

Singapore Pte. Ltd.

a design proposal by

National University of Singapore & University of Westminster

A man sets out to draw the world. As the years go by, he peoples a space with images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fishes, rooms, instruments, stars, horses, and individuals. A short time before he dies, he discovers that the patient labyrinth of lines traces the lineaments of his own face.

– Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph and Other Stories*



A Question of Limits

The thematic focus of these investigations revolve around a question of limits --- architecture's limits, the city's limits, the nation's limits, the limits of resources (labour, money, materials, ideas) and the limits of time traversed through history, the present and what is to come. The notion of limits pertains specifically to Singapore's physical size and resources, and how these limits are circumvented, even celebrated, through the nation's capacities, ambitions, projections and influences.

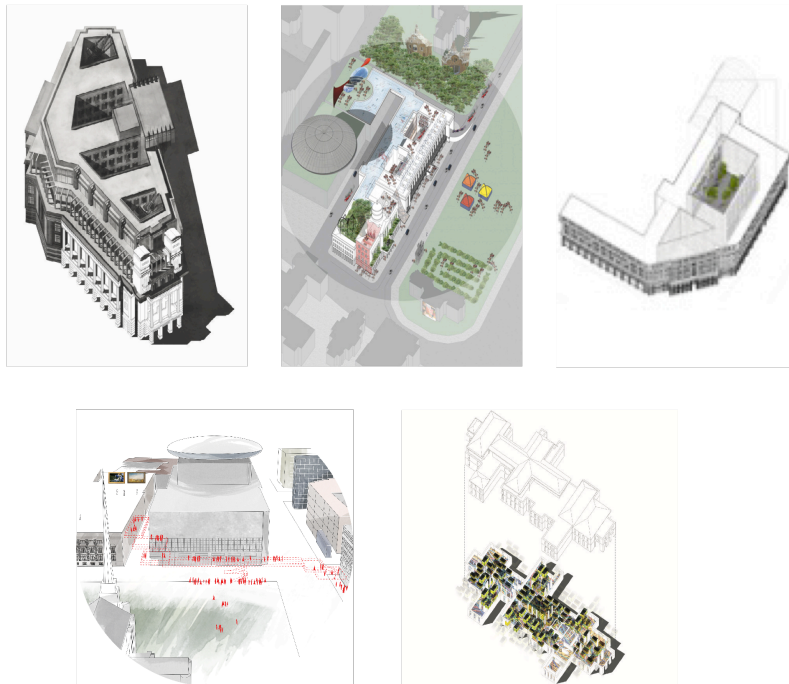
The team explores the issue of limits through strategic interventions primarily within Singapore's central urban core, an area which includes the central business district of Shenton Way, the colonial and museum districts, as well as the reclaimed Marina Bay area which is also the site of the city's new architectural icons – the Marina Bay Sands and the Gardens by the Bay. Significantly, this area is also constituted through reclaimed land with

the first reclamation project historically taking place in the Telok Ayer Basin under Stamford Raffles' colonial administration. Today, the new Marina Bay Financial District to the south of Shenton Way is built as it were, on where there was once only water. Containing the city's financial heart, its cultural sites and the newest entertainment quarters, as well as luxury shopping and dining, this site is fueled by conspicuous consumption, a burgeoning economy, aspirations towards cutting-edge culture, a colonial legacy and a national imperative to cultivate an emerging Singaporean image.

Two architectural angles are taken to approach Singapore's limits: on the one hand, the reinvention, reappropriation and reclaiming of the city's colonial architectural legacy, and on the other hand, the introduction of unexpected programmatic spaces, landscapes, scales and ideologies that are responsive to the fluid and uncertain socioeconomic and cultural conditions of a nation-state-city which has recently earned the unenviable title of the 'most expensive city in the world'.

The interventions explore questions of identity, conservation, heritage and adaptability. They also interrogate issues of power, stakeholdership, sociocultural transformation and economic resilience in responding to an evolving demographic, a maturing civil society and uncertain geopolitical challenges.

