

6. Hybrid Art Places in Singapore: Platform Fundamentals, Negotiated Typologies, Hyper Hybridity

This chapter presents the results of empirical analyses on Hybrid Art Places in Singapore, primarily based on Instagram image datasets and supplemented by synthetic visualization tools. The findings are discussed to support the hypotheses in the previous chapters regarding the structural dynamics, grammar, and logic of hybrid space. First, the baseline distributions of Instagram images across five museums show how intersections of art, people, and architecture drive media production and reveal fundamental differences in how places are represented in social media. Second, media identities are surfaced through self-organizing maps, which uncover both recurring fundamentals of representation and typological variations across venues. Thirdly, the identification of hyper-hybrid places demonstrates where feedback loops, virality, and algorithmic acceleration concentrate, resulting in disproportionate levels of media visibility. Taken together, these results substantiate three structural conditions of Hybrid Art Space: platform rules as structuring agents, algorithmic acceleration (visible in the disproportionate outputs of hyper-hybrid venues), and hybrid negotiation (visible in the typological variation of media identities).

6.1 Cases (Singapore): Five Contrasting Venues

To ground the analysis, I focus on five museums in Singapore that span a range of scales, missions, and exhibitions. They provide a comparative cross-section of the city's cultural landscape and, at the same time, function as test cases for developing methods to analyze hybrid art spaces. In addition to the five museums, I collected data on all other art venues identified in Singapore's official cultural planning documents. This broader dataset, the *Singapore Collection*, serves as a control group against which the data from the five museums can be compared.

ArtScience Museum (ASM): A privately operated museum within the iconic Marina Bay Sands complex, designed by Moshe Safdie in the form of a lotus flower. The venue is internationally recognized for its digital and interactive exhibitions, such as the permanent teamLab installation. Its exhibition halls are primarily underground.

National Gallery Singapore (NG): Housed in two heritage buildings in the civic district, NG hosts one of the largest collections of Southeast Asian art. Its curatorial approach is eclectic, featuring major retrospectives, participatory installations, and didactic displays that coexist. The gallery strikes a balance between monumental architecture and varied exhibition formats.

Asian Civilizations Museum (ACM): Situated on the riverfront, the ACM showcases archaeological artifacts and material culture from across Asia. Its displays are largely object-centric and oriented toward heritage interpretation rather than immersion.

Center for Contemporary Art (CCA): Located within the Gillman Barracks cluster at the time of analysis (2016-2020), the CCA, now permanently closed, was affiliated with Nanyang Technological University and featured an exhibition center alongside artist residencies. On a smaller scale, it cultivated a networked identity tied to artist communities and educational programming.

The Substation: A historic independent arts centre located in a converted shophouse, long associated with experimental practices and community engagement. While its direction has shifted over time, it remains event-driven, hosting performances, talks, and grassroots cultural activities.

6.2 Baseline: What People Actually Post

The starting point for understanding hybrid art spaces is to ask a simple but crucial question: what do people actually post when they visit an art venue? Using the labeled Instagram dataset (500 images per museum, plus a comparative city sample, the Singapore collection, of 61 venues), I examined the distribution of content across seven categories: Art, People, Architecture, Practical Items, and their intersections (Art+People, People+Architecture, Art+Architecture). The images have been manually labeled, as described in the methodology outlined in Chapter 5.

Table 6. Distribution of the different content categories among the five museums. Tomarchio (2021, 2023a).

	National Gallery	Art Science Museum	The Substation	Asian Civilisations Museum	Centre for Contemporary Art	Control Group
Art	21 %	13 %	22%	33%	43 %	31 %
Art + People	23 %	62 %	13 %	11 %	11 %	16 %
People	6 %	2 %	32 %	24 %	16 %	21 %
People + Architecture	13 %	7 %	6 %	11 %	2 %	7 %
Architecture	12 %	9 %	7 %	12 %	3 %	15 %
Art + Architecture	16 %	4 %	2 %	2 %	6 %	2%
Practical Items	10 %	3 %	19 %	6 %	18 %	8%

Table 7. Distribution of content categories. “Alone” indicates stand-alone categories while “intersection” looks at the categories with more than one element. Tomarchio (2021, 2023a).

