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Art in *space*

German gallerist **MATTHIAS ARNDT** has made it his mission to familiarise the West with the world of contemporary South East Asian art. Now, with a gallery and a new home in **SINGAPORE**, he and his Australian wife Tiffany Wood are familiarising themselves with the new world of stacked, high-density living at The Interlace. **NARELLE YABUKA** visited the compound for a chat about art and architecture.

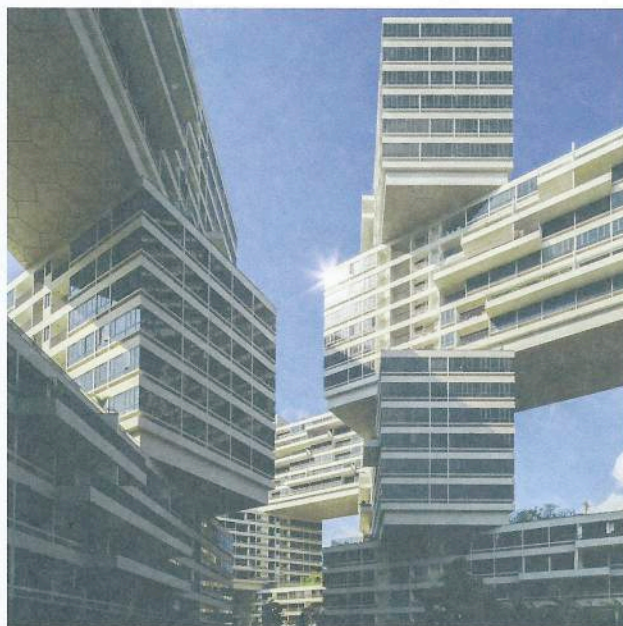
TEXT NARELLE YABUKA | PHOTOGRAPHY REBECCA TOH







PREVIOUS | MATTHIAS ARNDT, BESIDE PAINTINGS BY INDONESIAN ARIN DWIHARTANTO SUNARYO AND FILIPINO MARIA TANIGUCHI, 18TH CENTURY CHINESE URNS, A CASED FIGURE BY FILIPINO MIGUEL AQUILIZAN, AND A 19TH CENTURY FILIPINO STATUE. ABOVE | THE SCULPTURE THAT IS THE INTERLACE FORMS THE BACKDROP TO ALL SIDES OF A BRIGHT BALCONY. OPPOSITE | THE OPEN STRUCTURE OF THE INTERLACE, COMBINED WITH ITS HILLSIDE LOCATION, RESULTS IN GOOD BREEZES REACHING EVERY BLOCK.



People have been known to go to great lengths to quell their curiosity about The Interlace – the surreal web of 31 hexagonally stacked apartment blocks in Singapore designed by Ole Scheeren, a former partner at architectural practice, OMA. There are tales of architects feigning interest in apartment rentals just to gain entrance to the secured compound. Such is the desire to judge for oneself the degree of success with which this fearless approach to high-density housing and communal space translates to comfortable living.

My own ticket to enter came in the form of Matthias Arndt – the German-born and Singapore-based gallerist, art collector and dealer who now calls The Interlace home with his family. Our arrival at the security gate marked the end of a brief walk through the leafy grounds of the adjacent Gillman Barracks contemporary arts cluster on the opposite side of Depot Road. There, in early 2013, Matthias opened a sister space to his well-established Berlin gallery ARNDT.

Navigating through the resort-like grounds of The Interlace to Matthias' block – through landscaped plazas, beneath and beside hovering

apartment blocks, and past pools, barbecue stations, play hills and recreational rooms – it strikes me that we have entered a networked village. It is a three-dimensional matrix of spaces, vistas, and community life. The difference to the sedate (and sparsely populated) single-blocks-in-a-field model of the colonial-era barracks on the hillside next door is stark.

"The transition from the green hill with the colonial structures to this is funny," says Matthias of his home environs. "It's both extremes, but together it's very beautiful." We reach the apartment where Matthias' Australian wife, Tiffany Wood, concurs. "I wouldn't ordinarily choose to live in a development like this. It's massive! But I think it's part of living somewhere like Singapore," she says. "It sits very nicely with Gillman; it just makes sense that it's here." And with at least one other gallery director residing in the property, the pair feels that they are part of a growing local arts community.

