find a plant at home or in your neighborhood that attracts you. Document it and try to find out its botanical name and uses. Make a sketch of your plant in the box below and write down the information you discovered. Name your sources. Are you sure your documentation is correct? Would you share it with others?



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CCA Activities:

Jef Geys. *Quadra Medicinale Singapore*

Activity #1:

Go Foraging and Create a Medicinal Guidebook

(Required materials: educational resource guide, coloured pencils, a smartphone with recording device and camera)

(* An important note: The activity sheets will not be graded, nor is there only one correct answer. They are to provide a platform for creative dialogue, debate and continued research into the suggested topics.)

In Activity #1 explore the exhibition in a small group of 4 to 5 people. Each person should choose a minor ailment, e.g. cough, cold, earache, stomachache etc. As a group, go foraging through Geys's exhibition of documented plants and try to find the ones that can help you or your group members feel better. Create a medicinal guidebook noting down all relevant information for each plant as presented in the artworks, including: common name, family name, and medicinal uses. Make a detailed sketch of each plant you choose in the spaces provided for in the educational resource guide.

Medicinal Guidebook



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Medicinal Guidebook



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Medicinal Guidebook



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Activity #2: Archiving Practice

Go back into the exhibition alone and take pictures on your smartphone of the work that you enjoyed in the exhibition. Include pictures of your friends viewing the exhibition as well.

Which photos give us more of an experience of 'art'? Geys's artworks themselves or the visitors looking at the artworks?

How would you define art?

How do you think Geys would define what art is?

What do you think the term 'archiving practice' means to Geys?

Activity #3: Positive Aesthetics and Taking Inventory Art Studio Group Work

(Required materials: smartphone with recording device and camera, paper, coloured paper, acrylic paint, watercolors, paint brushes, felt-tipped markers, thumbtacks, string, old plastic containers, buckets, cardboard, newspapers, bric-a-brac).

Jef Geys was an educator who taught positive aesthetics, an experimental pedagogical approach that encouraged students to be not only in contact with works of art, but also to discover the concepts behind them and then find other applications for these ideas in their own personal art making or daily life. In this method the classroom becomes a kind of laboratory to be used for exploration and collaboration, combining innovative art making techniques with real world happenings in politics, as well as social and environmental issues. Geys also used his classroom to make his own work, enlisting the help of his students at times. He included those projects in his long running 'inventory list', which he began in 1958 to document all of his works through his personal archive. His aim was to create a sense of equality between the everyday activities of an artist and what is considered his art production.

During your visit to *Quadra Medicinale Singapore*, what underlying concepts did you discover in Geys's work? Think about alternative meaning making systems and the concept of dissemination of knowledge. Geys uses his art to question these systems, but do you think he also invents new systems of meaning making and knowledge sharing through his conceptual art practice?

Can you make an original artwork or write a text building upon Geys's ideas about categorizing plants for medicinal purposes? Remember to use your own life experiences in creating the artwork.

You may choose to work in a group or on your own. Feel free to use any of the mixed media materials available to express your concept. At the end of the art studio session, each participant will document and share something about their artwork.

Post-visit Ideas!

Each teacher must decide how to best continue to use the enriching and thought-provoking gallery visits to enhance their students' cross-disciplinary learning experience. The following are a few ideas that could be developed by the students in post-visit lessons or projects.

– Follow Jef Geys's directions for his *Quadra Medicinale Singapore* project and do a survey documenting the plants growing on the street within 1 to 2 kilometers of your home or school. Create a poster or installation using your research findings to share with your classmates.

– Start a small medicinal garden in pots in your school or at home. Learn how to tend these plants and use them for minor ailments or as teas. Make an archival journal of your experience as a gardener, documenting both the successes and failures.

– Visit the NTU Community Herb Garden or the Ethnobotany Garden in the Botanical Gardens and do some cross-cultural research. Compare the use of medicinal plants for healing in Western and traditional Asian societies. Where can you obtain these types of medicines today? Interview medical practitioners or pharmacists who promote medicinal plants in their work.

– Look at the packaging of things you buy. Geys made seed package paintings, highlighting discrepancies in what you are led to expect and what you get in reality. Can you do this with other products besides seed packets? Create an exhibition using this theme.

*Pre-gallery visit activities:

Archive – A place or collection containing records, documents, or other materials of historical interest

Biotope – (Environmental Science) *ecology* a small area, such as the bark of a tree, that supports its own distinctive community

Conceptual art – art in which emphasis is placed on the means and processes of producing art and on the ideas conveyed rather than on the production of art objects

Dadaism – a revolt by certain 20th-century painters and writers in France, Germany, and Switzerland against smugness in traditional art and Western society; their works, illustrating absurdity through paintings of purposeless machines and collages of discarded materials, expressed their cynicism about conventional ideas of form and their rejection of traditional concepts of beauty

Ethnobotany – the scientific study of the traditional knowledge and customs of a people concerning plants and their medical, religious, and other uses

Foraging – obtain (food or provisions) by searching

Inventory – a detailed, itemized list, report, or record of things in one's possession, especially a periodic survey of all goods or materials in stock

Medicinal – of, relating to, or having the properties of medicine

Pedagogy – the principles, practice or profession of teaching

Plant – a living organism of the kind exemplified by trees, shrubs, herbs, grasses, ferns, and mosses, typically growing in a permanent site, absorbing water and inorganic substances through its roots, and synthesizing nutrients in its leaves by photosynthesis using the green

Positive Aesthetics – an experimental pedagogical approach used by Geys's with his students promoting the contact with works of art, the discovery of their underlying concepts, and the search for applications for these ideas in their own personal art making or daily life.