	NG	ASM	The Substation	ACM	CCA	Control Group
Alone	43 %	24 %	75 %	93 %	81 %	69 %
Intersection	57 %	73 %	25 %	7 %	19 %	23 %
Art	42 %	46 %	36 %	40 %	58 %	44 %
People	30 %	42 %	50%	39 %	30 %	34 %
Architecture	29 %	11 %	14 %	21 %	11 %	23 %

Two regularities appear consistently across the dataset. First, art itself dominates: in the majority of the venues, including the control group, the single largest share of images features artworks as isolated objects. This baseline holds for ACM (33% Art), CCA (43% Art), and the control group of 61 Singapore venues (31%). The museum visit continues to be framed primarily on social media through object-centered representation, extending long-standing traditions of visual documentation into the digital sphere. Second, intersections vary strongly by venue. Some institutions emphasize significant overlaps among art, people, and architecture, while others use stand-alone categories. For example:

✚ **ArtScience Museum (ASM):** 62% of images fall into *Art+People*, while stand-alone People or Architecture images are rare (2% and 9%, respectively). Although the architecture of the ASM is quite iconic and would, in theory, follow Instagrammability rules, this is not reflected in the image composition. The dark rooms, reflective surfaces, and responsive light fields of exhibitions such as *teamLab* installations create conditions where bodies and artworks are visually inseparable.

✚ **National Gallery Singapore (NG):** 23% of images are *Art+People*, alongside strong representations of Art and People as separate categories. Here, the curatorial design produces multiple affordances for compositing—immersive rooms, participatory prompts, and monumental architectural backdrops—so intersections occur through diverse rather than singular formats.

✚ **The Asian Civilizations Museum (ACM) and Center for Contemporary Art (CCA):** stand-alone categories dominate, with minimal intersections. ACM leans towards Art (33%) and People (24%), reflecting its object-focused displays.

CCA skews to Art (43%), which is interesting considering its event-based formats.

✚ **The Substation:** shows a different balance: 32% People and 19% Practical Items (e.g., posters, tickets). Here, the venue is represented less as a container of objects than as a social and informational node—a place where belonging is indexed through images of gatherings and signs rather than through art-people composites. These distributions point to a first structuring principle: what circulates online is patterned by the affordances of both the venue and the platform. Venues that invite people to position themselves within the image—whether before an immersive installation, a monumental façade, or a carefully staged threshold—create intersections that are highly legible on Instagram, while simultaneously enabling visitors to craft a personal, art-inflected media identity.

6.3 Fundamentals of Representation: Platform Rules as Structuring Agents

Looking beyond content categories, a second layer of analysis examines the aesthetic grammars through which art venues are represented on Instagram. By combining manual content labels with automated measures of visual properties (hue, saturation, luminosity, RGB balance), and clustering them using self-organizing maps (SOMs), it is possible to identify recurrent **fundamentals** that cut across venues. These are not venue-specific identities, but relatively stable attractors in the visual language of hybrid art spaces—patterns that reappear wherever certain curatorial or spatial conditions align with platform logics.