The couple made the move to Singapore with their young son in mid-2013 after several years in Melbourne, prior to which they lived in Berlin. After opening ARNDT at Gillman, the decision to relocate to Singapore was a given.

His interest in contemporary
South-East Asian art was
driven by sheer curiosity

"If I work with Asian art, I must be here more often," Matthias acknowledges. His interest in contemporary South-East Asian art – which, he says, was relatively unknown in Europe until recently – was driven by sheer curiosity. "I came to one of the first editions of Art Stage," he says. "I had no reference. I didn't know any of the [South-East Asian] artists, but I could see the substance and quality of their work. So I visited more and eventually held a group show in Berlin titled *Asia Looking South*."

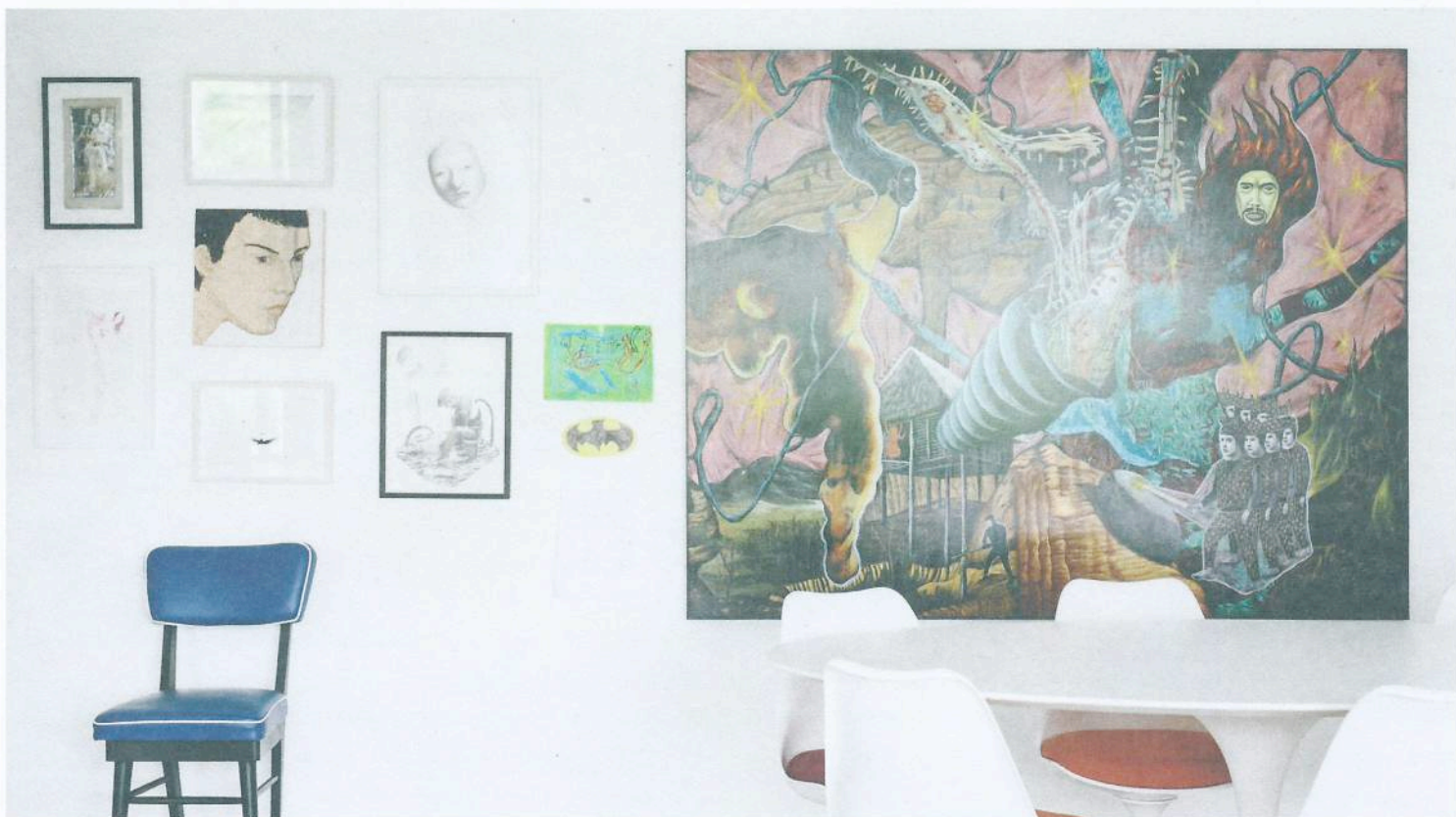
That 2011 show included the work of FX Harsono, Eko Nugroho, Ugo Untoro, Agus Suwage and Entang Wiharso of Indonesia; Geraldine Javier of the Philippines; Natee Utarit of Thailand; and Vertical Submarine of Singapore. Then came solo shows with these artists, and more travel – particularly to the Philippines. Says Matthias, "I was really taken by the energy of the art."

