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WY-TO SINGAPORE PRIORITISES INCLUSIVE LEARNING THROUGH ART IN THE NEW KEPPEL CENTRE FOR ART EDUCATION

"A world of wonder for children led by independent discovery, grounded by research and well-being advocacy"

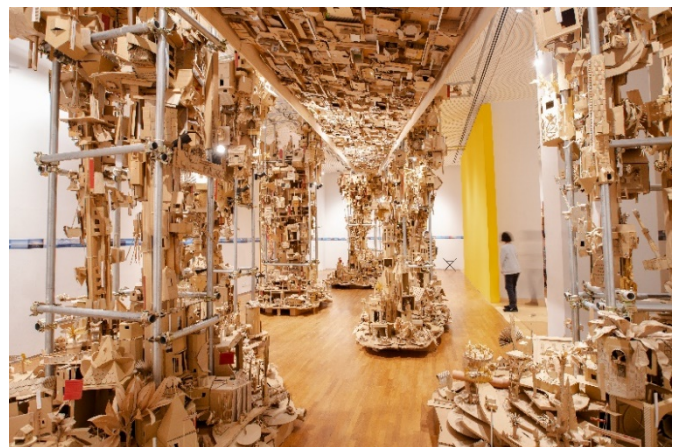
WY-TO Singapore was announced as the winner of the Keppel Centre for Art Education in early 2023. The practice based in Singapore and Paris, with expertise in experiential design, was invited to participate in the Research and Design tender. Participating firms were called upon to propose an innovative revamp of the 1,500 sqm art centre guided by their research methodology. WY-TO's literature research on Childhood Development and Elements of Art was applauded by the client, thereby awarding the project to them.



The winning proposal was built from their experiential expertise in designing immersive exhibition environments without sacrificing safety, attention to detail, and a memorable visitor journey. Stemming from this, their exhibition projects have received recognition from the Singapore Tourism Awards 2022 for Outstanding Leisure Event, and lauded by the prestigious France Design Award – Le French Design Top 100 Designers 2024 for their Head/Home exhibition design in Gallery Children's Biennale 2023.



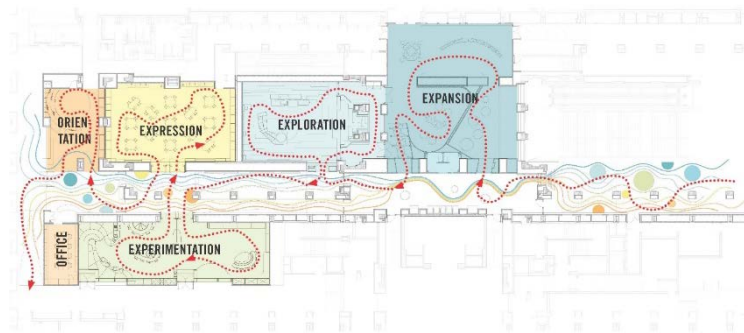
*Left, above: Singapore Tourism Awards 2022 – Outstanding Leisure Event
Gallery Children's Biennale 2021: Why Art Matters*



*Right, above: Le French Design Top 100 Designers 2023 –
Head/Home by The Aquilizans*

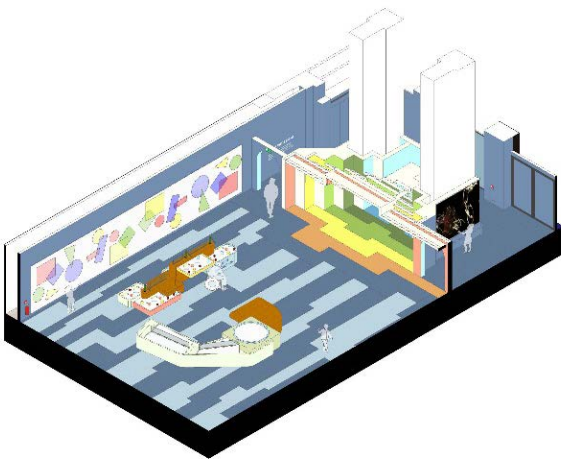
Part of WY-TO's design signature is an engaging experience for all. Augmenting from their projects, WY-TO focused on creating a conducive art education centre accessible to all. Every square meter is then strategised for a sense of agency.

