

# PASSAGE

Friends of the Museums Singapore

May / June 2017

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منازلون فیشن و مقترام دان اوام مالیا



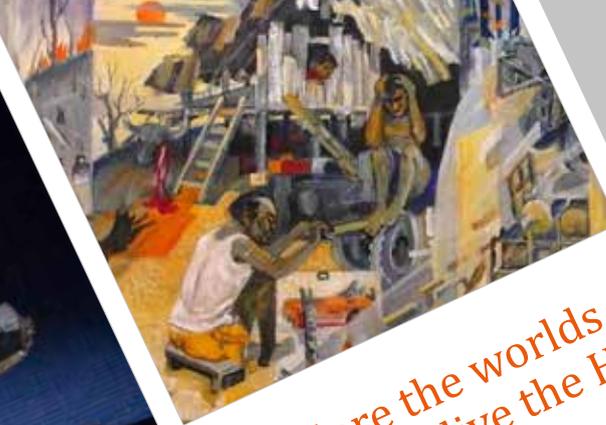
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# museum guide

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# President's Letter

## Dear Friends,

In my report to members at last year's annual general meeting, I mentioned that this year the council planned to add new activities that would be more relevant to the lifestyle needs of our members. I am happy to announce that in March we launched *Curio*, an initiative that offers a wide spectrum of activities. To kick off the programme, we offer activities such as a night at the theatre, a film screening and a workshop that teaches you how to make full use of the functions of your mobile phone's camera. Check out our website for updates on this programme.

This May, we are once again planning ahead for our autumn docent training programmes. On 16 May, a Public Information Meeting will be held at the National Museum of Singapore to introduce the museums where our members can serve as volunteer guides. If you have enjoyed the rich diversity of the collections in Singapore's museums, perhaps it's time you considered being part of our docent community. Or, if you have friends who might be interested, invite them to attend and come along yourself. The graduates featured in this issue share their stories of the unexpected pleasures of being an FOM docent.

On 19 May, we will be honouring our volunteers at the annual Volunteers Appreciation Morning. In conjunction with this event, we will be announcing the recipient of this year's Salome de Decker award, which is presented every year to an FOM volunteer who has quietly and positively given time and skills to the society.

Salome de Decker was honoured for her contributions by the National Volunteer Centre in 2004. Unfortunately, she lost her life to cancer at the age of 35. The award that is named after her exemplifies her spirit of volunteerism: teamwork, respect for others, giving freely and growing through service to others. Unlike previous years when the recipients were announced at our annual general meetings, the council has decided to present the award during the Volunteers Appreciation Morning, as we feel that this is a more appropriate platform to honour the recipient.

Those who are fans of Korean drama series such as *Jewel in the Palace*, *Dong Yi* and *Wind of the Palace* should not miss out on the Asian Civilisations Museum's current exhibition featuring the court treasures and city life of Joseon Korea. Visitors will see the lavish artefacts commissioned by the Joseon dynasty's royal court and learn about the material culture and everyday lives of the Korean people during that period. The exhibition will end on 23 July.

With the Vesak Day festivities and Hari Raya Puasa celebrations coming up in May and June, I wish our Buddhist and Muslim friends happy holidays.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clara Chan'.

Clara Chan  
FOM President 2017

Please Note: In the Jan/Feb 2017 issue, page 20, paragraph 8: the sentence should read: "The colonial government was the unabashed owner of the government opium factory at the foot of Opium Hill (*Bukit Chandu* in Malay), today's Peppy's Road."

# A Mini United Nations

## The Docent Graduates of the National Museum of Singapore

By Diana Loo Pye Fung



The 2016/2017 docent graduates at the National Museum of Singapore with co-heads of training.

Singapore has been a potpourri of multiculturalism and diversity since ancient times, therefore it was no surprise to find that the 2016/2017 batch of trainee docents at the National Museum of Singapore (NMS) was a multinational and highly diverse one. The 19 docents hailed from 10 different countries: the United States of America, Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Japan, South Korea and of course, Singapore. This diverse group had a high degree of commonality, so its members quickly hit it off when they first met last September. Regardless of where they had come from, they had a passionate interest in the history of Singapore. After six months of intense training that included enlightening lectures, insightful field trips and rigorous practice sessions, all its members graduated in March. A very commendable feat with not a single drop-out!

This international group of docent trainees included four Singaporeans and 15 expatriate women, some of whom had just arrived in Singapore and others who'd been here for more than three years. Some, such as Linka Lokker (from the Netherlands), had lived in many different countries, but this was their first time in Southeast Asia – new job opportunities had brought their families here. Others, such as Lara Collette (a Swiss national of Lebanese-Jordanian heritage), reported that their families had deliberately chosen Singapore for their overseas assignments.

