OH! EXPERIENCE:
SINGAPORE’S ONLY ART WALKABOUT

OH! has been held over 3 editions at Niven Road, Marine Parade and Tiong Bahru in 2009, 2011 and 2012 respectively. We are grateful to have the support of many art-loving volunteers, who are not just passionate about the arts, but also strongly identify with our unique missions to:

1) Outreach to people not usually interested in arts and culture,
2) Create alternative, participative models for experiencing arts and heritage,
3) Create shared memories and define the space we live in as extensions of our lives.

What does our mission mean to visitors? The OH! experience for the visitors is really about:

1) Interacting with art closely, e.g. examining edible art, an ang ku kueh made in the mould of the artist’s fingerprint, taking fun photos with an anamorphic artwork, feeling the textures of the installation pieces, or even trying to make a wish at our OH! Tiong Bahru Wishing Well.
2) Learning about the neighbourhood, architecture and history. Guides shared community stories, and local artists also created work based on the identities of the areas, e.g. Zhao Renhui’s work featured the lost songbird corner at Tiong Bahru, Marc Gabriel Loh’s installation touched on Tiong Bahru’s nickname, Den of Beauties, as wealthy Chinese businessmen used to visit their mistresses in the area.
3) Active participation. Given the informal setting in homes, as compared to museums or galleries, a lot of questions are asked and discussion generated during the tours. More than 50 independent blog posts and reviews have been written, and the interest is also reflected in tweets and Facebook updates. Many of the visitors have followed us from the 1st edition in Niven Road, and some have become volunteers in the following editions, opening up their homes, or volunteering as guides.
OH! EXPERIENCE:
SINGAPORE’S ONLY ART WALKABOUT

Each OH! edition has involved 60, 100 and 100 volunteers respectively. The majority of our volunteers are involved in leading the OH! tours and the remainder participate in logistic and operations related duties. Each OH! volunteer guide is taken through a comprehensive arts education and introductory docent training program developed by the OH! team, to ensure that they, as guides, and the visitors would all have enjoyable, enriching and unusual experiences. The program is as follows:

1) Introduction Workshop (3 hours)
This is a crash course on contemporary art, and focuses on the skills and knowledge required to share and present ideas about art in a simple way.

2) Follow-up Workshop (3 hours)
This is a second workshop to teach communications skills and enhance the presentation skills of our volunteers. Our repeat volunteer guides would be on hand to talk about their past guiding experiences, to relate tips on building rapport with OH! visitors and pointers for creating a more interesting experience for everyone involved.

3) Independent Studies
The OH! team provides regular updates of information such as the artists biography, artwork commentaries and background stories of the communities, to help volunteers have a richer understand of every edition of OH!. Some volunteers also work with the artists to produce the artwork. Each volunteers spends an estimated time of 4 to 8 hours of off-site study, to familiarise themselves with the material.

4) Walkthrough
The artistic director and/or the OH! manager will lead volunteer guides on a 3 hours walkthrough of the tour, to share exciting community and heritage stories, give an overview of the neighbourhood, share anecdotes about the public spaces discovered through research or interviews with residents, and describe special features of the architecture of the area. The aim is to provide a multi-layered commentary to our visitors, to help them discover secrets about the neighbourhood and enhance their appreciation of seemingly “usual” surroundings. Artists insights on the artworks are also discussed with volunteers, to enable more meaningful discussion with visitors.

Following the popularity of OH! Marine Parade, we had 250 volunteer applications for the most recent OH! Tiong Bahru, and had to limit final participants to just 80 people. Our volunteers come from many different walks of life, 10% are retirees and executives aged 50 and above, 45% are tertiary students and 45% are PMEBs. 30% of our volunteers are foreigners, and we believe that participating in the OH! experience gives them a better understanding of Singapore’s identity, landscape and provides deeper connections to the local community.