

Singapore Woos Millionaires With Murakami, Leibovitz

By Frederik Balfour - Jun 27, 2012 1:00 AM GMT+0800

What's the connection between racing car driver [Lewis Hamilton](#), Michelin-starred chef [Joel Robuchon](#) and [New York](#) gallery owner Sundaram Tagore? The answer is Singapore.

The city-state's relentless quest to attract money and millionaires, which includes the world's first nighttime Formula One race, \$10 billion on two casino resorts and a private gold vault, has now drawn some international galleries to an enclave that once housed British soldiers.

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An archival print of Andy Warhol taken in 1976 in New York by Annie Leibovitz. The print is showing at Sundaram Tagore Gallery which is opening in September at Singapore's Gillman Barracks. Photographer: Annie Leibovitz/ Contact Press Images via Bloomberg

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[Gillman Barracks](#) will commence business in September with the simultaneous openings of 13 art spaces including [Sundaram Tagore Gallery](#), [Takashi Murakami](#)'s Kaikai Kiki Gallery and [ShanghArt](#) of [Shanghai](#).

The project is a joint effort by Economic Development Board, the National Arts Council and the landlord, [JTC Corp.](#), a state-linked infrastructure developer. Sundaram Tagore, gallery founder, says the government's role is a mixed blessing.

"The plus is you have top officials' support," Tagore says. "you get the right curators and the ability to make things happen very quickly. On the downside you are not entirely autonomous in terms of marketing and that's very important."

Asian Millionaires

The potential in the region is growing fast. A June report by [Capgemini SA \(CAP\)](#) and RBC Wealth Management said Asia-Pacific millionaires outnumbered those in [North America](#)



"Wet Face," a charcoal-on-paper drawing from 2011 by Filipino artist Kiko Escora. Escora's works go on sale at the Drawing Room Gallery in Gillman Barracks in September 2012. Source: The Drawing Room Gallery via Bloomberg

Enlarge image



An artist impression of Gillman Barracks. The cluster of galleries will be housed in a former British military compound that will be open to the public in September 2012. Source: Singapore Economic Development Board via Bloomberg

Enlarge image



"Church Gate Station, Western Railroad Line, Bombay, India, 1995" by Sebastiao Salgado. The gelatin silver print will be shown at Sundaram Tagore Gallery in September 2012. Photographer: Sebastiao Salgado/Amazonas Images via Bloomberg

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A sculpture in stainless steel entitled

for the first time. Singapore has 91,200 U.S. dollar millionaires, more than regional rival Hong Kong, with 83,600. It also has the most number per capita -- almost one in six-- of any country in the study.

Gillman Barracks is a far cry from Beijing's 798 Art District or New York's Chelsea, areas that evolved when artists and galleries seeking cheap rents and lots of space moved in.

The former British compound consists of 14 separate buildings. Most will be used as gallery space -- there will be about 20 galleries eventually -- and others will house the Centre for Contemporary Arts Singapore and international artist residences opening next year.

The first 13 galleries were selected from among about 30 applicants by a government-appointed committee.

"The deliberate way we have gone about developing is quite unique," says Eugene Tan, program director of the Lifestyle Programme Office of the Singapore [Economic Development Board](#). "Others have grown organically, but that has also been their weakness."

Government Support

Government support was a big selling point for Cesar Villalon, whose Manila-based gallery [The Drawing Room](#) is opening a 200 square meter space at Gillman. "With the EDB on top of it we felt the place would be promoted properly," Villalon says.

Previous efforts by Singapore to create a cluster of galleries have met with limited success. The refurbished Police Station on Hill St., which became the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, only had space for a handful of commercial galleries on the ground floor.

An attempt to create a cluster of galleries in a warehouse complex next to the container port suffered from a dearth of business.

"The site was not ideal," says Tan.

Eighteen months ago Singapore launched the government-backed [Art Stage Singapore](#), the city's response to the [Hong Kong International Art Fair](#), which is entirely private. That followed the opening in 2010 of Swiss-backed Singapore Freeport Pte also built a tax-free maximum-security vault for art, gold and valuables at Changi International airport.

"Transfor-mers II" from 2010 by Filipino duo Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan. Alfredo and Aquilizan's works go on sale at the Drawing Room Gallery in Gillman Barracks. Source: The Drawing Room Gallery, Manila via Bloomberg

Enlarge image



A pastel-on-paper drawing in 2012 by Filipino artist Jose Legaspi. Legaspi's works go on sale at the Drawing Room Gallery in Gillman Barracks, a cluster of galleries housed in a former British military compound in Singapore. Source: The Drawing Room Gallery via Bloomberg

Experimental Space

Gillman Barracks is a 15-minute drive from the city center, which ShanghArt owner Lorenz Helbling sees as a plus.

"Hong Kong is too much of a shopping center," Helbling says by telephone. "The barracks is away from the city and has an arts center too. There's more space for experimentation."

Gillman's lower rents are a major factor too. Tagore said his new 4,400 square-foot space in Gillman Barracks will cost about the same to rent as his 2400 square-foot gallery in Hong Kong's trendy Soho district.

He's bringing photographers [Annie Leibovitz](#), [Edward Burtynsky](#) and Sebastiao Salgado to Singapore; [Japan's](#) Ota Fine Arts will exhibit Yayoi Kusuma. ShanghArt will sell works by Chinese photographer Yang Fudong, and [Indonesia's](#) Equator Art Projects of Jakarta, Agus Suwage, whose works fetch as much as \$300,000.

Content will be monitored. The Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts will ensure that galleries are aware of "certain sensitivities in Singapore such as race and religion and take care not to tread on them," says Tan.

Superior Infrastructure

Singapore has also used the casinos by [Las Vegas Sands Corp. \(LVS\)](#) and [Genting Singapore Plc \(GENS\)](#) -- with theme park and restaurants by Robuchon, Wolfgang Puck and other international chefs -- to help boost tourist numbers last year to a record 13.2 million, more than double the island's population.

With the [Singapore Art Museum](#) well established and the new [National Art Gallery](#) set to open in 2015, the city boasts a better arts infrastructure, says David Elliott, a curator and former director of the [Biennale of Sydney](#).

However Hong Kong is closing the gap. Its M+ museum, opening in 2017, on June 13 a \$170 million donation of contemporary Chinese art from Swiss collector Uli Sigg that will anchor the museum's permanent collection.

"Now it's going to put pressure on [Singapore](#) to decide exactly what its center of activities and collecting should be," Elliott says.

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