

PASSAGE

FRIENDS OF THE MUSEUMS SINGAPORE

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2022

DANCING LADY, RISING HORSE

UNRAVEL THE MYSTERY BEHIND
TWO CURIOUS OBJECTS IN THE
ACM'S COLLECTION

BROKEN JOURNEYS OF BLUE AND WHITE

PRECIOUS CARGOES THAT
ENTHRALLED THE WORLD

SHIPWRECKS

TALES AND TREASURES
FROM THE DEEP



art
history
culture
people



ON THE COVER

Read about this mysterious 500-year-old beauty in Dancing Lady, Rising Horse on page 2. Porcelain Dancing Lady, Jingdezhen. Photo courtesy of the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM).

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PASSAGE

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President's Blog

Hello everyone! Happy 2022!



Photo by Dawn.

January sees our museum docent community returning to more regular guiding after months of on-again, off again tours. I understand it can be frustrating. Thank you docents for your patience and commitment.

We're also hopeful that things will brighten up and docent training that's still in progress at the ACM, IHC and NMS will end with more in-person opportunities, not to mention the end-of-training get-together that trainees and training teams alike look forward to. Hopefully, training at SYSNMH would also be conducted without restrictions from February soon after the Lunar New Year festivities.

For this first blog for our flagship *PASSAGE*, I'd like to introduce two power-packed ladies who answered the call to helm the editorial and production team at *Passage* as the new Co-Editors-in-Chief. They both come with credentials which I'm confident will carry *PASSAGE* forward to new heights of excellence.



Photo by me.

Heike Bredenkamp, originally from Pretoria, South Africa, is a 25-year publishing veteran having been publications manager, editor, and writer across several platforms. Her focus has been on business-to-business and brand magazines for which she has won several industry awards. Heike guides at the ACM.

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You can already spot their work in this issue's refreshed layout.

As many members return from holidays all over the globe, and as FOM activity groups begin another year of learning, experiencing and sharing, we're certainly off to a great start. All systems go for 2022!

Millie Phuah
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Unless otherwise stated, the abbreviation FOM used in this newsletter refers to Friends of the Museums Singapore. FOM is not responsible for statements expressed in the signed articles and interviews.

Dancing Lady,

Rising Horse

TIM CLARK UNRAVELS
THE MYSTERY BEHIND TWO
CURIOUS OBJECTS IN THE
ACM'S COLLECTION



Porcelain Dancing Lady, Jingdezhen
mid 16th century. Courtesy of Asian
Civilisations Museum (ACM).

If the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) were threatened with destruction, and I could only save one artefact, it would be the porcelain 'Dancing Lady' in the Trade Gallery. She is a rare beauty. Oscar Wilde maintained that something that is perfectly beautiful should be perfectly useless, but she mocks this statement. Despite being adorably decorative, it always surprises visitors when I tell them that she was actually made with a mundane function in mind. Her hair piece is a disguised wooden stopper, and her arm is hollow, allowing her to be used as a pouring pot. But for pouring what?

The answer requires some speculative detective work, the type docents love to indulge in. A clue lies in the fact that, being decorated in the *kinrande* style (a Japanese word meaning gold brocade) this Chinese beauty was probably made for the Japanese market. At least two examples are found today in Japanese museum collections in Tokyo and Osaka. So, could she have been used for pouring *sake*? She could, but I think not. Just as I question the British museum's description of a similar figure in their Sir Percival David collection as a wine ewer. Wine or *sake* would surely spoil



Horse water-dropper, Kangxi period, Port Louis Museum, France. Photo by Tim Clark.

in a container so hard to clean out, and her limited capacity would do little to satisfy a wine connoisseur.

In my humble opinion, she would have been used for the same purpose in Japan as she might have done in China – as a water-dropper, to administer carefully controlled amounts of water for making ink.

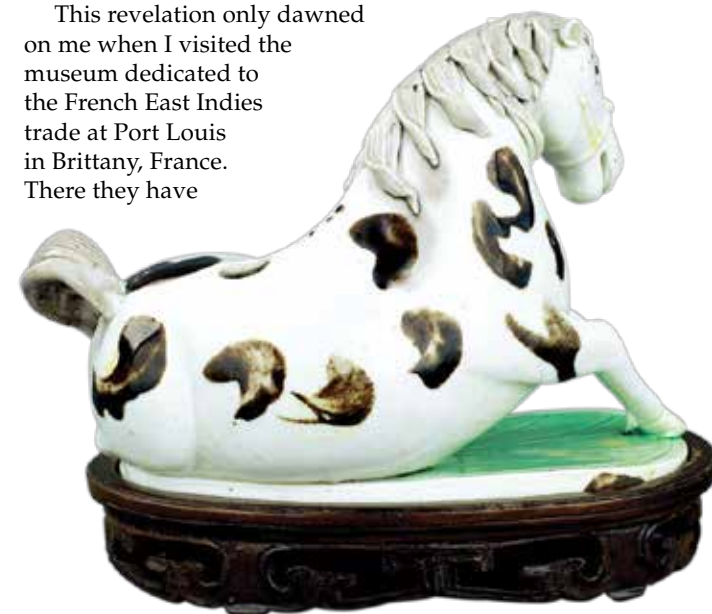
A HIDDEN SECRET IN THE RISING HORSE

This brings us to the question of what does our 'Dancing Lady' have in common with the 'Rising Horse' besides both being made of porcelain in Jingdezhen? On the face of it, the horse served a very different purpose. That lacquer orb mounted on the horse's back was clearly used for burning incense, conceivably to sweeten the air in the boudoir of one of Louis XV's mistresses. It is rather *de trop* (over the top) reflecting the Rococo era when excessive ornamentation was *a la mode*. But if you strip it of its *ormolu* French gilt metalwork, and unseat the lacquer container with its coral finial, then the purpose for which it was originally designed will be revealed. Yes, it was originally a water-dropper.

This revelation only dawned on me when I visited the museum dedicated to the French East Indies trade at Port Louis in Brittany, France. There they have



Horse incense burner, Jingdezhen porcelain, early 18th century with
Japanese lacquer bowl set with coral and French gilded bronze mounting.
Courtesy of ACM.



Water-dropper, Chinese famille verte, early Kangxi period c 1680.
Courtesy of Marchant, London.



Buffalo water dropper, porcelain, Kangxi period. Courtesy of Peabody Essex Museum (PEM), USA.

Water-dropper, porcelain, Kangxi period. Courtesy of PEM, USA.

Water-dropper, porcelain, Kangxi period. Courtesy of PEM, USA.



Jade horse, 16th century. Courtesy of Fitzwilliam Museum, UK.

Tin-glazed earthenware Delft, Holland 17th century. Courtesy of Groninger Museum, The Netherlands.

Dappled horse, porcelain, Kangxi period. Courtesy of PEM, USA.

an unadorned version of a similar contemporary rising horse. This lovely golden horse with a silvery mane, made during the early Kangxi period of the Qing Dynasty (1662-1722), has a hole in its back for filling with water. Its mouth, like the arm of the ‘Dancing Lady’, serves as a spout for delivering controlled quantities of water onto an ink stone to produce the perfect consistency of ink for Chinese or Japanese calligraphy.

SYMBOLISM OF CHINESE SCHOLAR’S OBJECTS

You can imagine a Chinese scholar having one of these objects on his desk, adding a fifth treasure to his four cherished essentials of ink stone, ink block, brush and paper. Better still, he might have had a pair of such horses in mirror image of each other to inspire his writings. Or he might have chosen a water buffalo or the figure of a man holding a pouring vessel.

In the original version this character would have held a gourd, which is associated with the immortals, symbolising long life. Had our scholar been employed in government service he might have yearned for promotion; in which case he would have appreciated the gift of a horse water-dropper with a monkey on its back. The description of this object is a pun in Chinese for the phrase: “May you immediately be elevated to the rank of marquis”. In some versions the monkey is holding a peach, conferring longevity as well as nobility on its owner.

The concept of a recumbent or rising horse owes its origins to the Tang Dynasty Emperor Xuanzong (713-765) who received five such horses carved in various colours of jade as a tribute and souvenir of his time spent serving in five cavalry regiments.

No trace of these original jade versions has survived, though a precious black jade reproduction made in the 16th century is reputed to resemble one of the originals and could have been seen at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, UK until it was sadly stolen in 2012. Thankfully, this museum still has a variety of water-droppers made of jade as well as porcelain.

Other contemporary versions of this horse were produced purely for their decorative appeal. The pair of aubergine-coloured, piebald horses with golden manes are a fine example. And although these could not be used as water-droppers they would still surely have been welcome in a scholar’s studio because dappled horses are said to presage inspiration.

The demand for such charming equine figures was bound to lead to imitation in Europe. In the 17th century the means of making porcelain was still a mystery so the Dutch in Delft made a copy in tin-glazed earthenware. The Japanese, by the 17th century, had acquired the secret for making porcelain, and since the Dutch had good trading connections with Japan, they were able to commission a porcelain version. Finally, in the mid 18th century a pottery in Staffordshire, England (possibly Longton Hall), made a very fine porcelain tribute that could almost pass itself off as a *blanc de chine* Chinese original.

Horses are well-loved, so their popularity, as ceramic ornaments is not surprising. The French adaptation to serve as an incense burner is unusual but not unique. One similar to the ACM example fetched £21,250 at auction in 2010. Our ‘Dancing Lady’ is much rarer and more desirable. One almost identical to the ACM figure sold at Sotheby’s for £134,500 in 2013.



Porcelain, Japan late 17th century. Courtesy of Groninger Museum, The Netherlands.



Longton Hall, UK, soft-paste porcelain. Courtesy of Victoria & Albert Museum.

DANCING LADY CONTINUES TO MYSTIFY

When she was made in the Jiajing period of the Ming Dynasty (1522-1566) she would surely have been favoured by a Chinese collector, despite the probability that she was designed and destined for export. The panel on her chest displaying a lively lion suggests a rank badge and the pedestal on which she stands gives her an added air of superiority. The raised foot in the attitude of a dance could have been considered rather alluring and possibly risqué at a time when women’s feet were objects of adoration. She might not have appeared erotic or even exotic to a Japanese, though her decorative *kinrande* livery would certainly have made her fashionable as well as desirable.

Had she travelled further she would have been even more appreciated. It is believed that the Indian Mughal Emperor Jahangir (1605-1627) had an example in his collection. And imagine if she had reached Europe, where not only was anything made of porcelain treasured, but the figure of a richly attired Chinese woman would have been as fascinating as a creature from another planet. What price would an obsessive porcelain collector like Augustus the Strong of Saxony have been willing to pay for such a prize? One can only wonder.

Now it would be wrong to rob our dancing lady of all her enticing air of mystery, so I’ll let her dangle a question. What is she holding in her pouring hand? Is it a cherry? The flowers she is wearing certainly resemble cherry blossom, which the Japanese would find pleasing. But the leaves look more like wolfberry leaves. So, the question remains: what fruit is she bearing and why? 🍒

TIM CLARK is a semi-retired NTU lecturer. He is also a docent, collector and council member of the South East Asian Ceramic Society (SEACS).

Shipwrecks

**PATRICIA BJAALAND
WELCH** INVESTIGATES
FAMOUS SHIPWRECKS
AND THEIR SECRETS

"The vessels built at Ormus are of the worst kind, and dangerous for navigation, exposing the merchants and others who make use of them to great hazards."

