

Background and History

The idea of a Very Special Arts Singapore was first mooted by Professor Tommy Koh, Singapore's Ambassador-at-Large and ex-Chairman of the National Arts Council. During his stay in Washington DC, United States of America, Professor Koh had befriended several talented and courageous Singaporean painters and hearing impaired mime artistes. It was also there that he was first introduced to Very Special Arts, where he became an active campaigner of its objectives.

Through Very Special Arts, Professor Koh witnessed the benefits of the arts for people with disabilities, both as morale booster and as means to greater financial independence.

In the meantime, the arts scene for people with disabilities in Singapore is about ripe for such a proposal. Till 1993, arts for people with disabilities evoked memories of sporadic school performances, year-end bazaars, Special Art Exhibitions, the Mouth and Foot Painters, Hi! Theatre and the Wataboshi International and Regional concerts. Besides being largely independent from one another, these activities cater solely to a specific art form or disability group. It is indeed time for a co-ordinating agency for arts for people with different types of disabilities.

Also, through all these earlier efforts in arts programming, people with disabilities became more intensely aware of their innate talents and need for expression, as well as their potential contribution to society. Organisers, schools, sponsors, volunteers and the general public who had the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the special works were all moved by their powerful and emotive arts.

It is against this backdrop that the need for a Very Special Arts Singapore emerges to complement existing efforts and to seal the gap for groups whose artistic and therapeutic needs have not been fully realised.

Very Special Arts Singapore was hence launched on 27 September 1993 with the patronage of Professor Tommy Koh.