

# Pairing artists from East and West

Among the exhibitions planned at the new Arndt Singapore gallery is one juxtaposing works of Western and Asian artists

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**G**allery owner Matthias Arndt, 44, had his reservations about Gillman Barracks when he visited the arts cluster that was launched last September.

It was raining as the veteran German art dealer and gallerist hopped from one swish gallery to another in the area. Even with an umbrella, he ended up getting wet.

Speaking to Life! last week during a recent business stopover, he says: "People wondered if Gillman Barracks would take off and as I walked in the rain, I didn't know how it would work."

Those doubts, however, did not stop the owner of Arndt gallery and one of the first contemporary art spaces in former communist East Berlin from inking a deal last month to open a gallery in Gillman Barracks.

Arndt Singapore kicks off on Friday. Its inaugural exhibition, Light & Reflection, features works by German artists Heinz Mack and Otto Piene. The artists are co-founders of the international art group Zero, whose works explore light and movement.

The gallery will also have a booth at the Art Stage fair next week.

Mr Arndt says: "Singapore, for what my gallery does, is geographically and strategically ideal. We support South-east Asian art in the West and the Asia Pacific so I want to be closer to artistic creation in this region."

The Arndt gallery in Berlin, which shows international artists, has in recent years introduced South-east Asian art to audiences in Europe. Last year, its exhibitions featured accomplished Thai contemporary artist Natee Utarit, whose paintings draw on photography and classical Western art, and the hot, young Indonesian artist Eko Nugroho, who makes socio-political works in multiple mediums such as murals and sculpture.

The gallery in Singapore aims to focus on the reverse, introducing critically acclaimed Western artists who are less commonly shown here. But it will also exhibit works by Asian artists.

Its exhibition programme includes a curatorial series, Kindred By Choice, which aims to juxtapose works by selected pairs of Western and Asian artists in meaningful ways. An example would be the iconic British collaborative Gilbert & George and Indian artist Jitish Kallat, contemporary artists inspired by



Besides focusing on works by Western artists who seldom exhibit here, Mr Matthias Arndt will also show Asian works. ST PHOTO: DESMOND LIM

modern urban life and whose works are often imbued with a sense of the grotesque and irony.

Arndt Singapore will also offer services such as artist management and art advice for the development of corporate and private art collections.

Mr Arndt adds that he chose to open a gallery in Gillman Barracks because he was won over by its cluster concept.

He says: "I like the idea of having several businesses, galleries in one spot because it is easier for visitors."

His gallery in Berlin has benefited from being in similarly strategic areas. It opened near the tourist

attraction Checkpoint Charlie in 1994 and is now in the hip arts district of Potsdamer Strasse.

Arndt Singapore is the latest to join the cluster of 13 established galleries in Gillman Barracks. Two others, Pearl Lam Galleries from China and Kaikai Kiki Hidari Zingaro from Japan, are scheduled to debut this year.

For Mr Arndt, who plans to be at the gallery here every month, the country's proximity to Australia where his family is based is a bonus. He is married to Ms Tiffany Wood, who runs the gallery's projects in Australia. The couple have a five-year-old son, August.

With just six weeks between the time he signed the contract to the opening of Arndt Singapore though, his life has recently been a whirlwind.

"I spent Christmas in Australia working on the phone," he says, and jokes: "I hope my family doesn't hate me. They were a little annoyed."

Also on his to-do list: growing the gallery's client base in Asia.

He says: "I don't expect to sell out every show and have people run into the gallery to tear paintings from the wall. It will take time but we hope to have a larger client base."

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