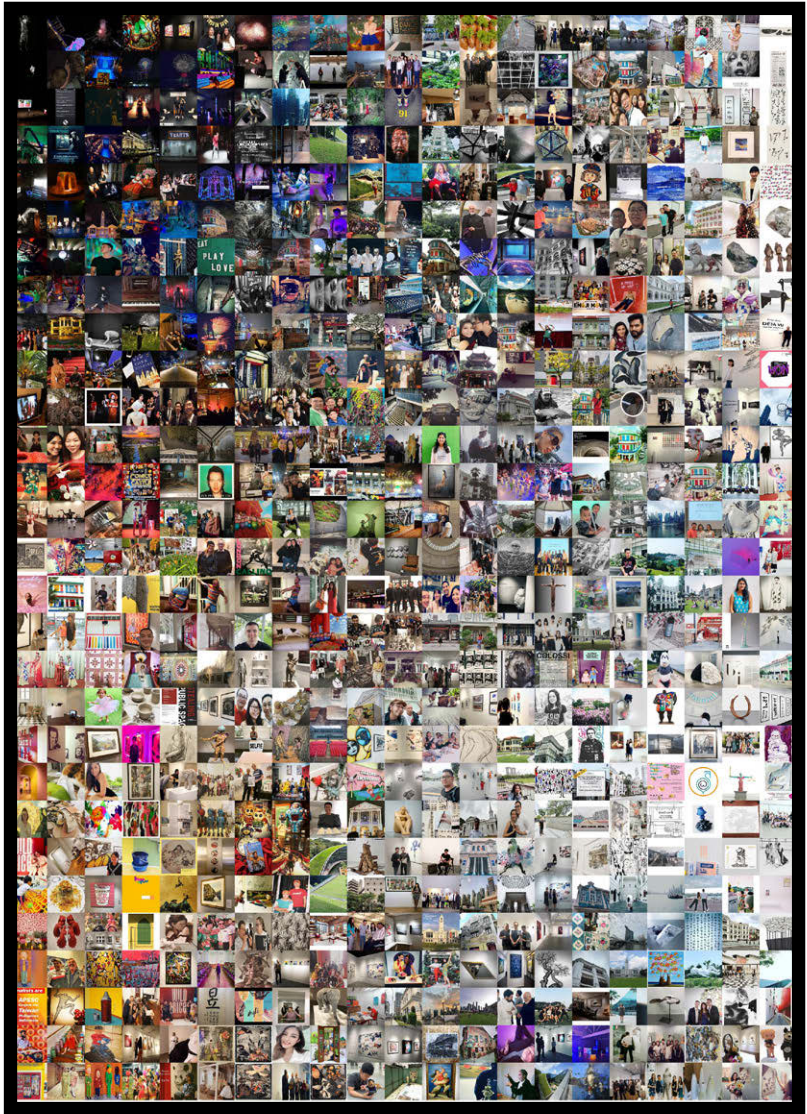


Figure 14. Self-organising map of images from different museums in singapore. It is possible to observe clusters where similar content also has similar visual properties. Diagram by the author. Originally published in Tomarchio (2021, 2023a).

✚ **White Box** | Characteristics: desaturated, high-key images; strong emphasis on objects alone; minimal human presence. Curatorial analog: the “white cube” gallery, where neutral walls serve as a backdrop for autonomous artworks.

✚ **Dark Immersive** | Characteristics: low-key palettes punctuated by luminous edges; silhouettes of bodies against light or projection fields; blurred boundaries between people and installation. Curatorial analog: the “black box” of performance and digital media, where darkness functions as an immersive frame.

✚ **Leisure Colourful** | Characteristics: saturated backgrounds in bright tones (yellows, pinks, neons); groups interacting playfully with artworks; emphasis on touch, movement, and collective participation. Curatorial analog: participatory or “experience-first” staging, where artworks double as playgrounds or backdrops.

These fundamentals demonstrate how platform rules act as structuring agents. Instagram’s algorithms do not simply amplify what exists; they shape what becomes visible and reproducible by privileging clean contrast, recognizable figures, and bright saturation. In turn, curators and designers increasingly stage environments that anticipate such grammars: minimalist galleries reinforce the White Box, digital immersive rooms align with Dark Immersive, and participatory installations fuel Leisure Colorful.

What emerges, therefore, is a feedback loop where aesthetic fundamentals circulate across venues, publics, and platforms. They condense into recognizable templates that make spaces *Instagrammable*, and in doing so, they influence both visitor behavior (how to pose, where to stand) and institutional choices (how to light, stage, or frame exhibitions).

