IT'S unanimous. The visual arts scene is fully equipped and more than capable of supporting events such as the Singapore Art Show, which was opened last night by Dr Lee Boon Yang, Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts.

The Singapore Art Show 2005, organised by the National Arts Council (NAC), sells itself as the visual arts festival with something for everyone: A national platform showcasing the widest range of works ever displayed in Singapore.

Sculptures, paintings and installations are being displayed at venues across the country, including the Singapore Management University Campus Green and Raffles City Shopping Centre.

The event has received the thumbs-up from both artists and art critics, who unhesitatingly agree that Singapore is clearly ready for a show of such magnitude.

In fact, the NAC never doubted there would be sufficient local works of quality to fill a nation-wide visual arts showcase.

The NAC's senior director of arts cluster development Goh Ching Lee said: "It was not a question of 'are we ready?'. We need a platform to show the breadth of our artwork here, to frame artists of the future. And today, many kinds of things are coming together for the visual arts."

Indeed, Singapore had 563 visual arts activities last year, according to the NAC website, more than double the total 10 years ago. Local artists are also active internationally, and with increasing participation in famous overseas biennales, and young artists forming collectives independently, the visual arts scene is flourishing.

Second-generation artists such as Goh Beng Kwan and Chua Ek Kay believe the new generation of artists are prepared to push the boundaries and participate in events such as the Singapore Art Show.

Said Chua: "There are enough graduates from our art schools and some of them are very talented."

In fact, the very idea of questioning Singapore's readiness for a successful visual arts showcase is an unnecessary hindrance.

The Substation's co-artistic director and art critic Lee Weng Choy said this problematic view saw society as a child and the policy-makers as parents.

'Singapore's art community is admittedly not very large, but a number of contemporary artists have received international recognition and deservedly so," he said.

He and the likes of LaSalle-SIA College of the Arts lecturer Ernest Chan believe...
the issue is the lack of preparation time to organise the Singapore Art Show and also the biennale next September.

Said Chan: “To organise a national art exhibition needs at least a minimum of five years of planning, not to mention it is our very first biennale ...”

Lee thought last year’s arts festival Seni, billed as a precursor to the biennale, provided a lesson that should have been learned.

“Planning a biennale requires a lot of time. But have we given ourselves the time to do this? No. If I am not mistaken, the hardworking NAC would certainly have liked to have started much earlier with this, but did they get the go ahead from their paymasters?”

But the platform for visual artists is finally ready and the event has kicked off. All that remains to be seen is whether the Singapore Art Show lives up to the hype and creates the buzz it’s supposed to generate around the city.

One certainly hopes so.

What’s your view? Email us at plus@newstoday.com.sg