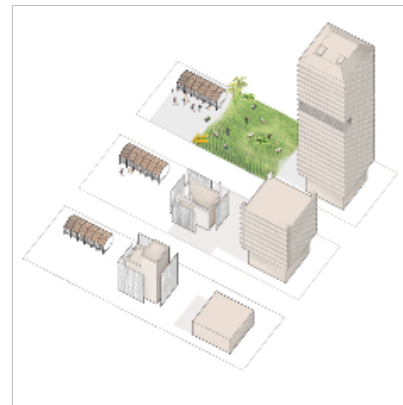
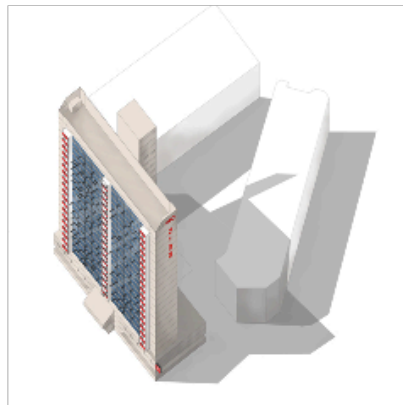
The design proposal is drawn out across blocks of 50 years, and in each 50-year-block, architecture eludes the island's limits by anticipating, exceeding and overachieving. Like the way land is efficiently reclaimed on its coast, for the first millenium, Singapore Pte. Ltd. will correspondingly reclaim, repurpose and reinvigorate monuments, cultural manifestoes, public housing, land use and economic policies. Beyond the first 100 years, it will intensify the physical reclamation of land, sea and air limits, boosting the island by augmenting and multiplying its most desirable assets.



The Jubilee Year: Happy Birthday Singapore, or at 50

Five propositions engage architectural sites and monuments that have been instrumental in anchoring the nation's colonial heritage. The monuments – the MICA building (previously the old Hill Street Police Station), the Fullerton Hotel (previously the General Post Office), the Asian Civilizations Museum (previously the Government Offices), and the National Gallery Singapore (previously the City Hall and Supreme Court) --- become new sites from which to imagine and enact new futures. The projects seek to reclaim and return these edifices to the Singaporean people and those who have made this city their home.

The propositions suggest a reactionary change-in-use to each of these colonial icons, as well as positively embracing Singapore's propensity for conspicuous consumption. The often 'add-on' programmes of shopping, dining and entertainment are taken on as constructive and critical design probes to transform the Fullerton Hotel and the National Gallery into new indices of 'Singaporean culture'. At MICA, the theoretical and physical implications of heritage conservation are questioned. The proposal is a symbolic restoration of the MICA building in order to heighten its status as a hallowed state monument. A cul-de-sac bridge from the Southeast Asian migrant worker haunt of Peninsular Plaza stops short of entering the National Gallery, ending up side-by-side with the latter's new rooftop deck. Here on the bridge, high society and high culture encounter the Southeast Asian migrant worker community across a 2.4m gap. The Asian Civilizations Museum is overwhelmed by its newest exhibit – the data server. The project explores the physical effects of a potentially invisible but overpowering condition of being digital.



The Millennial Year: Singapore (Un)limited, or 50:50

As Singapore ages and matures, the idea that development is simply fueled by a single economic or political agency becomes more and more improbable. We propose that an understanding of 'soft power' as it unravels and affects architectural production in this city is key to circumventing its physical limits. 'Soft power' is held in tension with the more physical and manifest conditions of economic and developmental power which has contributed to the city's exponential growth in the past 50 years. This is evident in the construction of Shenton Way, the project of land reclamation and the preservation of colonial buildings. The notion of 'soft power' refers to a fluid network of actors, agents, agency and modes of implementing power on the built environment which are no longer transparent or stable, affected as it were by global flows of money, labour and imported culture. As a country with no hinterland of its own and with a huge reliance for the basic resources of food and water on its neighbouring Southeast Asian neighbours, Singapore embodies a geopolitical fragility. This fragility must be tampered with appropriate responses towards issues of territoriality and territory. The four propositions at the millennial year explore radical changes in property stakeholdership and liberal land use policies. Yet, the focus is always on productivity and inexhaustible economic vitality. The city continues to reinvent itself. It asserts an unyielding commitment to growth.