- Marco Polo

Amongst some of history's many tragedies are shipwrecks for they inevitably involve a loss of human life, but we also know that as unintended time capsules they can answer questions and reveal startling new information.

THE BELITUNG (826)

The discovery of the *Belitung* (ca. 826 CE) has been one of the most dramatic and important shipwreck finds in Southeast Asian waters. But of all the incredible discoveries the *Belitung* revealed, the most striking to me was the fact that this Arab-made vessel had made it safely all the way to China more than 600 years before Columbus dared to cross the Atlantic. In 1271, Marco Polo and his father and uncle refused to board a similar vessel in Hormuz because they deemed it unseaworthy. In Polo's words, "The vessels built at Ormus are of the worst kind, and dangerous for navigation, exposing the merchants and others who make use of them to great hazards." (*Travels of Marco Polo*, Chapter XIX)

THE SINAN (1325)

The ill-fated *Sinan* was a Chinese merchant vessel bound for the port of Hakata, Japan when she disappeared in 1325. For centuries, experts have pondered the question of when China started exporting (not producing) its world-famous blue-and-white porcelains.

(top)

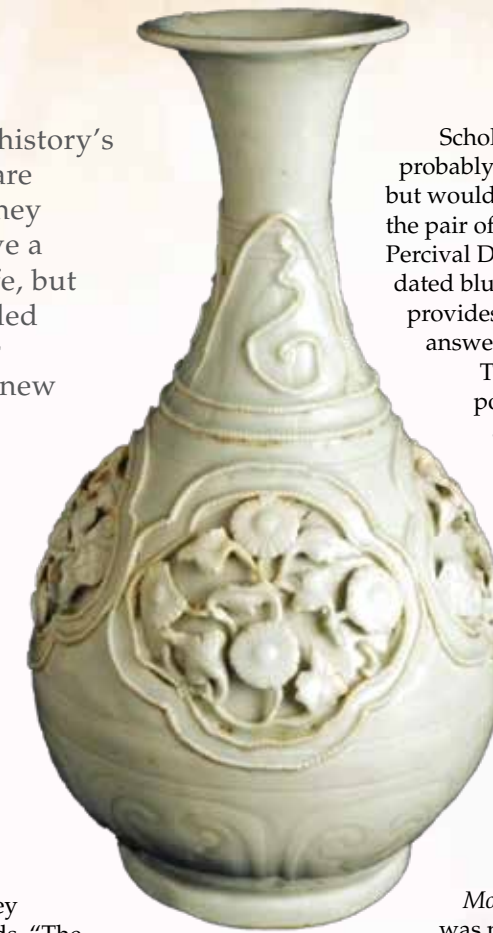
The 'Gaigneres-Fonthill Vase', sent as a gift by Nestorian Christians to Pope Benedict XII in 1338, was believed lost but turned up in a house auction in 1882. Courtesy of the National Museum of Ireland.

(left)

The Jewel of Muscat, a replica of the *Belitung*, and the kind of ship that Marco Polo and his fellow travellers turned their backs on due to its unseaworthiness. Photo by Alessandro Ghidoni from Shipwrecked: Tang Treasures and Monsoon Winds, Krahl, R. et. al. Smithsonian Institution, USA.

(right)

There were 180,000 ceramics onboard the *Sinan*, shipwrecked in 1325, but not a single piece of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain. Courtesy of the National Museum of Korea (Seoul).



Scholars reasoned that early pieces would probably not have been mass-produced for export, but would have been high-end pieces - such as the pair of blue-and-white altar vases found by Sir Percival David in China dated 1351 (the earliest dated blue-and-white porcelains yet found), which provides an early production date, but doesn't answer the export question.

The earliest documented blue and white porcelain known to have reached Europe is a vase known as the "Gaigneres-Fonthill Vase" sent by Nestorian Christians as a gift to Pope Benedict XII in 1338.

Both of the above examples date to the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368), when more than half of the workshops in the Yuan administration were focused on producing the famous *panni tartrici* or heavily gold-embossed *lampas* luxury textiles sought globally by royalty, clergy and elites from the Mediterranean to China, allowing other craft workshops, including ceramic centres, more leeway and freedom to experiment.

Furthermore, the Yuan, with its *Pax Mongolica* meant Central Asian-sourced cobalt was now readily available for China's potters to experiment with. As a result, the Yuan is recognised as being the birthdate of China's blue-and-white porcelain. But the question remained as to when production reached a stage when she began to produce sufficient quantities to export them in bulk.



The wreck of the *Sinan*, discovered in 1976 off the coast of Korea, provided a breakthrough because her cargo consisted largely of Chinese ceramics. There were 180,000 pieces of Longquan greenware, *yingqing* and *qingbai*, *shufu* and other white wares, black-glazed *jian yao* (the much sought-after teaware that would have fetched top prices in Japan), even some *Cizhou* and *jun* wares, but not a single piece of blue-and-white porcelain.

Combining the fact that the *Sinan* was most likely loaded in the Chinese port of Ningbo in 1323 without a single piece of blue-and-white, with the date of 1338, when a significant piece of blue-and-white was sent to Italy, Chinese scholars finally settled on the date of 1328 as the first date a commercial-size cargo of blue-and-white porcelains would probably have been exported from China.

THE TURIANG (14TH CENTURY)

Marine treasure hunting, according to marine archaeologist Michael Flecker, took off in Southeast Asia in the 1970s and 80s, “driven by oil and gas and marine engineering blokes who whet their appetite salvaging tin and rubber from WWII wrecks. It was their rich finds, (such as those found with the *Hatcher Wreck* and the *Geldermalsen*) that attracted the interest of local Indonesian divers, starting with the *Pulau Buaya Wreck*.”

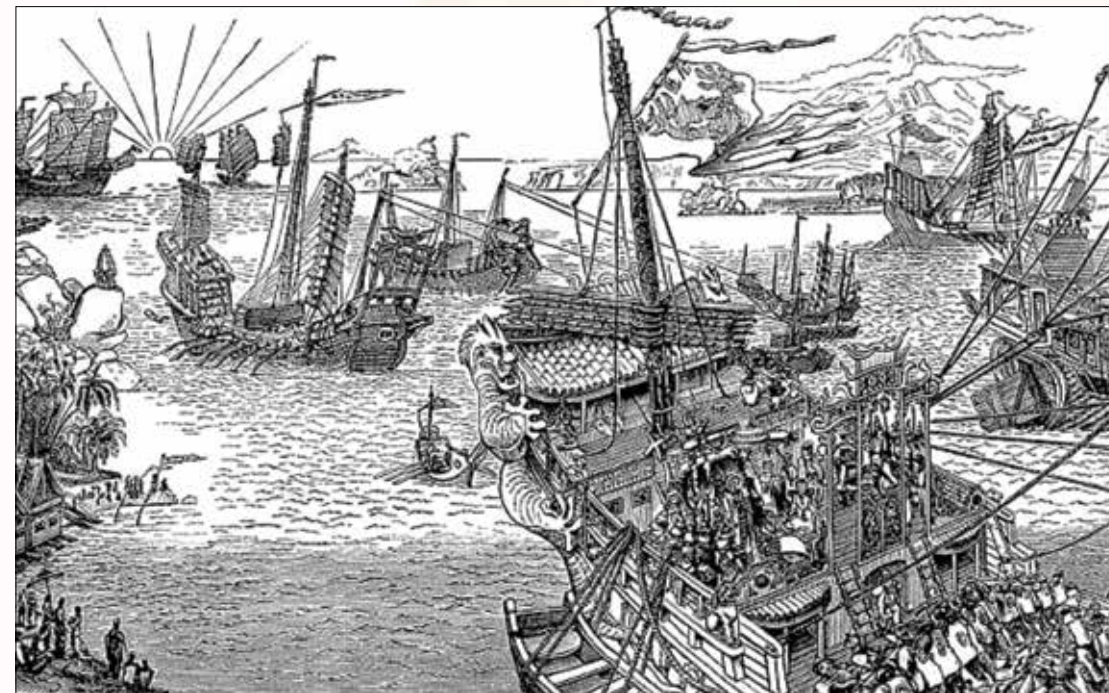
Marine archaeologists had been noting the arrival of ceramics in local antique shops and the black market, and eventually a few conscientious salvagers paved the way for marine archaeology and private enterprise to begin working together. Flecker cites the 1987/88 excavation of a Manila Galleon (the *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción*, which sank in 1638) in Saipan as an example.



Ceramics found on the *Geldermalsen* awaiting the Christie's auction in April 1986. Courtesy of Michael Hatcher.



More than 150,000 ceramics were found with the 1752 *Geldermalsen* wreck when salvaged by Michael Hatcher. Courtesy of Michael Hatcher.



A 1910 illustration by Sir Henry Yule depicting Khublai Khan's fleet of Mongols off the coast of Japan in 1281.

It was the ceramic cargoes of some of these newly salvaged shipwrecks that attracted the interest of Roxanna Brown, a Bangkok-based ceramics scholar. She and amateur archaeologist/diver Sten Sjøstrand noticed two emerging patterns: the absence of Chinese ceramics and the appearance of export-quality Southeast Asian ceramics in 15th century shipwrecks.

They began keeping meticulous records that in the end revealed the evidence of what some Sinologists had been speculating on for years, a phenomenon first named in the 1950s to explain some sites in a small corner of Borneo, but which came to represent the near total absence of 15th century Chinese exported ceramics in all of Southeast Asia, today famous as *The Ming Gap*.

But that wasn't all. The shipwrecks they were studying held more surprises. Brown credits the *Turiang*, a 14th century Chinese wreck (dated 1305-1370) discovered by Sjøstrand, with the discovery that upset Southeast Asian ceramic history. Its ceramic cargo was multinational, including not just Chinese, but also Thai and Vietnamese wares enroute to Borneo and/or Sulawesi, confirming that not only was China not the sole exporter of ceramics in the region, but that

Thailand and Vietnam were also viable “volume exporters” who had begun exporting their local ceramics successfully even before the inward-looking Ming banned foreign trade.

Suddenly, Southeast Asian ceramics became “collectibles” and the study of our regional ceramics took off. Museums began adding Southeast Asian ceramics exhibition cases, and even galleries.

THE FLEETS OF KHUBLAI KHAN (1274, 1281)

Genghis Khan's grandson, Khublai Khan, twice tried to conquer Japan by sending a fleet - once in 1274 and again in 1281. The fleet in 1274 was probably just meant to intimidate the *shogun*, as it consisted of only 900 ships with 15,000 seamen and 10,000 soldiers, a fleet considered by scholars to have been too small a force for a conquest.

It made landfall but ran into a violent storm with the survivors retreating back to Korea. The 1281/2 fleet was more serious with 100,000 soldiers and 3,500 ships if we are to believe Mongol records, but a typhoon sank most of the ships and the few washed-up survivors were either killed or enslaved.

