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A documentary exhibition on the granddaddy of avant-garde art shows is now on at the National Museum

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DOCUMENTA is one of the biggest contemporary art shows in the world today, drawing about 600,000 visitors to the small and quiet German town of Kassel every five years.

For those who have never had a chance to go to the exhibition, there is a documentary exhibition about documenta in town now.

Held at the National Museum, archive in motion: 50 Jahre/Years documenta 1955-2005 is an exhibition split into 11 rooms and chronicling the half-century of the exhibition's colourful history.

Initiated by artist and art educator Arnold Bode in 1955, documenta is the granddaddy of avant-garde art shows in the world. It is curated by a different person each year, and controversy usually arises over the choice of artists.

Visitors to the exhibition here can browse through old photographs and brochures, and watch rare archive footage of the 11 editions of the art show.

They can even look at quirky historical documents such as a curator's personal shortlist of artists – always a controversial decision – complete with cancellations and additions. Eleven commissioned works by young contemporary artists are also featured.



WHEEL OF FORTUNE: This artwork by Andreas Seltzer, titled *The Biiig Is Coming Into Vogue*, features a lottery-ticket drum filled with tickets bearing the names of artists.

Curator Michael Glasmeier, 56, who is also an art history lecturer in Bremen, Germany, says: "This is informative for people who haven't had the chance to go to documenta. Maybe some of them will think about going to Kassel to see it after this."

The exhibition, jointly organised by the Goethe Institut and the museum, is also a journey into documenta's ups and downs.

For example, the documenta 6 room features pictures and information about Walter De Maria's infamous Vertical Earth Kilometer in 1977. The American artist drove a 1km-long brass rod into the ground in Kassel so that only a few centimetres remain visible.

The exhibit provoked angry responses from the city's inhabitants, who endured months of noise pollution from the drilling. But it still stands there today as one of the classics of conceptual art.

In tandem with this exhibition is a smaller one called Picturing Singapore, which depicts the Republic's own social and artistic developments during the same period of 1955-2005.

The exhibits, a mix of reproduced documents from sources such as art organisations and the Government, include old Courtesy Campaign posters and documentary photos of performance art pieces.

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> archive in motion: 50 Jahre/Years documenta 1955-2005 and Picturing Singapore are on at the National Museum until July 31. Opening hours are 10am to 6pm daily. Admission is free.