

RATIONAL CONVERSATIONS

ALFIAN
SA'AT

A

Manifesto for
Arts Funding



EPIGRAM

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PRESENTED ON 2 MARCH 2018 AT
AN INSTITUTE OF POLICY STUDIES-
SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM ROUNDTABLE
DIALOGUE ON “WHITHER ARTS FUNDING:
PRIORITIES, VALUES AND CONTROL”.

1

To fund the arts is
to fund democracy.

2

Democracy
involves dissent.

Democracy involves debate, the contest of arguments, the sharing of different opinions. In such situations, dissent is inevitable. And this dissent deserves public funding because this is the way to cultivate a public sphere, or to create the conditions in which both assent and dissent may emerge without fear or favour.

3

The public
consists of diverse
minority groups.

Arts funding is about disbursing public money according to public needs. But what exactly do we mean by the public? It cannot mean only the majority. Popular sovereignty does not mean tyranny of the majority. As much as democracy requires majority rule, it also requires minority rights. In between elections, minority views must be given fair play in the legislature, the media and also the arts. Thus, funding guidelines have to address the needs of a dynamic and diverse public, not a static and homogeneous one.



Alfian Sa'at is a Resident Playwright with W!LD RICE. His published works include three collections of poetry, *One Fierce Hour*, *A History of Amnesia* and *The Invisible Manuscript*; a collection of short stories, *Corridor*; a collection of flash fiction, *Malay Sketches*; two collections of plays; as well as the published play *Cooling Off Day*.

Alfian has been nominated ten times for Best Original Script at the Life! Theatre Awards, winning in 2005 for *Landmarks*, in 2010 for *Nadirah*, in 2013 for *Kakak Kau Punya Laki (Your Sister's Husband)* and in 2016 for *Hotel* (with Marcia Vanderstraaten).

In 2001, he won the Golden Point Award for Poetry as well as the National Arts Council Young Artist Award for Literature. He has also been nominated for the Singapore Literature Prize three times, for *Corridor* (1999, Commendation Prize), *A History of Amnesia* (2004) and his translation of the novel *The Widower* (2016).

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Rational Conversations by Epigram Books is a series of essays and speeches by prominent Singaporeans on issues close to their heart.

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“

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