While ARNDT's earliest buyers of South-East Asian art were mostly from the region, currently more than 50 per cent of sales are to international buyers. "That was my promise to the artists and audiences," says Matthias. "The idea was indeed to offer an international audience and build awareness in the West – including the Pacific. We've done a lot of business in Australia."

"Us being here has generated so much work that there's an overflow, so I help Matthias with certain projects," says Tiffany, who has a solid background in the art auction business and currently undertakes consultative art-related projects independently. She spent more than 20 years working for Sotheby's in London and New York, as well as for Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York and auction house Phillips de Pury in New York, London and Berlin.







ABOVE | TWO 1960'S-ERA ARMCHAIRS AND A COMPLEMENTING COFFEE TABLE WERE PRODUCED IN INDONESIA. BELOW | A 1950'S-ERA UPHOLSTERED CHAIR FROM INDONESIA ACCOMPANIES A CLUSTER OF SMALL ARTWORKS BY MIROSLAV TICHÝ, NEDKO SOLAKOV, AYA UEKAWA, DOUGLAS KOLK, STEPHAN BALKENHOL, DENNIS SCHOLL AND THE COUPLE'S SON. OPPOSITE | THE FAMILY IS REMINDED OF THEIR PRESENCE IN A HIGH-RISE RESIDENTIAL NETWORK BY THE VIEW FROM THE KITCHEN.

With that experience she and Matthias are building ARNDT Art Agency as a complementary activity to the gallery. The agency will provide both management and advisory services. "I think this is an even more important contribution to Asia," says Matthias. "It's needed in Singapore," adds Tiffany. A rear lounge space in the gallery will soon become the agency's office.

So, perhaps, the pair will spend less time at home, where there has been an ongoing process of adjustment to the small Interlace apartment interior. "The rooms are not as generous as they could be," says Matthias. "It's this pragmatism that rules. But from everything I've seen in Singapore, nowhere is any more generous. Even some of our wealthiest clients here complain that their ceilings are too low when we show them two-by-three-metre paintings."

Given the size of the space, much of the family's collection of 20th Century furniture classics is still in storage, and some of it has been sent back to Berlin. "The climate here is also too hard on it. We're not hard-core airconditioning people," says Matthias. They have managed, however, to incorporate some hardy pieces by Eames and Eero Saarinen alongside modern Indonesian pieces.

Even more intriguing is the collection of artworks with which they choose to live. It represents a fusion of eras and cultures –



*The collection of artworks with which they choose to live
represents a fusion of eras and cultures.*

Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan (Brisbane-based Filipinos), Rodel Tapaya (Filipino), Arin Dwiheartanto Sunaryo (Indonesian), George Condo (American) and Man Ray (American). It is, in a way, an apt reflection of their own experiences of cultural collage, and of 'new' worlds – geographic, artistic and architectural.

Sitting in the living room and looking out over other blocks and through them to puzzle pieces of sky, I have the opportunity to contemplate whether that sense of community I experienced downstairs infiltrates the private domain in a negative way.

"Does it feel like a petri dish?" I ask Matthias.

"No, and that's to my surprise." He assures me, "There is a lot of privacy. You don't actually look into people's homes because they are far enough away. And with the hexagonal arrangement, nobody looks directly at you, so you don't feel exposed."

I take his word for it and make my way out through the lively, woven ground-level plazas, pools and gardens, through the security gate and to the divisive and heavily trafficked street. It crosses my mind that if only there could be a strong urban connection between The Interlace and Gillman Barracks, these two divergent species of spaces and forms might begin to coexist in an even more fascinating and potential-laden manner.

h See works from some of the artists ARNDT represents at habitusliving.com/issue27/arndt

ARNDT | arndtberlin.com

