

SICC SUCCESSFULLY HOSTS VIRTUAL AND IN-PERSON ART EXHIBITION IN THE ERA OF NEW NORM

BRIEF

Business in Malaysia cautiously reopened when the Recovery Movement Control Order was announced in June, where majority of corporate sectors were allowed to resume, while museums and art galleries around Malaysia permitted to receive visitors. Sabah International Convention Centre (SICC) reopened its doors to welcome MICE activities, operate under strict compliance of public health safety SOP to prevent the spread of COVID-19. However, the mood in the state capital city Kota Kinabalu remained somber.

To reconnect with the local community, support and form a bond with the local art community, SICC initiated and launched its inaugural community art exhibition; **#MASKED – Making peace with our limitations**. SICC's #MASKED art event offered artists to showcase their innovative and creative works of art over a 3-day exhibition. The theme of the event focuses on creations conceived during the period of the artists' isolation during coronavirus pandemic lockdown and explores their interpretation of the new future.

HIGHLIGHTS

Main objectives were met: to revive venue activities and generate brand awareness, the art event was a showcase of SICC's exhibition hall, offered virtual experience through live-streaming, venue's flexibility was tested successfully that it has the ability to adapt to innovative events and transformed into a spacious art gallery. SICC collaborated with art event coordinator Jared Abdul Rahman, event project partners, Sabah Cultural Board and Sabah Art Gallery to create the first hybrid contemporary art exhibition in Sabah.

The theme of the event is pandemic art which is a movement that has global appeal, #MASKED included installation art, performance, sculpture, multi-media, craft, paintings, sketching, photography all combined with a common theme of art forms created during coronavirus lockdown; this exhibition provided opportunities for the local community to participate in a world-class event without the hassle of overseas travel restrictions. The interactive event programme allowed artists to conduct art workshops, sell their artwork in the pop-up gallery, while hybrid Q&A sessions engaged with visitors and online attendees via live-streaming of guest hosts conducting virtual tour.

Overall assessment and achievement of the event include meeting targeted number of visitors, a healthy number of artists participated in the exhibition and adherence to SOP. The event received overwhelming interest from the art community resulting in 80 distinct artists and art collectives featuring 595 pieces of artwork. Following the success of SICC's first signature art event, a quarterly art event at the venue is now at the planning phase to launch end of December.

CHALLENGES

SICC had just opened for 3 weeks when the Malaysian government imposed a nationwide coronavirus lockdown in March banning all public events. The sudden disruption in MICE industry from COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant impact on events booked at SICC; initial uncertainties meant indefinite postponement and cancellations of events at the venue.

At the planning stage for #MASKED, there was a restriction on the number of people allowed in a room at any one time due to SOP in place, to adhere to physical distancing rules and limitation on mass gatherings, pre-registration to the event was required to capture details for contact tracing, as well as to limit number of visitors per day.

Going beyond the health regulation requirements, the traffic flow of the exhibition is designed that visitors do not cross path, separate doors for entry and exit, no more than 150 people in the 1,7010sqm hall during the pre-registered 1-hr viewing session. In addition to the enhanced disinfection schedule at the venue, the hall was closed midday for sanitizing. Hand sanitizers are placed at all strategic locations and the closing time was set at 5pm each day.

Event: #MASKED – Community Art Exhibition
Organizer: Sabah International Convention Centre
Dates: July 24 – 26, 2020
Attendance: 900 adhering to SOP, live-streaming 2 sessions per day by virtual guide