The 'local' becomes ever more urgent and important an idiom. The grit of everyday life makes a comeback. The public housing 'Heartland' landscape of small stakeholders catering to the needs of the local populace is transposed onto the Fort Canning Hotel. It is also inserted into Marina Bay Sands – one of Singapore's most expensive real estates – where it

takes root and starts to really blossom. The consequence is an amazing city skyline which is 'Uniquely Singapore', because rather than composed by stararchitecture, it is, to quote the refrains from a popular national ballad, made up of 'home truly'.

The Ministry of National Development Building is also reclaimed for public housing but specifically for the 'disenfranchised third' – a group of residents who do not fit into public housing's primary criteria of nuclear families. The project takes advantage of adapting aging buildings of a suitable type and scale with minimal retrofit. It works in a kind of 'can do, make do' attitude which eschews complicated and costly refurbishment, thus advancing a different incarnation of 'affordable' public housing.

Finally, as the financial district moves southwards to Marina Bay, a temporal utopia supporting alternate economies – farming and fisheries, makers' spaces, creative studios and workshops, budget tourism facilities, light industries – moves into and reoccupies an old Shenton Way which faces impending demolition and rebuilding. This alternate economy operates in the shadow space of the new CBD, thus making productive a site in limbo. The CBD's abstract and fragile relations of finance are renewed by this 'ghost city's' infill of more tangible and more enduring means of material productions.



S i n g a p o r e P T E . L T D.

50:50:50:50: ...
Reclaim: Limitations, Hard and Soft Power

Beyond the first 100 years: A Memento Mori, or 50:50:50:50:50....

As a rejoinder to WAF's second call to design a monument for the nation, we argue that a monument is inappropriate to memorialize a space whose historical past is spatiotemporally still wedded to the contemporary present. Singapore's most important events are still unfolding in the now. As such, the nine Singapore overtures iterated above have, in a sense, fulfilled the brief for a memorial, a monument and a visitors' centre to remember Singapore by.

For Singapore, we propose instead a more worthy commemoration through a *memento mori* – an architecture that serves as a warning or a reminder of death; of inevitably reaching an end or *the* end; of a certain eventuality in reaching the island's limits.

Memento mori (Latin) 'remember (that you have) to die' derives from a medieval practice of using specific objects, relics, and constructions to reflect upon one's mortality. Singapore's *memento mori* will be demarcated by the city's developmental limits. It will be bracketed by the sky, land and the sea; by infrastructure and nature. It will express the absolute limits of Singapore's capacity and desire for developmental growth. It will confront the negated condition of island-ness. It will maximize efficiency; minimize redundancy. It will be driven by contingency rather than need.

Our proposition for Singapore's *memento mori* has its foundations in five key coordinates and five corresponding programmatic spaces which exemplify the very best of this island-city-nation-state – Changi International Airport with expanding termini in the east; the endless suburbia of exported public housing models in the west; Jurong Caverns' underground network of crude oil storage in the south; the engineered ecology of Lorong Halus wetlands in the north, and the tallest, biggest, smartest and most energy efficient skyscraper in the central business district.

These five coordinates multiply and celebrate the island's 'best of the best'. They demonstrate its economic and political prowess. They can reimagine the limits of this sunny, tropical isle.

Time is three things for most people, but for you... just one. A singularity. One moment. This moment. Like you're the center of the clock, the axis on which the hands turn. Time moves about you but never moves you. It has lost its ability to affect you. What is it they say? That time is theft? But not for you. Close your eyes and you can start all over again.

— Jonathan Nolan, *Memento mori*