In Singapore, all three fundamentals are present, though with different weights: galleries tilt towards White Box; large-scale immersive shows gravitate to Dark Immersive; and studios or pop-ups skew towards Leisure Colorful.

The fundamentals are not merely stylistic tendencies but structural anchors of hybrid art space, showing how the interplay of space, publics, and platform logics produces recurring visual languages that shape cultural visibility.

6.4 Typologies: How spatial arrangements are negotiated

Based on content analysis combined with automated analysis of visual properties, I also generated self-organizing maps (SOMs) for individual museums, enabling the identification of typologies of hybrid art places. These typologies capture the specific ways in which media identities are produced, and they highlight a crucial dimension of Hybrid Art Space: the fact that such identities are not fixed but negotiated. They emerge through the interplay of curatorial staging, visitor practices, and platform logics. The SOMs generated for each of the five Singaporean museums map how content categories (Art, People, Architecture, Practical Items) cluster together with aesthetic attributes such as hue, saturation, and luminosity. The resulting diagrams do not simply mirror curatorial intent; they provide a kind of digital fingerprint of how each venue circulates in the feed at a given moment. This fingerprint is dynamic, changing with new exhibitions and shifting publics, but it nonetheless offers a lens into the processes through which hybrid meanings are co-produced.

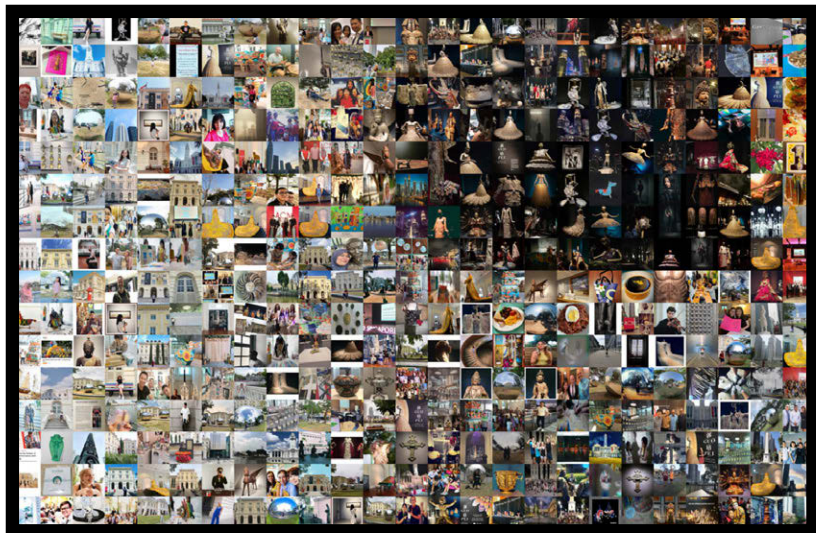


Figure 15. Self-organising map of the Asian civilisation museum. Diagram by the author. Originally published in Tomarchio (2021, 2023a).



Figure 16. Self-organising map of the Art Science Museum. Diagram by the author. Originally published in Tomarchio (2021, 2023a).

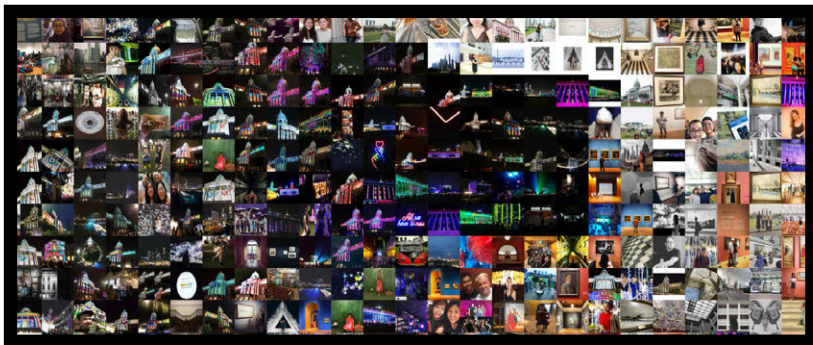


Figure 17. Self-organising map of the National Gallery. Diagram by the author. Originally published in Tomarchio (2021, 2023a).