Regular working sessions were done with the art centre's Team, external educators and consultants specialising in Early Childhood, Psychology as well as Special Needs. These sessions assisted in providing various checkpoints of embedding inclusivity as well as accessibility that moves past physical and reach for spectrums of neurodivergent. In addition, focus group discussions were conducted with parents and school teachers to fully understand the motivations for visiting the art centre. Discussions ranged from safety concerns, and activities, to addressing stresses faced by accompanying adults for large groups of children. Insights gathered were analysed to inform the types of learning activities, and levels of engagement, amongst many others, all aimed at developing and aligning with the research methodology. As a result, the spatial narrative began to write itself into the design of the art education centre.



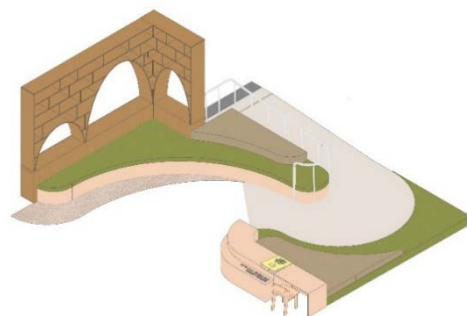
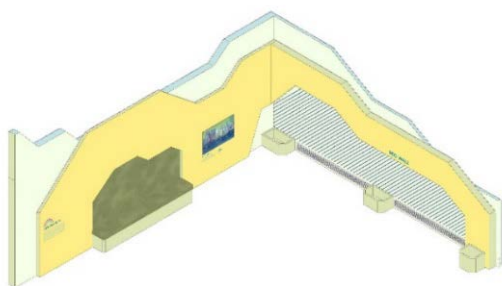
Above: Visitor journey of the Keppel Centre for Art Education.

Inclusive Design for All



Beginning first with the layout. The stations' organisation is intended to provide smaller open yet intimate interactivity moments. Other than the functional benefit of sectioning for activities to happen, it also spurs the excitement of discovery at every curious turn. Not forgetting about accompanying guardians, included seating nooks are deliberately placed at the sidelines and lower than usual for a child's point-of-view observation. "In doing so, we empower both groups to decide how they enjoy the experience. Children can run free while still being in the field of their sight. Guardians can lean back and take a breather. We remove the mental stress by allowing a very natural form of observation." shares Yann. "This encourages them to return because we provide different experiential options they can choose with every revisit."

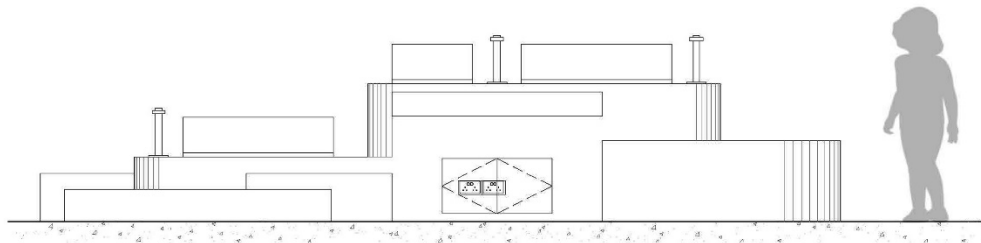
Left: Exploration Room.



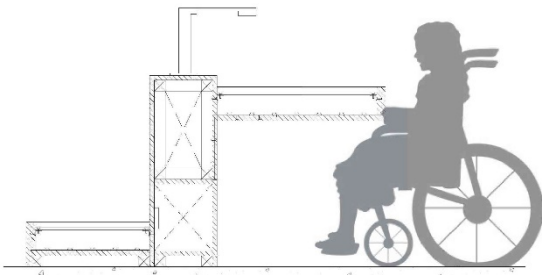
Above: Seating nooks at (Left) Exploration Room, (Right) Workshop Lab



Above: Overview of the Exploration Room



Above: Varying heights of the Light Projection Activity Station



The decision to vary station heights is to intently and subtly invite greater physical accessibility for a diverse audience group. Whether walkers, wheelchairs, or prams, children and adults alike, are able to reach, feel, and explore every activity in each of the 6 zones WY-TO was in charge. The clever optimisation of spaces and stations further accentuated the child-led learning journey. Children could spontaneously huddle in their small groups to enjoy the activity together as a way of developing social skills and empathy. Furthering that, it is to result in a learning space that is made inviting for a large number of people. In this train of thought, placing the Calm Pod in between 2 highly stimulating zones is also intended to normalise taking a break and resetting before continuing the experiential journey.



Above: Individual calming spaces equipped with activities recommended to recentre or cope with excessive stimulation

Intuitive Design Solutions



Colours and textures are used throughout the art centre. While generously applied, they complement and contrast for a balanced visual composition. Easy on the eyes, they are also strategised for intuitive wayfinding and creating pockets of dwelling rooms without the instating walls and structures. An air of liveliness and engagement is further enhanced with the differently shaped lightweight coloured cloths hanging from above in the “Exploration” area. Experientially, they are added visual interests that incite curiosity ever so gently and inclusively. Children can look up and engage with the space in another manner, driven by their imagination.

