

Singapore Art Museum Meet the Neighbours Tour

By Wendy McDowell

Six months after starting my docent training at the Singapore Art Museum (SAM), I was officially a docent and spending a lot of time there. It was like a new home in Singapore for me, but I didn't really know our neighbours. When I agreed to organise a few Friday Highlights Tours, I had the perfect opportunity to meet and also introduce the neighbours to the new docent trainees.



The Cathedral of the Good Shepherd

The first neighbour, the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, is diagonally across the street from SAM at the corner of Bras Basah Road and Queen Street. This is the oldest Catholic church in Singapore and the seat of the archbishop. The original chapel was located where SAM is today, but became too small. Father Jean-Marie Beurel convinced the bishop to use the original chapel site for a school, which became

St Joseph's Institution and was converted to SAM in 1996. The church had been moved to its current site and built in a restrained Renaissance style, in the shape of a Latin cross. In 1888 the church was elevated to cathedral status and in 1973 it was declared a Singapore national monument. The cathedral opens at 7:00 am on weekdays, so if you are out early, it's a good place to begin.

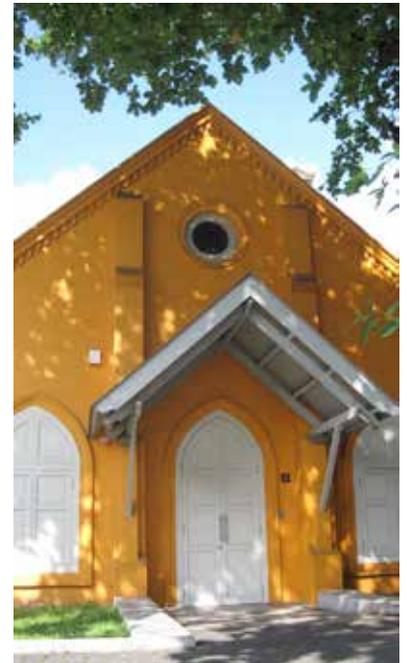
If you look across Bras Basah from the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, you will see an entrance to the Bras Basah MRT station on



Jacob Ballas Centre

Queen Street right in front of NTUC Income Centre. The station was designed by Singapore architects, WOHA, as part of the Marina Line Architectural Design Competition. At the World Architecture Festival in 2009, WOHA won the prize for best transport building for the station's design. As you ride on the 41-metre-long escalator, look up and you will see how the glass-panelled reflecting pool provides the station with natural light. To see the reflecting pool from above ground, simply walk across the street from SAM's front entrance.

As you walk straight out of the Bras Basah MRT station into Queen Street, look behind SAM and you will see the Church of Saints Peter and Paul. With more Chinese and Indian people joining the Catholic Church, Good Shepherd struggled to meet the language needs of the parish, so the Church of Saints Peter and Paul was constructed between 1869 to 1870 to serve the needs of these new church members. The church also became a school for many European missionaries who needed to learn Chinese before their postings abroad. In 2003, the church became a Singapore National Monument.



Sculpture Square



The Singapore Calligraphy Centre

In 2006, Singapore's inaugural international biennale of contemporary art opened, and the Singapore Biennale, titled *Belief*, included more than 95 artists from more than 38 countries and regions including Singapore. The Church of Saints Peter and Paul hosted Indian artist Alwar Balasubramaniam's *Emerging Angels* sculptures. The *Emerging Angels* appear to be buried in marble, but it was actually a slowly evaporating material, so the buried



The Church of Saints Peter and Paul

angels began to slowly appear. The *Emerging Angels* are very similar to the sculptures on the walls guarding the church area.

After you've had a chance to look around the church, keep going straight out the back until you reach Waterloo Street. Make a right turn and walk until you reach Middle Road, then a left and you will see the entrance to Sculpture Square at 155 Middle Road. The Gothic-style building is orange with white doors and was built as a Christian institute in 1870. In 1999, Sculpture Square opened as an

independent, non-profit art space dedicated to contemporary 3-dimensional art. Sculpture Square has several artists' studios, so if you visit, you may see artists at work. The exhibitions here change regularly and last only a few weeks; there is a small shop next door in the orange building, which among other things, used to be a budget hotel.

From Sculpture Square, walk back up Waterloo Street to Number 96 and you will see the SCWO (Singapore Council of Women's Organisations) building. The SCWO is a women's rights organisation and runs a secular crisis centre, Star Shelter, which provides a safe refuge for women who are victims of domestic violence. In addition to the Star Shelter, the SCWO building includes function rooms (for hire), the New2U Thrift Shop (all proceeds go to Star Shelter), library, legal clinics and the Torte Café, which gives Star Shelter women an opportunity to acquire job skills. The café opens at 10:00 am, so if you're feeling hungry, stop in for a bite.

Continue to 48 Waterloo Street where you will see the



One of the angels on the wall outside the church. The artist made the Emerging Angels very similar to these



The SCWO

Singapore Calligraphy Centre. This centre is operated by the Chinese Calligraphy Society of Singapore and is dedicated to the promotion and development of calligraphy. The centre offers classes and at times hosts short exhibitions.

If you continue down to 24 Waterloo Street, you will see the Maghain Aboth Synagogue and the Jacob Ballas Centre. The synagogue is the oldest in Southeast Asia and was built in 1878. The Jacob Ballas Centre opened next door in 2007 and is named for Jacob Ballas, who was chairman of the Singapore Stock Exchange. The stained glass windows were made by a local Singaporean artist and the windows were created to look similar to Marc Chagall's abstract stained glass pieces that represent the 12 Tribes of Israel. Ballas started his career in car sales, moved to insurance and eventually finance. When he died, in 2000, he left more than \$100M to Singaporean and Israeli charities.



The Torte Café, SCWO Building, 96 Waterloo Street

After all this walking, you may be hungry and there are lots of dining options in the SAM neighbourhood. Fine Palate Café at 51 Waterloo Street, is a small, quiet café with excellent food. I recommend the mixed greens and quinoa salad, the tuna and capellini pasta and any of the desserts. The Standing Sushi Bar, located in front of 8Q, has been voted the #1 sushi bar by *HungryGoWhere* and offers good value, bento box lunch sets. Dôme Cafe, Trattoria Lafiandra and Via Mar are all located on the ground floor of SAM.

After meeting all the neighbours, you might want to go back 'home' to SAM and join the 2:00 pm docent-led tour. Enjoy!

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All photos by the author