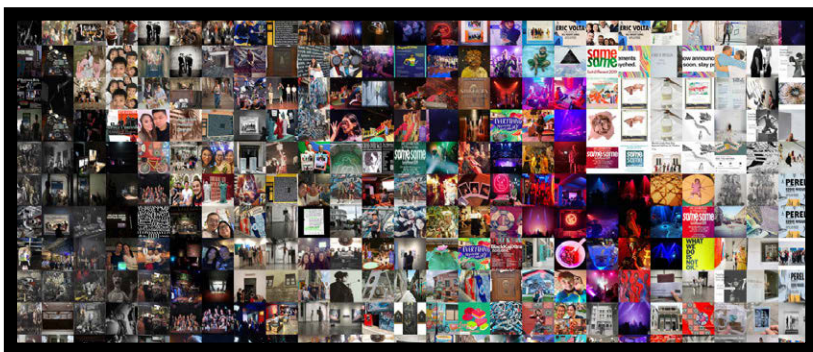


Figure 18. Self-organising map of The Substation. Diagram by the author. Originally published in Tomarchio (2021, 2023a).

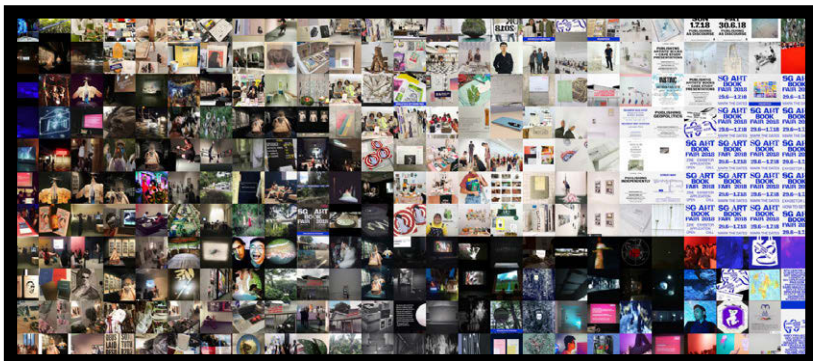


Figure 19. Self-organising map of the Centre for Contemporary Art. Diagram by the author. Originally published in Tomarchio (2021, 2023a).

One typology is that of the **immersive stage**, exemplified by the ArtScience Museum. Here, the SOM reveals a near collapse of the categories *Art + People*. Installations such as teamLab's *Future World* are designed to be entered, touched, and documented, so that the visitor's body becomes inseparable from the artwork. The dominant image is not of art as object, but of art as backdrop for self-insertion. Importantly, this is not a unilateral effect of curatorial choice. It is consolidated through visitor practices—posing, photographing, and sharing—and through platform amplification, as the museum itself recirculates user images. The identity of the ArtScience Museum as an “immersive stage” is therefore the outcome of a hybrid negotiation, co-authored across these different registers.

A second typology may be described as the **distributed museum**, a profile that characterizes institutions such as the National Gallery, the Asian Civilizations Museum, and the Center for Contemporary Art. In these cases, the SOMs show a plurality of clusters, with *Art*, *People*, and *Architecture* overlapping in diverse configurations. This reflects the heterogeneity of curatorial programs, ranging from heritage displays to participatory installations, as well as the multiplicity of visitor routines. Some visitors picture objects in isolation, others foreground architectural backdrops, and still others integrate themselves into participatory or immersive displays. The resulting media identity is not singular but distributed: the museum circulates simultaneously as an archive, as a civic monument, and as a social setting. Negotiation here operates less through one dominant routine than through a multiplicity of competing framings, none of which entirely subsumes the others.

