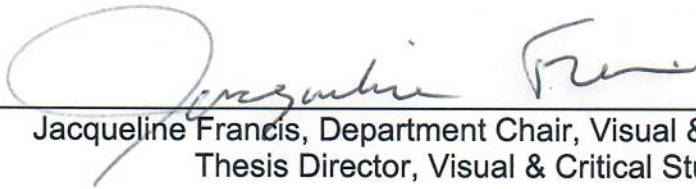


**VISUALIZING THE EVERYDAY:
POPULAR PORTRAYALS OF PUBLIC HOUSING ESTATES
& NATIONAL IDENTITY IN SINGAPORE**

By **Charmaine Koh**

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Masters of Art in Visual & Critical Studies
California College of the Arts
Date: December 7, 2017

Approved By:



Jacqueline Francis, Department Chair, Visual & Critical Studies
Thesis Director, Visual & Critical Studies



Karen Fiss, Faculty Advisor

Abstract

Public housing does not typically evoke notions of beauty or character. Images of public housing taken amid the contemporary impulse to document everyday life seem trivial and mundane. Yet, in Singapore, such images fuel a popular romanticization of the country's public housing estates, recasting them as trendy signifiers of Singaporean-ness where they were previously often dismissed as nondescript cultural voids.

I examine a mode of portraying Singapore's public housing estates that has gained especial prominence—one that presents the facades of individual blocks as pleasing patterns and pastoral scenes, and curates select tokens of everyday life. It exemplifies the potential of shared everyday environments to generate collective identity, aided by digital technologies that democratize image production and circulation. However, it also forms a ready vehicle for nostalgia, consumer marketing, and national narratives, which risk producing fixed notions of Singaporean-ness and eliding other realities that do not fit the mold.

Keywords

Singapore, public housing, national identity, everyday, nostalgia, pastoral, digital media, consumer marketing

Table of Contents

Introduction	4 - 8
A “visual love affair”	9 - 22
- Technological enablers	10 - 11
- Nostalgia	11 - 13
- Seeing through grids	13 - 22
Pastoralizing the HDB heartland	22 - 34
The everyday made bite-sized	34 - 42
Conclusion	42 - 44
Annex	45 - 46
Bibliography	47 - 49