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# A new chapter for an old canvas

Singapore Art Museum to lease former Catholic High building, expand premises

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WITH its visitor numbers on the rise, expansion is on the cards for the Singapore Art Museum (SAM).

The museum, which is housed in the former St Joseph's Institution, will lease the plot of land at Queen Street adjacent to its own to add to its existing floor space. It will spend at least \$5 million retrofitting the building there, the former Catholic High School (picture).

Work on this currently-vacant structure – where luminaries such as Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Lim Swee Say and Attorney-General Chao Hick Tin attended school – is expected to be completed in the second half of next year.

When ready, the premises will contribute another 3,000 square metres to the museum, half of which will be devoted to local and international contemporary art collections.

There are 44 museums in Singapore,



both public and private.

The SAM is at present the third largest at 10,000 sq m, behind the National Museum (18,000 sq m) and the Asian Civilisations Museum (14,000 sq m).

A National Heritage Board (NHB) spokesperson told TODAY that attendance at the SAM has grown by 10 per cent in the past 12 months.

## WITH ART AT HEART

WHAT THE WORKS WILL ENTAIL

- Museum's first expansion of display space since its 1996 opening
- 3,000 sq m of space will be added to the current 10,000 sq m
- Building's weightload will be reinforced so heavy artworks can be accommodated
- The facade of the 72-year-old building will be retained

The museum's assistant director for collections, Mr Low Sze Wee, 37, said the facade of the 72-year-old building will be retained.

"Besides climate control and other works, the building's weightload will also have to be reinforced to accommodate heavy artworks," he added.

Mr Michael Koh, 46, chief executive

officer of the NHB, told TODAY that the SAM's Queen Street lease is for nine years.

"We are extremely pleased that there is an opportunity to grow the visual arts base in Singapore," he said.

"Since the SAM opened in 1996, it has not expanded its display space. We are re-programming its galleries to bring more of our paintings to the fore and to introduce them to people."

The art museum currently displays about 200 pieces of works – which make up just 3 per cent of its permanent collection of 7,500, valued at \$64 million.

Both modern and contemporary art will continue to be shown at the museum until the National Art Gallery is up and running in 2012.

Then, the SAM will reposition itself as Singapore's first contemporary art museum, said Mr Low.

Catholic High, which moved to bigger premises in Bishan in 1992, was founded in 1935 by the French missionary Reverend Father Edward Becheras. It takes in both Catholic and non-Catholic students and was identified as a Special Assistance Plan (SAP) school in 1979. According to its website, the school has produced 19 President's Scholars as well as several key Singapore leaders.