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## Singaporean artist Robert Zhao's flora and fauna photographs acquired by Tate collection in Britain



Robert Zhao's *A Guide To The Flora And Fauna Of The World* was originally commissioned by the Singapore Biennale in 2013. PHOTOS: ROBERT ZHAO, COURTESY OF SHANGHART GALLERY

**Shawn Hoo**

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**SINGAPORE** – Singaporean artist Robert Zhao's *A Guide To The Flora And Fauna Of The World* has been acquired by the prestigious Tate collection in Britain.

Originally commissioned by the Singapore Biennale in 2013, Zhao's work is an eccentric encyclopaedia cataloguing organisms changed by human intervention – from square apples in South Korea to the man-made flowerhorn cichlid (also known as the luohan).

The multidisciplinary artist was recently selected to represent Singapore at the Venice Biennale in 2024, where he will present an exhibition that continues his longstanding engagement with the relationship between nature and culture.

The 40-year-old, who is in Europe as part of his site recce for the Venice Biennale, tells The Straits Times that he was “honoured when Tate got in touch with its interest to learn more about the work” and “pleasantly surprised” when the acquisition was completed.

On how his work resonates with contemporary issues, Zhao adds: “Our understanding of nature, or of the world in general, is shaped by both truth and fiction and, sometimes, the lines are more blurred than we imagine.”

Dr Sook-kyung Lee, senior curator of international art at the Hyundai Tate Research Centre: Transnational, who was involved in the acquisition, says “this particular work was identified as an acquisition candidate for its formal and thematic strength in questioning humankind’s relationship with nature”.

The 53-year-old adds: “This acquisition enabled Tate to broaden its representation of art from South-east Asia, while also building on innovative approaches to contemporary photography in the collection.”

The acquisition of Zhao’s work has been more than two years in the making and a milestone for the work, which has been exhibited internationally in cities such as Moscow, Hong Kong, Melbourne, Arles, Amsterdam and Beijing.

Mr Goh Chun Aik, 31, director of ShanghART Singapore, says Zhao is the first Singaporean artist represented by the gallery: “We are very happy that his continued efforts over the years and the importance of his work have been seen and recognised.”

The gallery, founded in China and located at Gillman Barracks, helped facilitate the sale.

A Guide To The Flora And Fauna Of The World is accompanied by an artist book – designed by Hanson Ho and Stephanie Ng – which won the Design of the Year award at the President’s Design Award and the Gold Pencil from the New York One Show Design Annual Awards in 2014.

Other works that the Tate has acquired in the past include Singaporean artist Ming Wong’s Life Of Imitation (2009) – on display at the Tate Modern – and those by the late Singapore-born artist Kim Lim, who received a solo show at the Tate Britain in 2020.



The artist book for A Guide To The Flora And Fauna Of The World won the Design of the Year award at the President's Design Award. PHOTO: COURTESY OF SHANGHART GALLERY

Those curious about Zhao's work can visit an ongoing exhibition of Singapore, Very Old Tree at the National Museum Singapore or check out [Albizia, an immersive performance installation on at the Esplanade Theatre Studio](#) from Aug 31 to Sept 3.

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An advertisement for The Straits Times' anniversary. On the left, there is a photograph of two round, yellow sugar rolls with a white filling, resting on a wooden cutting board. On the right, there is a dark blue background with white text. The text reads: "Enjoy a sugar roll on us in celebration of **The Straits Times' anniversary!**" Below this, it says "This giveaway is valid from July 12 to 31, exclusively for ST subscribers, while stocks last." At the bottom right, there is an orange button that says "REDEEM NOW!". In the bottom right corner, there is a small illustration of a birthday cake with candles and balloons.

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