“Everything in the art centre has a purpose. The lines on the floor instinctively guide you around the centre, while the carpet patterns can intuitively become a pocket of space for a shared dwelling moment,” says Yann. “It is part of engaging a visitor and meaningfully immersing them into the space. Beyond that, it is to, once again, provide them with options – to personalise their learning journey.”

*Left: Colour palette of the Keppel Centre for Art Education
Right: Graphic identity designed by WY-To Singapore*



Moving along to the different zones, WY-TO has made it very clear through a human-centric design approach to create conducive areas for learning through play. Whether through making 3-dimensional shapes made out of interlocking plywood pieces to encourage imagination, or through the informal library holding corner that facilitates bonding. Each of the zones is dedicated to promote a myriad of active and passive engagements held collectively.

Bringing Arts and Culture closer to The People with the Well-being Framework

Holistically designed for a supportive place of learning, WY-TO leveraged their research on the Well-Being Framework to magnify their intent. Out of the 12 Principles of Well-being developed for their research, 6 of them were applied to the Keppel Centre for Art Education. They provided a systemic overview of the direction and functioned as sensible benchmarks for the Team in interpreting research through design. These 6 principles are Active, Sensory, Playable, Neighbourly, Inclusive and Creative.

“When we design a public space, we analyse from different perspectives. While it is an art centre catering primarily for children, we should consider who else is with them and how we can make it work for them as well,” comments Yann. “And this touches on the Neighbourly and Inclusive Well-being Principles where the key idea is ensuring people care for one another and uplift each other in the process.”

Responding to the needs of a child-led environment and referencing the Playable principle, WY-TO successfully blends varying degrees of interventions to create intuitive agency opportunities within the centre.



Left, above: Calm Pod gently curved to provide privacy and security during mental respite.



Right, above: Gentle curves at larger group holding space near the washrooms that doubles up as an informal library for smaller clusters.

Corresponding with the Active and Inclusive Principles, more energetic spaces are wider, more open, and accompanied by stations and furniture. These “individual” islands assist as a sensorial guide for smooth navigation, making space accessible to a diverse audience. In the context of Keppel Centre for Arts Education, these islands can concurrently host a wheelchair-bound person and an active young child in the same zone, and look out for one another rather than avoid. These islands too, provide peace of mind for guardians to be passively involved in the child’s journey.



Left, above: Wider, open spaces to host both groups of people and various mobility options comfortably



Right, above: Cluster of children sharing an activity together



Left, above: Options for guided or independent learning



Right, above: Creative self-exploration through exhibited collection of art in the National Gallery Singapore

In the pursuit of realising the sense of agency through design, the Neighbourly Principle completes the intangible legacy of the learning discovery – feelings of achievement, sharing knowledge through combined play, showing, and empathy, among many others. The unique blend of research and honest human-centric methodology has allowed the design to pave the continuous streak of success the Keppel Centre for Art Education has with all visitors. “It is this simple concept of co-creating a conducive learning space from the stakeholders all the way to today’s visitors, that makes the experiential journey at the Keppel Centre for Art Education accessible to many, yet tailored to one,” says Yann. “And we are very happy to receive feedback of many returning visits from everyone!”

About WY-TO Singapore: WY-TO Singapore is a holistic built environment design practice that specialises in developing integrative experiential frameworks for sustainable cities in the context of tropical equatorial Southeast Asia climates. With expertise in Experiential Design, we research and develop people-centric concepts at the scales of towns to cultural placemaking through visitor journeys. Our Team works at the intersection of various stakeholders to co-create inclusive plans by going beyond physical design boundaries. We focus on re-establishing and programming a sense of place, guided by the interrelation of culture and heritage, distinctive to Southeast Asia. We celebrate the diversity that communities shape through comprehensive and curated systemic processes. We enrich cultural identities and nurture accessible experiences for all.

We are committed to the belief of adapting contextual practices to meet global planetary objectives with a green conscience and collaborative mindset for cities, places and communities to be progressive, agile and healthy.

About Well-being for All: 'Well-being for All' is the result of a year-long inquiry into research and practice across the fields of Urban Planning, Architecture, Urban Health, Sociology and Public Policy, informed by our background in the tropical built environment.

This research is a grant recipient of Good Design Research by [DesignSingapore Council](#).

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