Over the years, only a few random artefacts believed to have been from the fleets' wrecks were found in the Imari Gulf, but the last decade has turned up three Mongolian shipwrecks. One in 2011, a second in 2014 not far from Takashima Island, and a third and more scattered remains in 2015, less than two kilometres from the 2014 wreck. The finds have been confirmed by both the structures of the ships (including bulkheads with rocks as ballast) as well as the 13th century Chinese-made ceramics found onboard, but to date, we are still waiting for news from the marine archaeologists as to what they're finding. The ocean hasn't given up all its secrets to us yet. 📌



Two distinctive Thai Sukhothai underglaze black fish plates found on the *Turiang*, evidence that Southeast Asian kilns were exporting large quantities of ceramics in the 14th century. Courtesy of Sten Sjøstrand.

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Broken journeys of BLUE and WHITE

TIM CLARK TELLS THE A TALE
OF THREE PRECIOUS CARGOES
THAT ENTRALLED THE WORLD

All photos by the writer unless otherwise stated.

The mania for collecting blue-and-white ceramics began in the Middle East where rich deposits of the mineral cobalt could be found. Blue decorated ceramics were popular, possibly because the colour was reminiscent of precious lapis lazuli. Similarly, greenware appealed to the Chinese because of its resemblance to jade. But to make the blue glaze stand out on local earthenware during the Abbasid period required a covering of white tin glaze. Only the Tang dynasty Chinese at that time could produce the fine white stoneware which potentially provided a superior base for cobalt decoration. And this was a stepping-stone towards the development of underglaze blue-and-white porcelain that followed in centuries to come.

THE BELITUNG WRECK

Textbooks written during the 20th century confidently state that, “No Chinese examples have come to light that can be proved to date earlier than the 14th century.” Yet we now

know, thanks to the discovery of the Belitung wreck in 1998, that the Chinese were making blue-and-white plates 500 years earlier, in the 9th century.

The wreck not only provides the first archaeological evidence of direct trade with China, but it also reminds us how the course of history could have changed had this Arab dhow reached its probable destination of Basra, in the Persian Gulf.

The fact that just three blue-and-white plates were found onboard is telling. Presumably these were samples, made to order, following a decorative style already established in the region of Damascus. But this region lacked the white kaolin clay and the kiln

One of three Chinese stoneware plates with palmette motif from Belitung wreck, 830s. Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM).



technology of China to produce stoneware. Let alone the later, irresistible wonder of the Yuan dynasty: brilliant blue-and-white porcelain.

Had the ship completed its journey, and assuming the plates were well-received, we may speculate that the next ship bound for China would have set sail laden with cobalt and bearing an order for more blue and white dishes. Since

*(left)
Porcelain from
Jingdezhen for Middle
Eastern market 1403-24.*

*(right)
Stonepaste from
Samarqand, 1400-50.
Courtesy of the Victoria
and Albert Museum.*



that didn't happen, the famed Gongyi potters in Henan, China must have presumed that there was no demand for such things and production was shelved.

THE BIRTH OF FINE PORCELAIN

With the establishment of the Yuan dynasty by Kublai Khan in 1279, links between China and the Middle East were revived and safe passage along the Silk Road was assured by the *Pax Mongolica*. By this time Arab and Persian potters had discovered how to make their version of stoneware by adding quartz to the clay. It became known as stonepaste or fritware. However, Chinese potters could now produce something even finer. From the mountains around Jingdezhen a mixture of *petuntse* (feldspar) and kaolin clay combined to produce a material so fine that Europeans compared it to shell and called it porcelain (from *porcellana* in old Italian meaning cowrie shell). This led to an insatiable demand for blue-and-white porcelain.

A few precious examples reached Europe via the Middle East but, with the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Europeans needed to find a direct trading route to the Orient.

The Portuguese were the first to reach China in 1514. One of their earliest shipments of porcelain is represented by a plate at the Asian Civilisations Museum bearing the coat of arms of King Manuel I. They were not only the first Europeans to bring blue-and-white porcelain directly to Europe, but also the first to reproduce it using glazing techniques acquired from the Moors. Initially they even exported it to Northern Europe. So the recipe for what became known as Delft actually originated in Spain and Portugal.

The Portuguese golden age was the 16th century, and it was about to be eclipsed by the Dutch golden age of the 17th century. The Dutch wanted to monopolise the trade in spices, not share it. And while the Dutch Republic's arch enemy, Spain, ruled Portugal (1580 – 1640) Portuguese vessels and trading posts became fair game.

THE PORTUGUESE SHIP SANTA CATARINA

Piracy was rationalised and even justified under Dutch law. The most notable example was the capture of a Portuguese ship Santa Catarina close to Changi Point by a combined Dutch and local Malay force in 1603. This 14,000 ton carrack was laden with a cargo from China that included a huge

amount of blue-and-white porcelain. When the cargo was auctioned in Amsterdam it fetched the astonishing sum of three million guilders, equivalent to half the capital value of the Dutch East India Company (VoC) and double that of the English East India Company at that time.

The decoration on this consignment was designed to appeal to the European craving for chinoiserie. The dominant style comprised a segmented pattern laced with Chinese motifs and human images. This style became known as *kraakware* named possibly after the Portuguese carrack from whence it first came. It was quite unlike the floral designs so popular in the Middle East. Crude by Chinese standards, it was mass-produced because the world couldn't get enough of it.



Early Portuguese import of command porcelain bearing the coat of arms of King Manuel I who died in 1521. Collection of the ACM.



Kraakware plate from Jingdezhen 1580-1610. Contemporary with the Santa Catarina cargo. Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

European rulers vied with one another to show off their collections. In 1717, Augustus the Strong acquired a collection of 151 blue-and-white vessels from King Frederick William I of Prussia in exchange for 600 of his finest soldiers. The legacy of Augustus, Elector of Saxony, includes one of Europe's finest collections of blue-and-white porcelain, which survives to this day at the Zwinger Palace Museum in Dresden.

By the 18th century the most profitable trade goods from the Far East were tea and porcelain. The Dutch could count on a profit of 75% to 100% on porcelain. And tea could yield a profit of 90%. But only if it arrived fresh. Careful packing and a fast passage were therefore essential. And the British ships were faster than the Dutch, so the competition was intense.

FRENZIED DEMAND IN EUROPE

The craze for Chinese blue-and-white continued in Europe and the Middle East up until the end of the 18th century. The largest collection to this day is found in the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul where the Ottoman Sultans amassed around 20,000 pieces from the Yuan, Ming and Ching dynasties.



Adoration of the Magi by Mantegna 1495. Courtesy of Getty Museum.




Dutch ships in the Mediterranean by A. Storck c. 1699. Courtesy of Amsterdam Museum.

THE NANKING CARGO OF DUTCH VOC SHIP GELDERMALSEN

It was under such challenging conditions at Canton in December 1751 that the Dutch VoC ship Geldermalsen hurriedly loaded 203 chests containing 239,000 pieces of mainly blue-and-white and Imari-style porcelain from Jingdezhen. This formed the ballast for a much larger volume of 687,000 pounds of tea. She was also carrying a consignment of 147 pieces of gold. The gold was destined for Batavia, but because time was of the essence, no stop would be made. Instead, a ship would be waiting in the Sunda Straits to transfer the gold and supply drinking water for the next leg of the voyage via Cape Town to Amsterdam.

The rendezvous never took place because the Geldermalsen struck a reef just beyond Bintan Island. The entire cargo and 80 members of its 112 crew were lost, including the captain. Those who survived were initially suspected of having stashed the gold. But a salvaging operation in 1985 retrieved most of the gold, proving their innocence. And under the remains of the tea over 150,000 pieces of porcelain were rescued. The collection, known as the Nanking Cargo, was auctioned by Christies in Amsterdam. It was valued at US\$3 million, yet it fetched a staggering US\$20 million.

The shipwreck of the Geldermalsen happened at night in good weather and was attributed to navigational error. Or could it have been due to *karma* for the Dutch piracy of the Santa Catarina which occurred nearby, 150 years earlier? Sailors can be very superstitious. 



Blue-and-white porcelain reached the zenith of creativity and craftsmanship during the Kangxi period (1661-1722). An identical dish is in the Topkapi museum. Collection of the ACM.

Survivors from the Geldermalsen's 'Nanking Cargo' 1751. Author's collection.

TIM CLARK is a semi-retired NTU lecturer. He is also a docent, collector and council member of the South East Asian Ceramic Society (SEACS).

Gilding the lily

CAROLINE CARFANTAN

SEARCHES FOR THE VOICES AND TRADITIONS OF HYBRID DESIGN

Redesigned objects often raise more questions than give answers. Are they cross cultural art? Are they a visual interpretation or an expression of a hybrid culture? How should one define their identity? What is their origin?

When walking through the Maritime Trade Gallery in the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM), one can't help but notice that for most pieces on display, demand and design were influenced by European taste.

Indeed, among the classic Chinese porcelain export wares exhibited in museum collections around the world there are armorial plates, kraakware, animal terrines, and even sugar casters – all based on European models. The reason for this is simple. Europeans wanted patterns and designs that suited their own taste, and the Chinese porcelain artists obliged.

So, it is no surprise that between Asia and Europe design ideas and templates were passed backwards and forwards.

The results are often artefacts described as cross cultural art, blending different Eastern and Western sources. That these items were sourced from the other side of the world, in places mostly unknown to their new owners, increased their perceived value and added a singular, sophisticated and exotic touch.

Displayed in a salon in Europe, these objects became an eye-catching presentation of social aspirations and boundaries. However, as pointed out by historians, “one



Rococo beauties, 18th century mounted blue Chinese porcelain ewers in the ACM collection. Photo by Jo Wright.

might say that the engagement with the ‘exotic’ was only good as long as it could be sufficiently domesticated to fit within the pre-existing visual, tactile and artistic sensibility”.

RECONCEPTUALISING THE OBJECT

Not all pieces in the gallery are, strictly speaking, export wares. Some ceramics and porcelains, originally meant for Asian markets, were radically transformed and reconceptualised upon reaching Europe, resulting in something new and unique.

One of these “redesigned” pieces is a late 16th century Chinese red *kinrande* porcelain bowl. Kinrande wares are known by the Japanese term kinrande, meaning “gold brocade”, as their decoration resembles these brocades.

One might think that the bowl was splendid enough as it was, but not in the eyes of Ottoman monarchs. Their design was reinvented with the addition of gems and gilding, most likely by craftsmen from the Topkapi Saray.

They altered the porcelain through cutting and perforation as well as with the addition of gems or gilt bronze ornaments. According to ceramics specialist, Regina Krahl, “the Chinese element in such creations is no more than a background for the fanciful work in jewels and precious metal, which has been superimposed on them”.

Only a few of these bejeweled porcelains ever left the treasuries of the Ottoman palace as princely gifts to high dignitaries or dowries. Yet they were not gifts in the traditional sense of the term. Every single one had to be returned upon the death or departure from the country of its

owner – this sultan's gift was apparently just something short of a loan. However, displaying such an object in one's home was probably the ultimate status symbol, a luxurious object no money in the world could buy.

THE ROCOCO DRAGON

Two Chinese blue porcelain jars with ormolu (an alloy of copper and zinc used to imitate gold) mounts, dated to the first half of the 18th century, are another eye-catcher in the ACM Maritime Trade gallery. One is literally drawn almost to fall into their deep blue lapis hue.

This intense blue is probably the result of a “normal” sprayed glaze to which some extra cobalt was added. In their time, the objects being monochrome made them extremely desirable and valuable, if one believes the French *marchand-mercier* (art dealer) Edmé-François Gersaint. He stated: “One also sees blue, red and green, but these colours are difficult to spread evenly, and one rarely succeeds, which makes them very expensive when they are perfect.”

