The Singapore Biennale is a major milestone in the development of arts in Singapore, says the National Arts Council.

Hundreds of international art critics have arrived in Singapore for the inaugural Singapore Biennale, which will open to the public next Monday.

In an all-out bid to impress, even the media reception booth is a sculptural marvel.

Made of cardboard and paper by Japanese artist Shigeru Ban, the office will be recycled after three months.

This is just one of the numerous large-scale installations at the Biennale.

Lee Suan Hiang, Chairman of Biennale Steering Committee, said: "It is a culmination of the growth of the arts over the last 15 years. We didn't want it to be just another biennale and I think our geography and the cultural mix in Singapore - the fact that we are multi racial, multi religious, multi cultural - have helped us to position this Biennale differently."

The Biennale will also take place at seven religious sites, including a mosque, church, Hindu temple and Chinese temple.

Other exhibition areas include a converted army barrack at Tanglin Camp, a public housing block and the historical courtrooms of City Hall.

Themed "Belief", the Biennale features 118 artists from all over the globe.

Fumio Nanjo, Artistic Director of Singapore Biennale 2006, said: "Belief is very easily linked to religious belief. Also we wanted to talk about belief on economic systems, ecologies, and also, art is on some belief systems. All kinds of human life are actually linked to some kinds of beliefs."

One of the aims of the Singapore Biennale is to focus on emerging Asian arts, hence many pieces of works will have an East-meets-West quality.

55 percent of the artists featured in the Biennale are Asians. - CNA/ir