Territory – an area of land; a region

Terroir – Jef Geys uses this term in conjunction with the notions of biotope or territory, for him meaning his entire surroundings, human, and non-human, reflecting a region's history, language, social structure and natural environment

Suggested definitions taken from <http://freedictionary.com>

Education Programmes

Saturday, 1 December 2018 |

10.00am – 12.30pm

Friday, 11 January 2019 | 3.00 – 5.30pm

The Seminar Room and The Exhibition Hall, Block 43 Malan Road

Workshop for Teachers and Educators

by artist and educator **Kelly Reedy**

(United States/Singapore)

Belgium-born artist Jef Geys's multi-disciplinary conceptual art practice and his experiments in the field of pedagogy underpin this environmentally focused workshop. Through interacting with the exhibition *Quadra Medicinale Singapore*, participants will explore the themes of foraging in urban environments, research the medicinal uses of local plants, and discover surprising ways to archive an artist's practice.

Kelly Reedy (United States/Singapore) has worked in Singapore for over 18 years as an artist and educator, holding an MA in Education, Hunter College, and an MA in Art Therapy, LASALLE College of the Arts. She has exhibited her artworks internationally on Paris, Chicago, and Berlin, as well as locally at Jendela Visual Arts Space, Esplanade, Singapore Tyler Print Institute, and Alliance Française. Reedy has developed educational resources for the National Gallery Singapore and trained teachers at the National Institute of Education, specialising in visual arts education in museums and galleries. Reedy is a long-term collaborator for NTU CCA Singapore's workshop for teachers.

Saturday, 15 December 2018 | 3.00 – 5.30pm

Various locations around

Gillman Barracks

(Meeting point: Block 43 Malan Road)

Workshop fee: \$15

Registration required via Peatix:

foragingatgillmanbarracks.peatix.com

Workshop: Foraging at Gillman

Barracks with urban farmer

and nature educator **Alexius Yeo**

(Singapore)

Join this interactive walk in search of edible plants around NTU CCA Singapore and discover the rich edible resources growing around us. Learn how to find edible plants to add to your next home-made salad and be surprised by the many grasses that are commonly used in traditional medicine.

Alexius Yeo (Singapore) is the Director of Carbon InQ, a local company that teaches agriculture-based experiential learning programmes at schools and firms. He is also Founder of Project 33, a family-initiated farming movement uniting neighbourhoods through community farming, cooking, educational activities, as well as the practice of "sharing first" that involves sharing a portion of what one grows and owns with the community.

Saturday, 16 February 2019 | 2.00 – 4.30pm
The Seminar Room, Block 43 Malan Rd

Registration required via Peatix:
womensquestions.peatix.com

Workshop: *!Women's Questions?*

a facilitated discussion by ground-up initiative **Crit Talk**

!Women's Questions? (1965) was a list of handwritten questions that artist and educator Jef Geys made for, and with, the students he taught. For Geys, his artistic life was often integrated with his work—instead of teaching the history of classical art, Geys preferred to engage his students in discussions about the position of women in society. Taking inspiration from *!Women's Questions?*, this facilitated discussion hopes to provide a safe and critical space for participants to share their perspectives, personal encounters or observations on issues related to women in contemporary Singapore, and to create new “Women’s Questions” that take on relevance today.

Crit Talk (Singapore) provides open, critical, and participative spaces for young Singaporeans to discuss their unique experiences and topics participants feel important to address but are taboo or too controversial for a mainstream setting. Crit Talk is the brainchild of **Sya Taha** and **Saiful Anuar**. Sya writes about the media representation of Muslim women through race, disability and other intersectionalities, and is currently pursuing her PhD in National University of Singapore, while Saiful is a consultant on diversity and inclusion issues, and conducts design-thinking training.

Saturday, 2 March 2019 | 10.00am – 1.00pm
Meeting point: Block 43 Malan Road

Registration required via Peatix:
wondersofnature.peatix.com

Workshop: *Weeds, Wildflowers, and the Wonders of Nature* by Nature Society (Singapore)

Nature reserves and parks are often thought of as places to seek out beautiful and interesting plants. It may surprise us that fascinating and useful plants can actually be found all around us – many people call them weeds. In this workshop, participants will look for “weeds,” see where they grow, and identify them. We will search for information on their ecology, their broader distributions, and their various uses. Come prepared to spend a day learning about amazing plants that we see (and more often than not, overlook) every day. We may discover that our neighbourhoods are richer and more beautiful than they already are.

The Nature Society (Singapore) (NSS) has been an active member of Singapore civil society for over 60 years. It functions as an activity, advocacy, and outreach group, while delivering the scientific data needed to monitor the state of local wildlife to manage, protect, and promote it. NSS works with the conviction that a Singapore with thriving nature is a better Singapore for people and for wildlife.

Unless otherwise stated, all programmes are free. For updates please visit ntu.ccasingapore.org.

Join NTU CCA Singapore's Guided School Tours

These guided tours provide opportunities for discussions on art, honing observation skills and interpretive thinking for both students and teachers. The tours are led by NTU CCA Singapore's curators who will provide insights into the exhibition, and share their experience of working with the artists.

All tours are free of charge.

To arrange a day and time for the tours suited to your schedule, email NTUCCAEducation@ntu.edu.sg

Visitor Information

Exhibition Hours

Tuesday – Sunday, 12.00 – 7.00pm

Closed on Mondays

Open on Public Holidays (except on Mondays)

Extended hours 23 – 27 January 2019:
12.00 – 9.00pm

**Free admission to all programmes
unless otherwise stated.**

ntu.ccasingapore.org

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Exhibitions

Block 43 Malan Road,

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Residencies Studios

Blocks 37 and 38 Malan Road,

Singapore 109452 and 109441

Research Centre and Office

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