The **event-based hub**, represented by The Substation, constitutes a third typology. Unlike object-centered museums, The Substation's media profile is dominated by clusters of *People* and *Practical Items*. Photographs of tickets, posters, and gatherings outweigh depictions of artworks or architecture. In this case, the venue's hybrid identity is not primarily derived

from curatorial intention but from community practice. What circulates online is the scene itself: the sense of belonging, conversation, and participation in a collective. The Substation's media identity demonstrates that hybrid negotiation does not always revolve around the art object; it may also foreground the social life that surrounds cultural events.

Taken together, these typologies illustrate that the identity of Hybrid Art Places is not the product of curatorial authorship alone, nor simply of visitor appropriation, but of a negotiated interaction between institutional framings, visitor practices, and platform affordances. In the immersive stage, negotiation crystallizes around the enactment of self-insertion routines; in the distributed museum, around the coexistence of multiple routines that reflect both curatorial heterogeneity and public plurality; in the event-based hub, around the prioritization of social context over art objects.

What these cases demonstrate is the **logic of Hybrid Negotiation**: the meanings of art spaces are not predetermined but continuously shaped, contested, and co-authored within hybrid media ecologies. Hybrid Art Spaces are therefore best understood as dynamic arenas in which publics and institutions negotiate visibility, value, and significance through the interlocking grammars of curatorial staging and platform circulation.

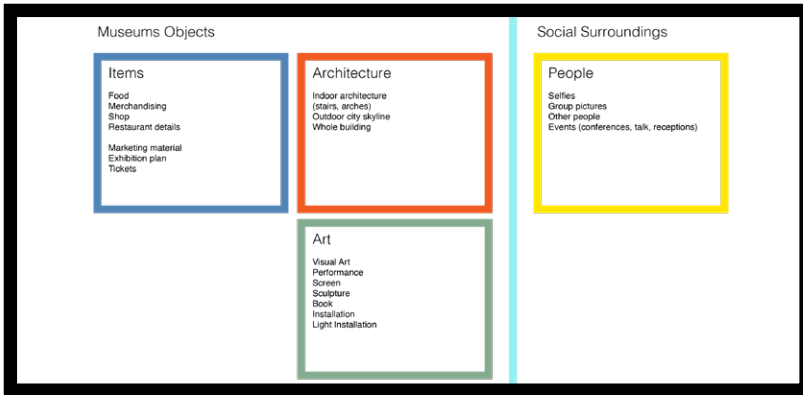


Figure 20. Labels in the elaboration of typologies. Diagram by the author. Originally published in Tomarchio (2021, 2023a).

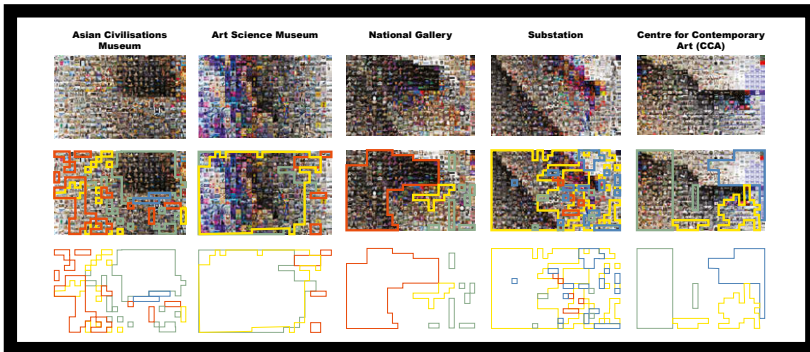


Figure 21. Typologies of the hybrid art place of museums. Diagram by the author. Originally published in Tomarchio (2021, 2023a).