European connoisseurs were most likely aware of the technical challenges of such pieces, especially the ones with a larger surface.

The purpose of ornamental mounts of these ewers was to draw the onlooker's gaze to the re-invented porcelain object. They made the object one of a kind, even though the mounts themselves were seldom unique in their design. This is illustrated by two jars in the Louvre Museum in Paris, France with nearly identical mounts.

Today, those gilded mounts not only allow historians to date an “assembled” redesigned piece, but also the paintings in which the piece is featured. As over time, the mounts and ornaments evolved towards more “inventive” forms, requiring art dealers to continuously adapt their designs to present customers with objects in the latest fashion.

According to the Louvre Museum, these similar mounts featuring dragons with outstretched wings can be dated to approximately 1730-1740.



Beauty through the eyes of a Turkish sultan: Gem-set Chinese porcelain in the ACM collection. Photo by Jo Wright.



Pair of Chinese porcelain ewers in the Louvre Paris collection. Photo: RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Martine Beck-Coppola.

Dragons were a widely used motif in Rococo art. They are in line with what art historians refer to as the “craze for chinoiserie”. This trend started under the reign of Louis XIV (17th century) and reached its peak during the Regency period and the early years of the reign of Louis XV (first half of the 18th century). Despite their seemingly “European” look, the design of these two dragons was influenced by Chinese drawings.

One should remember that in the Western bestiary, the dragon was a symbol of evil and heresy, up until the late 17th century, that is. At the beginning of the 18th century, there was an abrupt change in the value given to the dragon. He remained an emblem of strength, but now as in Chinese culture, he reinforced the power of the sovereign or of those holding power.

During the Age of Enlightenment, serpentine dragons became fashionable ornaments. They crawled or undulated around rigid structures, appeared on carved mantle pieces, or featured in the nobility's coats of arms.

A MARRIAGE OF AESTHETICS

Redesigned objects may come from very distinct locations. Yet, each part of the whole is in assonance with the other, the whole encompassing a singular specific consumer taste at one moment in time, while also illustrating meticulous local craftsmanship.

Viewed in this way, they are the precursor of individualism and customisation in the early period of mass-imported Chinese export wares.

CAROLINE CARFANTAN is an Asian Civilisations Museum docent and member of the Southeast Asian Ceramics Society. She is fascinated by the influence of Asian design in 17th and 18th century Europe.

An Inky Birthday Cake

Scholar's Gallery, ACM.

HARRIET YU LEARNS ABOUT THE CHINESE ART OF MAKING SOLID INK

Many exciting new artefacts have been rotated into the Scholar's Gallery in the Kwek Hong Png wing at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) recently. One of them is a round ink cake made by the master ink maker, Cao Sugong in the early Qing Dynasty (17th century).

Ink, along with an ink stone, brushes and paper are regarded as the "Four Treasures of the Study" in Chinese literary culture. Before the appearance of liquid ink in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912 CE), ink was in solid form. Solid ink can last for generations without drying up. The earliest solid ink found in China dates back to the 3rd century BCE. Ink cakes and ink sticks appeared later.

FROM PINE TREES AND BUFFALO HORNS

The main ingredients used for making Chinese ink are simple: carbon and animal glue. More than 20 Chinese medicinal herbs and musk (which today is commonly replaced with civet secretion) are added to the mixture as natural fragrance and a preservative.

Carbon comes from pine or oil soot and animal glue is extracted from bovine skin or horns. The mixture is pounded repeatedly, molded, dried and decorated. Early ink was

made using soot collected from burning old pine trees, which resulted in deforestation.

Ink from oil soot appeared in the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE). The oil used was mostly tung oil, extracted from the seeds of the tung tree (*Aleurites fordii*) that grows mainly in southern China as well as Myanmar and northern Vietnam. Pine soot ink gives a matt natural finish whereas oil soot ink is warm and glossy, ideal for calligraphy and painting.

The demand for ink sticks increased following the introduction of the Imperial examinations from the Sui Dynasty (581-618CE). Starting from the Song Dynasty, the craft of ink stick making reached a higher level and continued to improve in the Ming and Qing Dynasties with many literati collecting them as cherished objects.



Tung oil pressed from seeds of the Tung tree is used in making solid Chinese ink.

CAO SUGONG: MASTER INK MAKER

The Cao Sugong Ink Studio was established in 1667 in Shezhou, Anhui province and moved to Shanghai in 1864. This studio was the best of the four most prominent ink makers in the Qing Dynasty.



Over 10,000 carved antique ink molds made of briar wood are stored at the Cao Sugong Ink Studio in Shanghai. The renowned studio is run by the 15th generation. Photo by Shanghai Daily.

It provided custom-made ink sticks and cakes for the imperial court as well as many celebrities including Shanghai School artists Wu Changshuo and Ren Bonian. The studio is still operating in Shanghai after more than 350 years and is run by the 15th generation today.

The making of ink sticks and cakes involves a team of artists including the ink maker, carver, calligrapher and painter. More than 10,000 briar wood molds are stored at the Cao Sugong Ink Studio, with the earliest one dating back to the Ming Dynasty.

The process of making ink sticks is arduous. Ink sticks generally come in three sizes – one *liang* (which is approximately 31 grams), two *liang* and four *liang*. Each ink stick needs to be dried in the shade from six to 24 months, depending on the size. During the drying stage, a craftsman has to turn over the damp ink sticks every single day. It is only when the drying is complete that the ink sticks can be polished, carved and painted.

A set of ink sticks in the ACM collection depicts stages in the production of silk. One of the sticks bears the mark 'Cao Sugong Jinzhi' ("Respectfully made by Cao Sugong").



These ink sticks feature designs based on a series of illustrations by the Qing court painter, Jiao Bingzhen, known as Gengzhi tu. Each ink stick depicts a stage in the production of silk. Collection of the ACM.



Round Ink Cake By Cao Sugong, Anhui province, China, 17th century. 8.8 cm by 1.5cm. On loan to the ACM from the collection of Yuan Shaoliang.

A BIRTHDAY GIFT FIT FOR AN EMPEROR

This round ink cake is decorated on both sides. A poem written in regular script intaglioed with gold is displayed on one side. The poem wishes the reader longevity and prosperity, making it an ideal birthday present. Two seals are placed at the end of the poem. The top seal belongs to Cao Sugong, and the bottom seal is the name of his ink studio 艺粟斋 (yi su zhai).

南极老人 (*nan ji lao ren*), 躔于东井 (*chan yu dong jing*),
春夕值丁 (*chun xi zhi ding*), 秋曙见丙 (*qiu shu jian bing*),
保章占侯 (*bao zhang dian hou*), 祥光炯炯 (*xiang guang jiong jiong*),
寿考万年 (*shou kao wan nian*), 于天地并 (*yu tian di bing*)

*The star of the God of Longevity
Follows its course in the Well Constellation in the south
Seen in south by west at dusk of Spring Equinox
Spotted at south by east at dawn of Autumn Equinox
Keenly watched by imperial astrologists
For the world prospers when he shines bright
Long live for thousands of years
Together with Heaven and Earth.*

The reverse side of the ink cake depicts a beautiful scene. Shoulao, the Chinese god of longevity, sits under an aged pine tree. His characteristic elongated, bald head is clearly depicted. He is accompanied by a deer to his right and a crane to his left. Both animals are auspicious symbols for longevity and good fortune in Chinese culture.

The skills of the painter and wood carver are admirable: pine needles, spots on the deer and the feathers on the bird are masterfully crafted, coming to life in the light breeze. Shoulao gazes at us through the centuries, wishing us all peace and longevity in an unchanging scene. The craftsmen are long gone, but what they accomplished has achieved immortality.



A silk scroll by a Meiji period Japanese artist, Shibata Zeshin (1807-1891), depicting the God of Longevity sitting under a pine tree with deer and tortoises - all symbols of long life. Collection of the Honolulu Museum of Art. Gift of The James Edward and Mary Louise O'Brien Collection, 1978.

HARRIET YU is a retired medical doctor who has been an FOM member since 2018. She enjoys guiding Mandarin and English tours at the Asian Civilisations Museum. Her favourite corner at the museum is the Scholars Studio.

The Show Must Go On

KEEPING CHINESE WAYANG ALIVE

LAURA YUNG PEEKS BEHIND THE CURTAINS AT THE HISTORY OF CHINESE OPERA IN SINGAPORE

I still have vivid memories of myself as a little girl watching Cantonese opera with my grandmother.

The formidable general. Photo by Jack.Q/shutterstock.com.



The Investiture of the Chancellor in the Six Kingdoms. Photo by Cuckoo Cheung/shutterstock.com.

I still have vivid memories of myself as a little girl watching Cantonese opera with my grandmother. My favourite was attending the opening night of “The Investiture of the Chancellor in the Six Kingdoms” (六国大封相). The generals standing majestically in armours of different colours, with four pennants framing their backs signifying their rank, and elaborate headgear with pom-poms topped with a pair of pheasant feathers - it was a sight to behold! I would also look out for the beautifully adorned prima donna “driving” the white bearded official, her “chariot” represented by two large flags, which she held horizontally in front of her. Elegant and confident, she paced with an exaggerated gait while her passenger, the leading male performer, demonstrated his chariot riding repertoire to the audience's delight. Chinese opera left such a poignant impression on me I can still today feel the atmosphere, the energy, and the music.

EARLY HISTORY

Chinese opera is fondly known as “wayang” in Singapore, a Malay word meaning “dramatic performance”. In Chinese it is commonly called *da xi* 大戏 (“grand performance”). Chinese immigrants brought this multidisciplinary art form to Singapore in the early 19th century, a memento to remind them of home. Such performances in Singapore were reported from as early as 1842 by Charles Wilkes, Commander of the United States South Seas Exploring Expedition. He had been in Singapore during Chinese New Year and had witnessed this spectacle. He wrote “...whilst the actor was shedding tears, he would suddenly throw up one leg, and almost kick himself on the nose!”.

Wayang was performed for the entertainment of gods and men alike. Rudimentary wooden stages were set up in open spaces or on temple grounds on festivals such as deities’ birthdays, the Hungry Ghost month, Mid-Autumn Festival and the renovation of temples. Rich towkays sometimes

engaged opera troupes to perform on their birthdays. The plots were typically adapted from folklore, legends, historical events or moral stories advocating Confucian values. Street opera provided mostly free and casual family entertainment where audiences would even bring their own stools or benches to sit on. There were usually two shows - a matinee and an evening show lasting about three to four hours. The area surrounding the opera stage became a carnival ground for the duration of the troupe’s engagement. There were street hawkers and peddlers selling food, snacks, toys, *tikam-tikam* (lucky draw) and homeware. In those early days, Chinese opera was a common sight in Singapore and was the entertainment for the community.

THE GOLDEN ERA

Cantonese, Hainanese, Hokkien, Teochew operas were performed all year round by professional or amateur troupes. In the late 19th and early 20th century, in addition to street operas, purpose-built opera theatres sprang up to serve the respective Chinese communities. These were more than entertainment venues. Records showed fundraising efforts such as special performances for “1909 Canton Flood Relief” and the Anti-Opium Movement used opera to reach mostly illiterate audiences.

