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# Get more of us excited about art

IT IS heartening to see the strides Singapore's art and cultural scene has taken over the years, and the growing support provided by the authorities is timely.

The Singapore Art Museum becoming an independent company is a move in the right direction, though it must be welcomed with caution ("Autonomy for Art Museum to chart its path"; last Saturday).

First, what constitutes good art will always be a matter of debate.

Allowing the art museum to leave the fold of the National Heritage Board suggests it will be more independent politically. But will such political independence be replaced by commercial dependence?

In the name of private-public partnerships, corporations and business people are contributing to the non-profit sector through donations and offering expertise in running organisations in an economically sustainable manner. This is laudable but there are consequences.

In the context of the arts, experience has shown that businesses and wealthy individuals have come to define what is quality art, albeit with the assistance of art consultants.

Their generous donations and sponsorships have increasingly come to shape art museums and influence the status of artists today.

Do we want wealthy collectors and corporations to define good art for our society?

Second, while we should celebrate artistic successes and recognition, we should not forget that the arts rest on a foundation of creative experimentation.

Cultural institutions should provide the space to celebrate the quirky, unexpected and ridiculous.

The newly constituted art museum should not just be a space to display "good" art, but also showcase the ambit of Singapore visual arts.

It is important for Singaporeans to discuss what artistic expressions should come to define their community.

The Singapore Art Museum should not be alone in generating this discussion. It would also help if mass media outlets showcase art practices in unexpected corners of Singapore, critically review art exhibitions in locally relevant ways and celebrate experimental artistic expressions.

Admittedly, Britain's Turner Prize is essentially a marketing ploy. But it has managed to get people in Britain and around the world talking about art.

One important goal for the art museum is to get more of us talking about art, and the newspapers can play their part too.

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