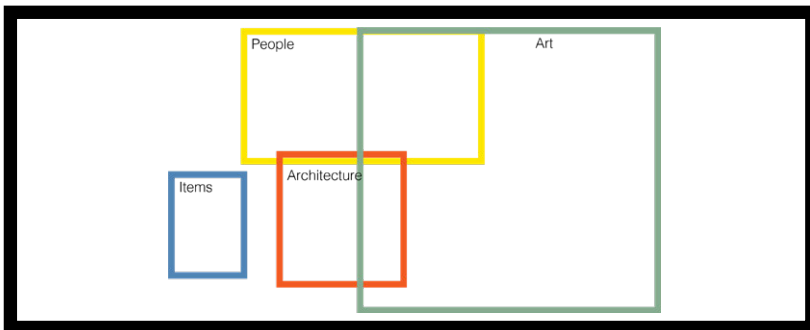


Figure 22. Scaled representation of the different clusters as mapped from the self-organising maps of the five museums and their intersections. Diagram by the author. Originally published in Tomarchio (2021, 2023a).

6.5 Hyper Hybrid Art Places: Definition, Mechanisms, and Empirical Grounding

A central finding of this study is the identification of a specific class of venues that I term Hyper Hybrid Art Places. These are art venues where the relationship between visitor numbers and social media posts is disproportionately amplified. Across the dataset, visitor numbers and media production are linearly correlated; in general, higher visitor numbers are associated with greater post volume. For most venues in Singapore, this relationship follows a stable trend with a relatively low coefficient of proportionality.

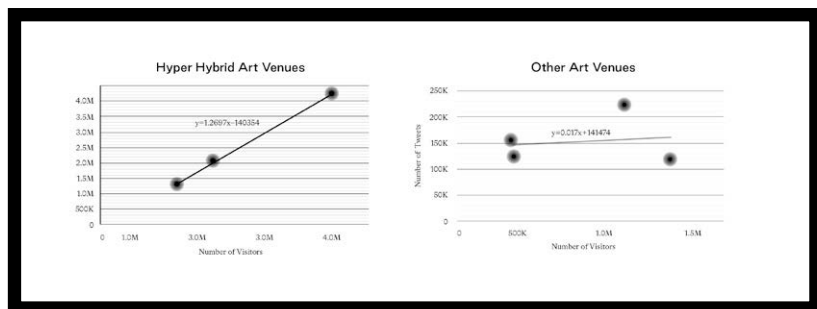


Figure 23. Comparison between the hyper and non-hyper hybrid art places, with the correlation between the number of visitors and the number of tweets in 2016 and 2017. Diagram by the author. Originally published in Tomarchio (2021, 2023b).

However, a small subset of venues diverges sharply from this baseline, producing up to seventy times more posts per visitor than expected.

Mathematically, hyper-hybridity can be defined as follows:

$$\text{Posts} > \beta \text{Visitors} \Rightarrow \text{Hyper-Hybrid}$$

Where β is the baseline proportionality coefficient derived from the majority of venues, a venue qualifies as hyper-hybrid when the post-to-visitor ratio exceeds this baseline by more than an order of magnitude.

In empirical terms, these venues are outliers whose media production cannot be explained solely by attendance. Hyper hybrid Places are therefore not simply popular. They are sites where physical attendance and digital circulation reinforce each other in recursive cycles of attention, producing visibility far greater than their visitor numbers would predict. This dynamic crystallizes the logic of algorithmic acceleration within Hybrid Art Space.

Drivers of Hyper Hybridity

The analysis suggests that this acceleration has two primary sources:

- ✦ **Material and curatorial factors.** Hyper hybrid venues typically stage immersive, spectacular, or participatory works—such as light-based environments, interactive installations, or monumental architecture—that lend themselves to photographic and performative appropriation. These settings generate images where visitors and art objects overlap, producing composites (Art + People, People + Architecture) that are particularly suited to social media circulation.
- ✦ **Platform logics.** Once in circulation, images from hyper hybrid venues are structurally advantaged by algorithms that privilege novelty, affect, and visual impact. Instagram’s Explore feed, for example, boosts saturated, affectively charged images that elicit engagement. This amplification increases visibility, attracting further visitors eager to replicate the circulating images, thereby sustaining the feedback loop between physical attendance and online dissemination.