Theatres at Merchant Road (Ee Hng 怡园 built c1889) and New Market Road (Diet Hng 哲园 built 1921) were where Teochew opera was performed. Sadly, these buildings no longer exist.

More Teochew operas and some Hainanese operas were performed at Tong Le Yuan 同乐园 and Yong Le Yuan 永乐园 opera theatres, near the junction of North Bridge Road and Rochor Road. They were demolished in the 1970s.

Lai Chun Yuen 梨春园 built in c1897 is probably the most famous theatre in the history of Chinese opera in Singapore. It was the home of Cantonese opera. Older generation Cantonese still call Smith Street where the theatre stands “Theatre Street”.

The first and last words of its name mean “Pear Garden”, a homage to the similarly named first ever imperial academy for performing arts founded by Emperor Tang Xuanzong (r 719-756). Lai Chun Yuen started as a teahouse style opera theatre where guests would sip tea, nibble on snacks and gossip while watching performances. In the 1930s, regular seats cost 40 cents; the next category, 80 cents, while the prime seats cost \$1.20. According to the “Colonel Report 1940”, a Chinese



Close-up of a 'Dan' 旦 female role. Photo by Jack Q/shutterstock.com.

labourer earned between 50 and 70 cents per day in 1938. Thus, to watch an opera performance at Lai Chun Yuen would be equivalent to almost a whole day's wages.

Lai Chun Yuen is the oldest opera theatre left from yesteryears. In its heyday, Lai Chun Yuen was possibly the largest theatre of its time, with a capacity of 834 according to The National Archives. Presently, it is a hotel next to the covered food street in Chinatown.

There were two opera theatres at the spot where People's Park Centre stands today. Heng Sheng Ping 庆升平 (1890s-1930s for Hokkien, Beijing operas) and Heng Wai Sun 庆维新 (1890s-1930s for Cantonese opera). It was said that a troupe leader at Heng Wai Sun offended the wife of business tycoon Eu Tong Sen 余东旋 (founder of Eu Yan Sang 余仁生 Chinese Medicine Company), who was an avid Cantonese opera fan. To console her, he built the Tien Yien Dai Moi Toi 天演大舞台 Opera Theatre for her. The most glamorous troupes from China and Hong Kong graced its stage for the next decade. It is The Majestic 大华 on Eu Tong Sen Street.

One only needs to look closely at the facade to see the unmistakable representations of Chinese opera.

Eu Tong Sen eventually bought Heng Sheng Ping 庆升平 and Heng Wai Sun 庆维新, and became known as the "wayang king of Chinatown". The section of Eu Tong Sen Street between Upper Cross Street and Merchant Road was once aptly known as Wayang Street.

ADAPT TO SURVIVE

Chinese opera was the leading form of entertainment until the onset of cinema in the 1930s. From the 1920s to the 1960s stand-alone opera theatres also faced keen competition from family amusement parks such as New World, Great World and Gay World which, in addition to Chinese opera performances, also featured eateries, shopping, arcade games and cabaret dance halls. Another perk was the waiver of rental fees for opera troupes. By 1940, both Lai Chun Yuen and Tien Yien Dai Moi Toi had been converted to cinemas.

The art form received a new lease of life when famous opera celebrities started to star in movies for cinemas and for television. However, the closure of the amusement parks and the subsequent government push to discourage the use of Chinese dialects from 1979 began to impact the reach of Chinese opera. Complaints from residents of the new Housing and Development Board (HDB) towns about the booming noise from opera performances also precipitated its decline.

Today, Chinese opera struggles to resonate with audiences in Singapore, and is mostly the preserve of elderly uncles and aunties. However, learning from the experience of Hong Kong and several mainland Chinese cities, there is surely an opportunity to adapt its format to make it more relevant to younger audiences. This could be achieved, for example, via the staging of excerpts instead of the full repertoire or performing in surviving historic venues such as Lai Chun Yuen and serving tea and dim sum during the performance, as was the case during the Golden Era. Using supertitles and docents to explain aspects of the programme could also promote understanding and appreciation of this magnificent form of Chinese culture.

LAURA YUNG joined FOM in 2019 for the study tour to Xian, China. The trip rekindled her interest in Chinese art and history. She is currently a docent trainee of ACM.



Teochew opera staged during Hungry Ghost Month. Photo by Jerome Quek/shutterstock.com.

Long-time editor bids farewell

After a dozen plus one year at the helm, Andra Leo pursues her great passion.



Andra Leo is the former managing editor at PASSAGE.

After 13 years with *PASSAGE* magazine, 11 of them as managing editor, I felt it was time for a change, for the magazine and for me.

The publication will benefit from new perspectives, and I will have the freedom to contribute if I choose to, but will not be obliged to do so. I will also have the freedom to pursue one of my great passions, travel. It seemed appropriate to hand this responsibility over as we approached the end of pandemic restrictions and the reopening of borders. I am already planning my "escapes".

PASSAGE has been both a joy and a burden, but mostly the former, for several reasons. One is that I have learned so much. Throughout these years, the often erudite and always interesting articles I have published have expanded my world and my knowledge. My circle of friends has

also expanded, not only because of the many study tours I participated in, but also because of correspondence with the writers who've contributed articles. Many have done so time and again. When writers are eager to contribute, I feel a sense of both accomplishment and satisfaction – the latter because they want to see their articles in this particular magazine. This is a compliment I feel deeply because initially it was quite a challenge to recruit writers. That I succeeded in this is probably my greatest source of satisfaction.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed both articles and ideas. I owe a special debt of gratitude to the various editorial teams. They have sourced for writers and given their time to proofreading – a tedious but essential part of the process. A special thank you to the stalwarts who've been with the team since I took over and stepped in to help when I was suddenly left to manage it on my own: Patricia Bjaaland Welch, Carla Forbes-Kelly, Gisella Harrold, Anne Perng and Durriya Dohadwala. 🙏

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Singapore's first Jewish museum opens

DAWN MARIE LEE

VISITS A NEW MUSEUM
THAT CHARTS THE 200-
YEAR HISTORY OF THE
JEWISH COMMUNITY

*Photos courtesy of the Jewish Welfare
Board unless otherwise stated.*



Waterloo Street can be called a hub of religious harmony. Chinese and Indian temples stand almost side by side with Catholic and Methodist churches dating back to the mid-1800s on this quiet street in downtown Singapore.

Few may know that the Maghain Aboth (Shield of Our Father) synagogue, the oldest and second largest in South-East Asia, is also there. Consecrated in 1878, the original single storey building has grown into a compound that has become the heart of the Jewish community in Singapore.

On 2 December 2021, the Jews of Singapore Museum was officially opened by guest-of-honour, Law and Home Affairs Minister K. Shanmugam, Mr Nash Benjamin, president of the Jewish Welfare Board, and Chief Rabbi of Singapore, Mr Mordechai Abergel.

(top)
Exhibition panels narrate the history of the Jews of Singapore.

(right)
The Maghain Aboth synagogue (right) and Jacob Ballas Centre where the museum is located (left) on Waterloo Street. Photo by Gaurav on Wikimedia Commons.

In March this year, the Minister stood in solidarity with the Jewish community when a 20-year-old man was arrested for planning a knife attack on those leaving the synagogue. In his speech during the opening ceremony, he said, "The safety and security of all in Singapore, including the Jewish community, is a key priority." He highlighted the contributions of Jews, "Jews have added to the richness of our history and our society today, and I'm very glad that this museum showcases the history for future generations."



Chief Rabbi, Mr Mordechai Abergel shows a Sefer Torah, inscribed on parchment scrolls and encased in an embellished silver Torah case, commissioned in the 1900s. Photo by the writer.

FROM THE SILK ROAD TO SINGAPORE

The new museum is located on the ground floor of the seven-storey Jacob Ballas Centre next to the synagogue. The permanent exhibition features three key themes: the history of the Jews in Singapore dating back to the early 1800s, the outstanding contributions of key Jewish figures and Jewish faith, culture and traditions. Content from the exhibition comes from the book *The Jews of Singapore* by Joan Bieder (2007).

The Baghdadi Trade Diaspora had been trading on the Silk Road to Asia since the 9th century and forged a network of fellow Jews worldwide. Jewish traders established communities in the British Straits Settlements of Penang, Melaka and Singapore. Singapore's first census taken in 1830 lists nine Jewish traders.

In 1846, six of the 43 trading houses in Singapore were registered to Jews. A *mahallah* (Jewish Quarter) had formed around Short Street near Middle Road, providing comfort and security to new immigrants. By the 1920s, the Jews were thriving and prospering in Singapore.

World War II took a toll on the community. Many fled to Bombay and Calcutta where there were large Jewish communities. Those who remained were killed or interned at Changi Prison. After the war, some emigrated to the newly formed nation of Israel.

Today there are approximately 2,000-3,000 Jews in Singapore although most of them are expatriates. Mr Nash Benjamin estimates that about 200 are local-born Jews with family histories intertwined with that of Singapore's. He shares, "Jews have a long history in Southeast-Asia, with the oldest community being in Singapore. But today we have unfortunately witnessed the disappearance of Jewish communities in the region, Singapore being the singular exception. We must not take this for granted."

PROMINENT JEWS

Visitors to the museum may recognise familiar names from Singapore's history such as David Marshall, Singapore's

first Chief Minister from 1955 to 1956, Jacob Ballas, benefactor of the Jacob Ballas Centre and chairman of the Malaysia and Singapore Stock Exchange from 1964 to 1967, and Sir Manasseh Meyer, a prominent businessman and donor to the National University of Singapore. Other notable names include pioneer surgeon Yahya Cohen and Supreme Court judge Joseph Grimberg.

FAITH, CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

One of the interesting Jewish traditions highlighted in the museum is linked to circumcision, which takes place when a boy is eight days old. After the ritual, the baby and his mother must live on the same floor of the house for 40 days. The child is then taken out to cross seven bridges. Another ritual is to pour water on the back of the car as one leaves for a long journey, as a good luck wish.

Another exhibition panel highlights some Singapore Jews including Singaporean actor and radio personality Andrew Lim, who Rabbi Abergel tells me "makes the best *kosher* Peranakan food!"

There is a *kosher* restaurant and supermarket in the same building. Both are open to the public. I was delighted to taste some local Jewish food during a media lunch. Apart from hummus and falafel, we were treated to curry puffs, mutton biryani and spaghetti mee goreng.

Mr Nash Benjamin says that the Jewish community had felt that a museum was long overdue. He hopes that visitors "will come and learn more about us, we welcome all".



A display of traditional Jewish religious objects, including a Menorah, candlesticks, a century-old Chumash and Tanakh, and the late Jacob Ballas' personal copy of the Book of Psalms, and his Talit and Tefillin set displayed with their monogrammed green velvet pouches.

DAWN MARIE LEE is the Co-Editor-in-Chief of *PASSAGE*. She is a docent at the NUS Baba House.

Museum visits are free of charge and by appointment only. To book a visit, go to: <https://singaporejews.com/museum/>

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In search of a unicorn horn

GISELLA HARROLD EXPLORES “ROOMS OF WONDER” IN HER NATIVE GERMANY

All photos by the writer.

Last year when I found myself stranded in Munich, I started to explore the Kunst- und Wunderkammern of Innsbruck and Landshut. A small, permanent exhibition at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) had sparked my interest in learning more.

The Kunst-und Wunderkammern have their roots in the Renaissance. Influential people such as royals, nobility, clergy and scholars established “rooms of wonder” to show off their wealth and power.

Essentially these rooms were like a cabinet of curiosities featuring artworks or exciting objects from exotic lands, rare specimens of nature and scientific instruments. The artefacts were presented in an open display on shelves, not enclosed in glass cases. This is still the same today in the modern Wunderkammer, which is why one needs to seek special permission to visit.

The Jesuits came to Passau in 1611 and might have established such a Wunderkammer, similar to the Kircherian Museum in Rome. Jesuits were famous for their studiousness, which is reflected in the extensive library. Today, part of the library has been transformed into a Wunderkammer which I visited. Fascinating objects include a giant Japanese crab spanning 3.20 meters and the mythical ‘horn of a unicorn’, which is in fact a narwhal’s tusk. A coin chest found in an attic complete with ancient coins is another curious artefact.

This modern Wunderkammer was made possible with



A giant crab and “unicorn horn” at the Wunderkammer. In ancient times, narwhal tusks were often touted as mythical “unicorn horns” and were prized treasures.

The cork Colosseum made using an 18th century technique by artist Dieter Coellen.



permanent loans from some prominent museums in Bavaria. For example, the huge earth and sky globes, made by Vincenzo Coronelli in the 17th century are from the Bavarian National Museum.

The Jesuits worked extensively in Asia, so it is not surprising that more than 50 objects on loan from the Museum of Five Continents are from China and Japan. One of the vases on display is said to have been owned by the Emperor of China.

The modern aspect of this collection is reflected in miniature cork models made by German artist Dieter Coellen, who is probably the only person in the world still using this 18th century technique. Here you’ll see highly detailed models of the Colosseum, Acropolis and other ancient wonders. **P**

GISELLA HARROLD is the FOM Council Rep for Communications. She can be reached at communications@fom.sg

ISLAND NOTES

Red lanterns to save a village

DARLY FURLONG SHARES A TALE ABOUT THE LUNAR NEW YEAR

Photo by the writer.

Chinese New Year is around the corner and I am excited to witness *Yuánxiāo jié*, which is known in China as a Lantern festival. It falls on the 15th day of the Lunar New Year, marking an end to the festivities.

It is said that this festival dates back to the rule of the Han dynasty. Villagers killed the heavenly Jade Emperor’s favourite

DARLY FURLONG is a passionate volunteer of museum-based learning for children and leads other causes in Singapore that facilitate social justice.

crane and he vowed revenge. The emperor’s daughter heard of his plans and forewarned the villagers. They decided to trick the Jade Emperor into believing that their village was already on fire by hanging red lanterns, bursting firecrackers and starting little fires. When the Jade Emperor saw the village, he was satisfied that no further action was required, hence the village emerged unscathed.

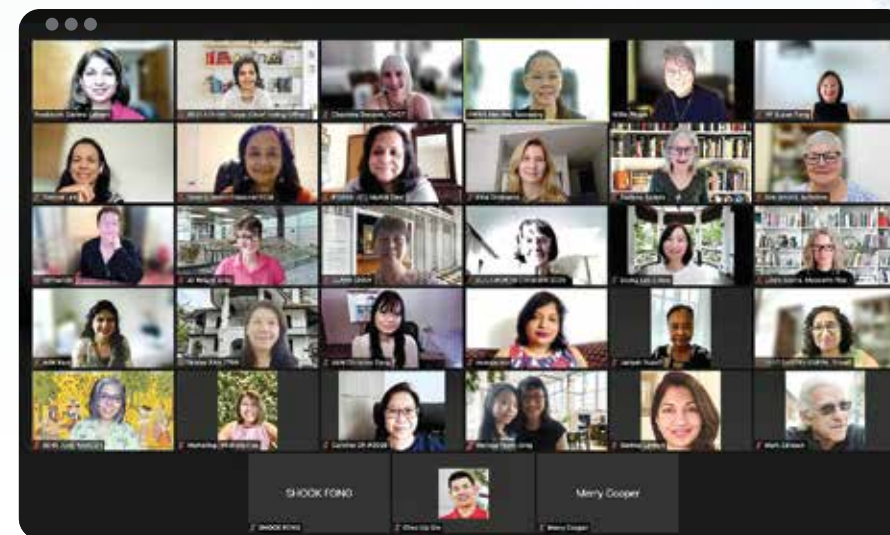
To mark this occasion of reprieve, homes in China are festooned with colourful lanterns, families light firecrackers and feast on *tangyuan* or *yuanxiao* (glutinous rice balls in syrup) symbolising the first full moon of the new year and completeness. **P**

(Editor’s note: In Singapore, the 15th day of the Lunar New Year is more popularly known and celebrated as “Chap Goh Meh”, a Hokkien term which means the “15th night”. Instead of marking the occasion with lanterns and firecrackers, most Singapore Chinese would gather for a family meal.)



Steering FOM during a pandemic

DARLENE KASTEN GIVES DETAILS ON HOW FORMAL MEETINGS CAN TURN INTO OCCASIONS FOR CELEBRATIONS



The virtual AGM, closing off 2021.

Annual General Meetings (AGMs) are opportunities for membership to vote on important resolutions and review an organisation’s financial health and yearly accomplishments, but when it is the final AGM presided over by an outgoing President who served three years, it also becomes a celebration for a job well done.

SUCCESSSES

A few of the many accomplishments presented at the virtual FOM AGM at the start of December last year were docent support for “FOM Cares” programming, the launch of “FOM Members Care” open to all FOM members, and docent training for two new institutions: Changi Chapel and Museum, and Fort Siloso.



Garima Lalwani (left) and Millie Phuah.

INNOVATION

A worldwide pandemic for the last two years saw the organisation tested and FOM rose to the challenge by reimagining events and activities. “Asian Study Group”, “Asian Film Study Group”, “Textile Enthusiasts Group”, “Monday Morning Lectures”, “Friday with Friends” and the seven “Asian Book Groups” all went virtual on the Zoom platform and a “Virtual Theatre Session”, “Textile

Study Group” and “Kantha Embroidery Workshops” were initiated. Docent led tours were adjusted for safety guidelines and even paused several times when safety concerns became too great. Docent training was cancelled for 2020-2021, but an online certificate course under the name “Asian Art & History for Museum Enthusiasts” was launched in its stead. This initiative was a huge success, keeping 151 members from 27 countries engaged in FOM programming. A hybrid model of online and in-person training kept the current batch of docents on their toes. Closed borders prevented “Asian Study Tours” from taking off, but the “Armchair Travel” and “Museums Around the World with FOM” series had members joining from Singapore and overseas.

STAYING CONNECTED

Digital communication was critical to keeping isolated members engaged. Weekly and monthly newsletters kept membership up-to-date on all FOM events and activities, with more information found on the FOM website, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter page, and in *PASSAGE* magazine. Behind the scenes FOM successfully transitioned from Yahoo Groups and Webmail to Google Workspace. FOM accounts moved from Citibank to DBS, and PayNow was introduced as an additional mode of payment.

Under the guidance of former President Garima Lalwani, the unwavering support of her councils, volunteer leaders, membership and partners, and with the gradual reopening of Singapore and the world, FOM’s future with new President Millie Phuah looks bright. **P**



A virtual carnival for FOM leaders

DARLENE KASTEN REPORTS ON THE LEADERSHIP APPRECIATION EVENT 2021

Photos captured during the online event.

For the second year in a row, the FOM Council was unable to host an in-person gathering for its annual FOM Leadership Appreciation Dinner to recognise the many volunteer leaders who make the organisation run so smoothly. So we ran away to the circus instead!

"Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls", the FOM Virtual Carnival was held via Zoom on the afternoon of 22 November 2021 under the direction of Ringmaster and Council Representative for Volunteer Appreciation and Membership, Christine Zeng.

FOM President Garima Lalwani welcomed the forty attendees including council members, activity leaders, museum coordinators, magazine editors, communication leaders, docent training heads and tour schedulers to the virtual Big Top. She expressed the spirit of the event perfectly when she said, "FOM Leaders are not only accomplished, hard-working, collaborative individuals, who love what they do, they are also really nice people! My heartfelt thanks to all of you for your contribution and support!"

Revelers were encouraged to come in their best carnival attire. Best Costume prizes went to clown Jyoti Ramesh and mime Simone Lee. A circus wouldn't be a circus without live performers and so we obliged with a Bad Acting game. Gisella Harrold demonstrated by delivering her assigned one-liner "overcome with evil." Hilarity followed with the best performances given by a "nervous" Hong Leng Lee, a "paranoid" Chey Cheng Lim and a "sobbing" Neeraja Rao.

We dined on gourmet carnival treats specially prepared by Chef Russell from The Refectory, and had more fun with decoupage craft kits prepared by Vicki Ling from Sense of Arts, making one-of-a-kind fabric pouches and purses. (Purchases of Vicki's craft kits support Sense of Art's many social enterprises.)

While we all agreed it was fun to escape from reality for an afternoon of clowning around, we are very much looking forward to a return of the in-person camaraderie found in leadership gatherings of old. Alas, not even a crystal ball can tell us what's in store for 2022. 🍷



Love textiles? Learn more!

Get between the folds of fascinating fabrics. The FOM Textile Enthusiasts Group (TEG) opens its first talk of 2022 to all FOM members.



SYMBOLISM AND RANK IN MING DYNASTY COSTUMES AND TEXTILES

Platform: Zoom

Date and time: Friday, 28 January 2022; 3pm, Singapore time

Speaker: Jacqueline Simcox

Registration by 27 January 2022 at www.fom.sg

The Zoom link will be sent to participants the night before the event.

As with former dynasties, the Ming dynasty set its own regulations for court apparel. Not only was the colour of a garment of importance in setting out the hierarchy of court officials, but the specific designs further distinguished their rank. Even the emperor was included in this system, which was to become more restrictive in the Qing period.

To modern eyes the designs on costumes, wall hangings, palace furnishings and even Buddhist silks appear wonderfully decorative, whether formal in pattern, or charming. Yet behind each motif is a symbolism whose meaning may reflect puns on words, folk tales, or ancient Chinese beliefs stretching back well over 2,300 years.

Jacqueline Simcox is a private dealer in London, who specialises in Chinese and Central Asian silk textiles, ranging from court costumes, palace furnishings, silks for Buddhist and Daoist use as well as pictorial subjects, rare early silk fragments and some Chinese silks made for export to the West.

She has written numerous articles on Chinese textiles, catalogued private collections and contributed essays to various museum exhibition catalogues. She has also co-authored a book on the imperial Chinese textiles in the Mactaggart Art Collection for the University of Alberta in Canada.

Currently Jacqueline lectures on Chinese textiles for the postgraduate Chinese course at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies and the "Chinese Art" and "World Textiles" courses at The Victoria & Albert Museum.

If your imagination has been firmly woven into this talk, you can join the next talk as a member of the TEG.



TEXTILES OF JAPAN – AINU, MINGEI AND OKINAWA

Platform: Zoom, TEG members only

Date and time: Friday, 25 February 2022; 10am, Singapore time

Speaker: Thomas Murray

Registration by 24 February 2022 at www.fom.sg

The Zoom link will be sent to participants the night before the event.