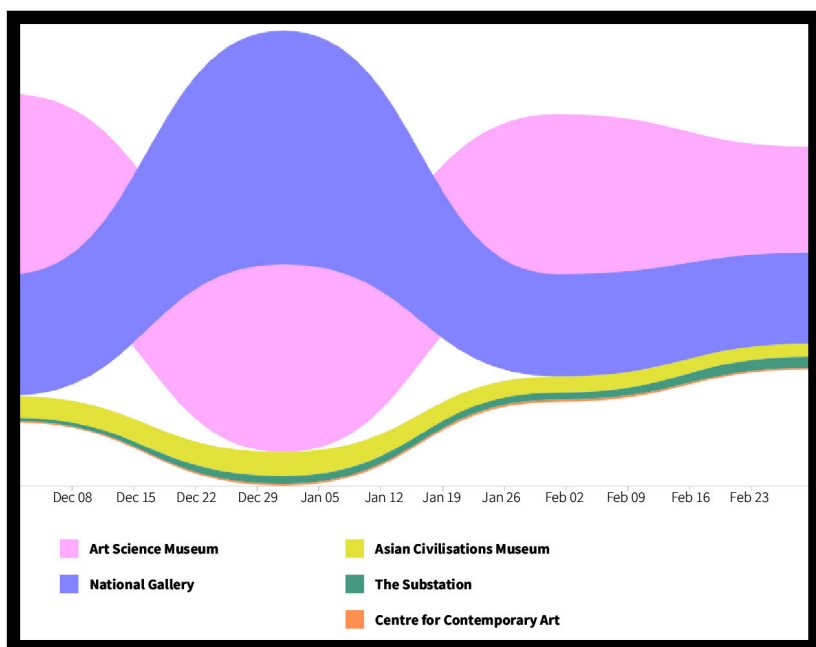


Figure 24. Comparison between production of images in Instagram from December 2019 to March 2020 among the five selected case studies. The two hyper venues (Art Science Museum and National Gallery in pink and blue, respectively) produced an average of 7,230 images in total, while the other three locations (light green for the Asian Civilisations Museum, dark green for The Substation, and orange for the Centre for Contemporary Art) produced an average of 450 pictures. Diagram by the author. Originally published in Tomarchio (2021, 2023a).

Looking back at the dataset, among the five case studies shown in Figure 24, two are hyper-hybrid art venues: the National Gallery and the Art Science Museum. While most non-hyper venues exhibit a predominance of stand-alone categories (Art alone, People alone, or Architecture alone), hyper-hybrid venues are dominated by intersectional categories.

At the ArtScience Museum, for example, 73% of posts fall into the cluster of intersections, reflecting installations such as *Future World* that integrate the visitor's body into the artwork. Similarly, at the National Gallery, the monumental colonial architecture accounts for a significant share of People +

Architecture images, with 57% falling within this intersection, effectively turning the institution itself into a stage for identity performance. This differs from the other venues and the control group, where standalone categories have more contributions.

Table 8. Distribution of merged content categories among the five museums. “Alone” indicates the sum of stand-alone categories (Art, People, Architecture) while “intersection” looks at the categories with more than one element (Art + People, Art + Architecture, People + Architecture). Tomarchio (2021, 2023a).

	National Gallery (Hyper)	Art Science Museum (Hyper)	The Substa- tion	Asian Civilisa- tions Museum	Centre for Contemporary Art	Control Group
Alone	43 %	24 %	75 %	93 %	81 %	69 %
Intersection	57 %	73 %	25 %	7 %	19 %	23 %

6.6 Conclusion

The empirical evidence from Singapore shows that three interacting forces pattern Hybrid Art Places.

- + Acceleration: Concentrated in hyper-hybrid places, acceleration occurs when spatial and curatorial affordances align with platform discovery, producing feedback loops that amplify circulation far beyond attendance figures.
- + Platform rules: These materialize as fundamentals of representation—stable visual grammars such as white box, dark immersive, and leisurely colorful—that structure how art is staged and circulated online.
- + Negotiation: Typologies emerge as negotiated identities, co-produced by institutions and publics through repeatable capture routines, which are dynamic over time and variable across sites.

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