From rugged Japanese firemen's ceremonial robes and austere rural workwear to colourful, delicately patterned cotton kimonos, this lavishly illustrated lecture explores Japan's rich tradition of textiles.

The traditional clothing and fabrics featured in this lecture were made and used in the islands of the Japanese archipelago between the late 18th and the mid 20th century. The Thomas Murray collection includes daily dress, workwear, and festival garb and follows the Arts and Crafts philosophy of the Mingei Movement, which saw that modernisation would leave behind traditional art forms such as the handmade textiles used by country people, farmers, and fisherman. The talk will present subtly patterned cotton fabrics along with garments of the more remote islands: the graphic bark cloth, nettle fibre, and fish skin robes of the aboriginal Ainu in Hokkaido and Sakhalin to the north, and the brilliantly coloured cotton kimonos of Okinawa to the far south. Thomas Murray will explore in this lecture the range and artistry of the country's tradition of fibre arts.

Thomas Murray is an independent researcher, collector and private dealer of Asian and Tribal art with an emphasis on Indonesian sculpture and textiles, as well as animistic art from other cultures. A "HALI" magazine contributing editor for the last 30 years, he serves as their in-house expert on all ethnographic textiles. His book, "Textiles of Japan" was met with critical acclaim and the collection was acquired by the Minneapolis Institute of Art. His most recent publication, "Textiles of Indonesia" serves as a companion volume to "Textiles of Japan". 🍷

For details, please email the coordinators: fomtegsingapore@gmail.com

Japanese docents celebrate their 40th anniversary



Happy 40th birthday to our Japanese Docents! Photo courtesy of the JDs.

HIROMI NISHIYAMA MARKS MILESTONES IN JD HISTORY

The Japanese Docents group (JD) began in 1981 when two Japanese women who loved Singapore and her museums joined the predecessor to FOM, and began giving Japanese-language tours soon after.

It is amazing how swiftly they managed to start tours in Japanese, especially when the technology available today did not exist back then. Research and translation had to be painstakingly done without the Internet.

Our founders' legacy continues to benefit us to this day. On top of their meticulous research and translation work, they crafted guide scripts, recruited and trained other JDs, and drafted guidelines for the group.


From its founding, the JD has kept a meticulous record of its activities for posterity. We continue to refer to these records when we face issues. We are grateful for the thoughtfulness and foresight of past generations of JD.

Some important highlights in our 40-year history include VIP tours for Japanese dignitaries such as Members of Parliament. In 2000, we were greatly honoured to receive Hanako, Princess, Hitachinomiya. It was a proud moment for the JD.

The Japanese Students' tour that began in 1983 has become an annual affair. Every year we guide a few hundred Japanese primary school students. It is something that both the students and docents enjoy. The feedback has been very positive through the years.

The JD guide programme started with the National Museum of Singapore in 1982 and has since expanded to include the Singapore Art Museum (1996), Asian Civilisations Museum (1997) and the Peranakan Museum (2008). We offer Japanese-language tours at all four museums.

The seeds sown by our two founders have grown. We cherish and enjoy the fruits of their labour but are also mindful of the need to plant our own seeds for future generations. We hit our peak membership in 2012 with 88 members. Even today with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic where we are unable to recruit, we have 56 members.

We are truly grateful for the friendship and support of the English docents and FOM through the years. Without them, we would not be here. Finally, we would like to thank our guests at the museums, for whom we exist. 

A new online charity corner


DARLENE KASTEN SHARES UPDATES FROM FOM MEMBERS CARE

FOM Members Care events are by design community-bonding experiences. Through most of the pandemic, we were able to adjust our gatherings to meet in person with prevailing regulations affecting group size and social distancing. But in May 2021, we decided to take a different tack. We launched a new online initiative called the *FOM Members Care Charity Corner* where we put the spotlight on a Singapore charity event every month for FOM members to consider supporting on their own.

Highlighted charities for the remainder of 2021 included:

- ♥ A personal care products drive in June for migrant workers supported by the charity **Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2)**.
- ♥ In July, we highlighted a book drive to raise awareness of reading and share the gift of literature with the less privileged in support of **NLB's Read for Books 2021**.
- ♥ After the successful **FOM Dragonfly Watch** event we organised in March, we followed up to highlight a second Dragonfly Watch census with NParks in August to further help determine the health of our local environment.

- ♥ September provided an opportunity to be involved in a second exercise challenge in support of the **3M Moves** initiative. This year our exercise "earned" school supplies for needy students.
- ♥ We encouraged members to unleash their inner scientist in October's **NParks Nationwide Bioblitz**, a biodiversity census of plants and animals all across Singapore.
- ♥ November saw another book drive, this time for pre-loved textbooks with **FairPrice's Share-a-Textbook**, the goals of which were to help relieve the financial burden of local families, encourage the value of thrift, and promote a greener Singapore through recycling.
- ♥ Our final highlighted charity for 2021 was the **FairPrice Walk for Rice** where members were encouraged to walk or run in November and December and dedicate their distances to translate into food for needy residents of Singapore's southeast district. For every 300m, FairPrice pledged to donate one bowl each of white rice, brown rice and oatmeal. Although this was the third year in a row that FOM Members Care chose to support the initiative, it was the first time we encouraged members to participate on their own.

The FairPrice Walk for Rice continues until 20 January 2022, so check out the FOM website to see how to submit your distances towards this worthwhile cause. We look forward to gathering together once again when restrictions ease. 



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Friends of the Museums Singapore

FOM is a volunteer, non-profit society dedicated to providing volunteer guides and financial support to Singapore's museums and cultural institutions and to delivering programmes to enhance the community's knowledge of Asia's history, culture and art.

FOM is an Associate Member of the World Federation of Friends of the Museums.

FOM member privileges include free admission to NHB museums (excluding special exhibitions); access to FOM programmes including docent training, lectures, study tours, volunteer opportunities; a subscription to the FOM magazine, *PASSAGE*, and discounts at selected retail outlets, theatres and restaurants. Membership in FOM ranges from \$30 (senior) - \$120 (family) depending on category of membership.

For more information about FOM, visit our website www.fom.sg or contact the FOM office.

MUSEUM DIRECTORY AND EXHIBITIONS

Please check individual museum websites for latest information on guided tours by FOM docents.

ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555
Tel: 6332 7798
www.acm.org.sg

Opening hours:
Daily 10am - 7pm
Fridays 10am - 9pm



FOM guided tours:

Please consult the museum's website at www.nhb.gov.sg/acm/whats-on/tours/daily-guided-tours

Understanding Asia through Singapore

The new and renovated galleries at the ACM use Singapore's history as a port city as a means of understanding the interconnections among Asian cultures and between Asia and the world.

Russel Wong in Kyoto - Continue the exploration (Until 10 April 2022)

ACM's expanded Russel Wong in Kyoto displays 37 additional black and white prints and several new colour images from the photographer's ongoing personal project to document the geisha community of Kyoto. This new selection sheds further light on rarely seen and lesser-known traditions of this private community. The images tell stories of traditional and contemporary Japan, revealing how one often merges into the other.

Over 70 black-and-white photographs illustrate customs and traditions of geishas – called “geiko” in Kyoto. The tea ceremony, dance, dressing up, and the lesser known Erikae ceremony, a two-week process where a maiko (geiko in training) prepares herself to become a geiko, are explored. The extension of this special exhibition allows visitors another chance to dive deeper into Kyoto's culture, and celebrates Russel Wong's gift of all the photographs in the show to ACM and the Singapore National Collection.



CHANGI CHAPEL AND MUSEUM

1000 Upper Changi Road North, Singapore 507707
Tel: 6214 2451 / 6242 6033

Opening hours:
9.30am to 5.30pm
Tuesdays to Sundays
Closed every Monday except Public Holidays

FOM guided tours: Fridays, 11am

The newly revamped Changi Chapel and Museum (CCM) features new content

and artefacts presented in an intimate and engaging format to tell the story of the prisoners of war and civilians interned in Changi prison camp during the Japanese Occupation. As part of the revamp, the National Museum of Singapore which manages CCM has been collecting stories and personal objects from families of former internees that emphasise their personal experiences. The museum's narrative is centred on remembrance and reflection, encouraging visitors to contemplate both the hardships that the internees underwent, as well as their courage and resilience in the face of difficulties.



GILLMAN BARRACKS

9 Lock Road, Singapore 108937
www.gillmanbarracks.com

A cluster of 11 contemporary art galleries and the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA), Gillman Barracks features an ever-changing selection of contemporary art exhibitions.

Opening hours: Tuesday to Sunday – Refer to individual gallery pages on-line for opening hours. Closed Mondays and public holidays

FOM guided tours:

For the tour schedule and to register, please consult the Gillman Barracks' website at www.fom-gillman-barracks.eventbrite.com

INDIAN HERITAGE CENTRE

5 Campbell Lane, Singapore 209924
www.indianheritage.org.sg

Open Tuesday to Sunday and public holidays. Closed on Mondays. Tuesday to Thursday: 10am to 7pm, Friday and Saturday: 10am to 8pm Sundays and public holidays: 10am to 4pm



FOM guided tours: Tuesday to Friday Please consult the centre's website at <https://www.indianheritage.gov.sg/en/visit/guided-tours>

The Indian Heritage Centre (IHC) celebrates the history and heritage of the Indian diaspora in Singapore and the Southeast Asian region. From early contacts between the Indian subcontinent and this region, the culture and social history of the community after the arrival of the British, through to the early stirrings of nationalism and political identity, and the contributions of Singapore's Indian community – the five galleries take visitors on a fascinating journey through

the Indian diaspora. Located in Singapore's colourful and vibrant Little India precinct, the centre opened in May 2015 and is a purpose-built museum.

Sikhs in Singapore – A Story Untold (Through 30 January 2022)

Co-created by members of Singapore's Sikh community and the Indian Heritage Centre, *Sikhs in Singapore – A Story Untold* is presented in three parts – *Roots*, which tells the story of the origins of Singapore's Sikh community; *Settlement*, which brings together some exemplary narratives of Sikh migrants to Singapore; and *Contemporary Perspectives* which offers glimpses into the experiences of some contemporary Sikhs.

MALAY HERITAGE CENTRE

85 Sultan Gate, Singapore 198501
Tel: 6391 0450
www.malayheritage.org.sg

Opening hours:
Tuesday to Sunday 10am – 6pm (last admission 5:30pm), closed on Mondays



FOM guided tours:

Please consult the centre's website at www.malayheritage.gov.sg/en/visit#Free-Guided-Tours

The Malay Heritage Centre (MHC) provides wonderful cultural exposure and learning opportunities for visitors of all ages and interests. Situated amidst the Istana Kampong Gelam, Gedung Kuning and the surrounding Kampong Gelam precinct, the Centre acts as a vital heritage institution for the Malay community in Singapore. Through its exhibits, programmes and activities, the Centre hopes to honour the past while providing a means for present-day expression.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE

93 Stamford Road, Singapore 178897
Tel: 6332 3659
www.nationalmuseum.sg

Opening hours:
Daily 10am – 7pm



FOM guided tours:

Please consult the Museum's website at www.nhb.gov.sg/nationalmuseum/visitor-information/nmsquicklinkretailvenuerental/guided-tour

The National Museum of Singapore is the nation's oldest museum that seeks to inspire with stories of Singapore and the world. Its history dates to 1849, when it opened on Stamford Road as the Raffles Library and Museum.

Dislocations: Memory and Meaning of the Fall of Singapore, 1942

(29 Jan – 31 May 2022)

The Fall of Singapore remains one of the most influential turning points in Singapore's history, even eighty years after its occurrence. This exhibition, while commemorating the events of 15 February 1942, also gives voice to more personal stories and looks at the impact the war continues to have on people today. From the experiences of eye-witnesses, both combatants and civilians, evacuees, both local and others to regional circumstances, and from memories that were passed down through generations to the origin of Total Defence Day, the exhibition aims to examine the Fall from new and varied perspectives.

NUS MUSEUM, NUS CENTRE FOR THE ARTS

University Cultural Centre
50 Kent Ridge Crescent, Singapore 119279
Tel: 6516 8817
www.museum.nus.edu.sg

Free admission

Opening hours:
Tues to Sat 10am – 6pm,
Closed on Sundays and public holidays,
Monday: Visits by appointment for schools/ faculties only.



Fistful of Colours: Moments of Chinese Cosmopolitanism (Until 31 December 2022)

Fistful of Colours: Moments of Chinese Cosmopolitanism brings together artworks from the late Qing Dynasty to the present moment to explore the social history of art, with a particular emphasis on the situatedness of Chinese ink works amidst its political milieus. With reference to the concept of Chinese cosmopolitanism as proposed by scholar Pheng Cheah, the exhibition connects the artistic and scholarly advocacy embodied by the artists presented, telling a story of the social life between artists and society through both modern and contemporary experiences of the overseas Chinese intellectual and mercantile communities, their pursuits of Chinese modernity, and their collective cultural commitments at the dawn of globalisation.

NUS BABA HOUSE

157 Neil Road, Singapore 088883
Tel: 6227 5731
www.babahouse.nus.edu.sg

For opening hours and guided tour information, please consult the Baba

House website at babahouse.nus.edu.sg/plan-your-visit
For enquiries, please email babahouse@nus.edu.sg

Now conceived as a heritage house facilitating research, appreciation and reflection of Straits Chinese history and culture, the NUS Baba House was built around 1895 and was once the ancestral home of a Peranakan Chinese family. During the one-hour tour, guests will be introduced to the history and architectural features of the house, and experience visiting a Straits Chinese family home in a 1920s setting, furnished with heirlooms from its previous owners and other donors.

THE PERANAKAN MUSEUM

39 Armenian Street, Singapore 179941
Tel: 6332 7591
www.peranakanmuseum.sg

This intimate museum possesses one of the finest and most comprehensive collections of Peranakan objects. Galleries on three floors illustrate the cultural traditions and the distinctive visual arts of the Peranakans. The museum is currently closed to prepare for its next phase of development.



SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

71 Bras Basah Road, Singapore 189555
Tel: 6332 3222
www.singaporeartmuseum.sg

The Singapore Art Museum (SAM) focuses on international contemporary art practices, specialising in Singapore and Southeast Asia. The main building of the museum (located along 71 Bras Basah Road) is currently closed to prepare it for its next phase of development. While we wait, SAM is not missing in action but a Museum In Action: bringing art experiences into everyday spaces around Singapore and actively collaborating with partners and communities. 2022 kickstarts with the launch of SAM at Tanjong Pagar Distripark, the museum's new contemporary art space opening in January. Find out more at <https://www.bit.ly/SAM-MuseumInAction>



STPI CREATIVE WORKSHOP AND GALLERY

41 Robertson Quay, Singapore 238236
Tel: 6336 3663
www.stpi.com.sg

Opening hours:

Monday to Friday: 10am – 7pm, Saturday: 9am – 6pm, Sunday: 10am – 5pm
Closed on public holidays

FOM guided tours:

For the FOM guided tour schedule, to learn more about STPI's public programmes, special evening tours, and programmes in Japanese, Korean, Mandarin and French, please visit stpi.com.sg

STPI is a dynamic creative workshop and contemporary art gallery based in Singapore. Established in 2002, STPI is a not-for-profit organisation committed to promoting artistic experimentation in the mediums of print and paper and has become one of the most cutting-edge destinations for contemporary art in Asia.

Charles Lim Yi Yong: Staggered Observations of a Coast (Through January 2022)

For half a year, Lim sailed all along the east coast anchorage of Singapore. Professionally trained in sailing, the artist applied his sense of staggered observation during these trips, which is the process of taking note of the wave patterns and clouds, allowing for the passage of time to occur, and finally, re-looking at the same points so as to note the changes. In this exhibition, Lim also expands on his interest in Singapore's project of land reclamation through a set of six laser-cut STPI handmade paper depicting maps of reclaimed lands.

SUN YAT SEN NANYANG MEMORIAL HALL

12 Tai Gin Road, Singapore 327874
Tel: 6256 7377
www.wanqingyuan.org.sg

Opening hours:
Tuesday to Sunday 10am - 5pm, closed on Mondays



FOM guided tours:

Please consult the Memorial Hall's website at <https://www.sysnmh.org.sg/en/visit/free-guided-tours>

Built in 1902, this double-storey villa was the nerve centre of Dr Sun Yat Sen's revolutionary movement in Southeast Asia. It re-opened to the public on 9 October 2011 and the revamped Memorial Hall pays tribute to the vital role played by Singapore and Nanyang in the 1911 Revolution. Focusing on the contributions of Dr. Sun Yat Sen's key supporters in Singapore, the refurbished museum sheds light on the lesser-known details of Singapore and Nanyang's involvement in the 1911 Revolution.



The true-blue Peranakan house, painted by Yusoff Abdul Latiff.

It is a short and colourful street in Singapore. The lively Peranakan houses on both sides of Koon Seng Road beckon the attention and thrill the senses of passers-by, tourists and bridal couples who wish for a classic wedding photograph backdrop.

"This Peranakan house belongs to my old friend, retired district judge Abdul Rahim Jalil. Being a person who believes strongly in authenticity, he has kept its most original condition," says Yusoff Abdul Latiff, referring to his painting of the "blue house" featured on this page.

Yusoff is a retired teacher who now indulges in painting watercolours with a focus on intricate Peranakan houses amongst others.

He points out that many of the neighbouring houses, and those in other parts of Singapore, have the façade and main structures intact, whilst the interior has been completely transformed beyond recognition with glass panels, jacuzzis and other modern features.

This contrasts with the historic details found both inside and outside the "blue house". Yusoff emphasises that although Rahim's living room came with the classic geometrical-release floor tiles, he found old matching tiles and was able to extend them throughout the entire ground floor.

Walls that talk

Some of the houses are painted in vibrant primary pigments, while others are coated in soothing pastel shades. They look a little like books neatly stacked on a shelf. Each one filled with a wealth of stories. Suppose you could reach out, take one of these houses carefully into your hands, open it up like a treasured novel and read its chapters. Imagine the life it has lived, the people who have built it, visited it and called it home, and the many conversations that have taken place since its foundation.

"This true-blue Peranakan house has been furnished with classic Peranakan teak and rosewood furniture and fittings. Even the attic has its fair share of them," continues Yusoff.

When asked about the signboard above the entrance door, Yusoff explains that Rahim commissioned a veteran wood craftsman to carve the retro family surname signage.

"It is finished in gold. It reads in Chinese characters as 'Jia Lee', closest to his father's name 'Jalil'. In Chinese, it means 'happy and beautiful'.

"Notice also at the gate is a small plaque with Arabic verse. It means 'may safety be with you', and below it the Chinese equivalent 'chu ru ping an', meaning 'safety in and out of the house'. The plaque is the only giveaway that its owner is a non-Chinese," adds Yusoff.

The authentic detail continues to the small garden where several oriental granite lions stand proudly amidst the well-manicured bonsai topiaries.

"It is hoped that such Peranakan houses in Singapore, even though no longer lived in by Peranakan families, should at least maintain their original interior for the benefit of posterity, and as a true reminder of the rich Peranakan legacy," concludes Yusoff. 📖

COMPILED BY HEIKE BREDENKAMP

Friends of the Museums (FOM) presents

MONDAY MORNING LECTURES

January – February 2022

Currently all Monday Morning Lectures (MMLs) are held online on the Zoom platform. Lectures are open to FOM members only. Visit the Community Events page at www.fom.sg to sign up. Registration opens one week before the event.

10 JANUARY WHY INDIA: A STORY THROUGH 100 OBJECTS

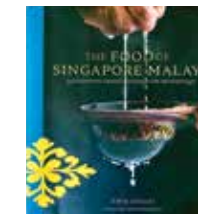
Speaker: Vidya Dehejia



In her richly illustrated book, Vidya Dehejia allows 100 objects to take centre-stage to tell a story of India that unravels in a series of thematic sections. The objects shed light on the varying priorities, and the differing strands of achievement, that arose over time to create the "rich multi-cultural medley that is today's India".

17 JANUARY THE FOOD OF SINGAPORE MALAYS: GASTRONOMIC TRAVELS THROUGH THE ARCHIPELAGO

Speaker: Khir Mohamad Johari



This talk is based on Khir Mohamad Johari's much-anticipated landmark book of the same title. The author will explore the food of Singapore Malays, not just as a means of sustenance but as a cultural activity. He'll share how geography, history and cultural beliefs have shaped and influenced Malay gastronomy.

24 JANUARY THE YEAR OF THE TIGER: TIGERS IN CHINESE ART AND LORE

Speaker: Patricia Bjaaland Welch



Explore the Chinese world of tigers from tiger rock art to Tiger Balm® with our annual January speaker, Patricia Bjaaland Welch.

07 FEBRUARY A FASHIONABLE CENTURY: TEXTILE ARTISTRY AND COMMERCE IN THE LATE QING

Speaker: Rachel Silberstein



Rachel Silberstein will introduce some of the key issues explored in her book, "A Fashionable Century," including the stylistic development of women's dress between the late Ming and the late Qing. By challenging the conventional production model, in which women embroidered items at home, she'll show how fashion was enabled by a process of commercialisation.

14 FEBRUARY MYANMAR'S FASCINATION WITH THE BUDDHA GOTAMA'S FOOT SOLES: SELECTED ASPECTS

Speaker: Lilian Handlin



By the 11th century, textual imports decked the Buddha Gotama's Foot Soles with 108 signs, sometimes even more. The talk flags only three interrelated aspects of the immensely complicated story regarding how Gotama footprints retained their resonance for so long.

21 FEBRUARY PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF NEPHRITE JADE IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY CHINA

Speaker: Yulian Wu



Jade, a hard and beautiful stone historically imbued with symbolic meaning in Chinese culture since the Han dynasty, was one of the most desired luxury objects in the Qing dynasty. This talk introduces the production and consumption of jade objects as well as their rich political and cultural connotations in 18th century China.

28 FEBRUARY THE BEAUTY OF THE NIGHT SKY: SEEING BEYOND THE OBVIOUS

Speaker: Akash Anandh



From Vincent van Gogh to Henri Matisse, children to adults, there are none who have not been enthralled by a starry night sky. Especially those who have experienced it from a rural area, away from light pollution. Get ready to peek into the depths of our universe and literally look back in time.

The lectures will begin promptly at 11am, Singapore time.



**NANYANG
TECHNOLOGICAL
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**School of Art, Design
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College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences

MA in Museum Studies & Curatorial Practices

Intake in August 2022

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