The group's diversity extended to their professional and academic backgrounds. Among them were dentists, journalists, teachers, elected municipal council members, politicians, architectural urban historians, fund managers, regional CFOs and many more. Imagine the highly engaging exchanges that occurred during the weekly lectures offered by A-list academics and professionals such as Professor John Miksic (a celebrated archaeologist and also a lecturer in the Southeast Asian Studies Department, National University of Singapore); Mr Kwa Chong Guan (Senior Fellow at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, long-serving member of the National Heritage Board, committee member with the National Archives and the Asian Civilisations Museum and Honorary Adjunct Associate Professor with the History Department at the National University); Prof Tan Tai Yong (President, Yale-NUS College, National University of

Singapore, a distinguished historian and co-author with Mr Kwa, of *From Classical Emporium to World City: Singapore – a 700-Year History*); Dr Farish A Noor (Associate Professor at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, researcher at various world-renowned institutions, member of the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations Panel of Global Experts on Religion and Politics in Asia; radio essayist for the BBC World Service) and many others.

But why was NMS rather than one of the other museums chosen by these volunteer docents? Most were motivated by having the opportunity to better understand the history and culture of the city they now live in. For some, it was curiosity about what Singapore had been like 50 years ago, what it has become today and how it is that the country's multiracial groups live together harmoniously. For a few, the decision was made after attending the NMS team's presentation during last May's Public Information Meeting (PIM). Their interest had been stimulated by the surprise information that Singapore has a history of more than 700 years.

Despite being a small country, Singapore has many enthralling museums and exhibitions that are held all year round. Even for local docents, the informative field trips were fascinating eye-openers. At the end of the course, it was not only the country's rich history that the group members, both local and foreign, had gained knowledge of, but the wonderful people they had met and become friends with, people from all over the world.

If you find this story inspiring, please join us for the next PIM at 10:00 am on 16 May, at the National Museum of Singapore. There will be a second PIM in August and the next docent training programmes begin in September.

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**Diana Loo**, a Singaporean, recently graduated as an NMS docent. She will be one of the co-heads for the upcoming docent training at NMS.

---

Photo by Gisella Harrold



## PASSAGE

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**On the Cover:** Cover of *Fesyen* magazine, the first Malay weekly magazine in Malaya. Issue No. 272, undated, Singapore, publisher: HARMY Press, Malay Heritage Centre Collection, National Heritage Board.

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 \$25 (senior) - \$100 (family) depending on category of membership.

For more information about FOM, visit our website [www.fom.sg](http://www.fom.sg) or contact the FOM office.

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FOM is not responsible for statements expressed in the signed articles and interviews.

## Asian Civilisations Museum

"When I first heard about docent training, I immediately thought that the knowledge acquired could be a great thing to 'take' with me after my family time in Asia was done. I chose the ACM because I believed it would be the most complete since it would include the cultural roots of Singapore and Singapore itself. I got so much more than I expected. It was a lot of work, and some. I was 'rusty' in my studying skills, but with all the support and encouragement I received from the other trainees and docents, I felt I could do it. It makes all the difference that docent training is run by a group of people with such professionalism and a commitment that exceeds all expectations. And this covers just the basics about this course. I found myself part of such a diverse group of people not just in cultural backgrounds, but also in walks of life. People who had chosen to be part of the training, as volunteers, sharing a passion and a goal – to be the best docent they could be. And as the time passed, friendships were formed and I discovered myself looking forward to every Tuesday and Friday (and sometimes Thursday), wondering, "where am I going next?", "which new little piece of the puzzle am I going to fit in?" It opened my eyes to a whole new Singapore, Asia and sometimes the world in general. I had a much better understanding of the cultures and peoples of the world through learning about hidden meanings and ancient symbols. Although I have only scratched the surface, I have a greater appreciation of many things.

On a more personal note, just after the course finished I took a trip to China with my family and realised how much I had learned. I couldn't wait to share as much as I could with them. It brought the trip to a whole new level for me, giving me an even greater sense of appreciation of the opportunity to be there, one that wasn't possible before". (Simone Lee)



*"It's a bit like going back to school – there are lectures, assignments, evaluations, but then it hits you why you remember school as one of the best times of your life. There are new friends to be made, places to explore together, parties to attend and you notice things around you with a fresh set of eyes. It's been an amazing experience". (Ramya Narayanan)*

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Aparna Balasubramaniam  
Caroline Carfantan  
Sabrina Champion  
Susan Chong  
Annabel Chow  
Niamh Daniels  
Marie Deckers  
Mai Rodriguez Entem  
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Darlene Kasten

Carolina Kiger  
Hyongmi Kim  
Oksana Kokhno  
Anitha Komanthakkal  
Simone F Lee  
Euna Lee  
Maria do Carmo Mattos  
Ramya Narayanan  
Nelly Navarro  
Jia Yan Png  
Mireille Rice  
Elizabeth Rogers

Shweta Sadavarte  
Manisha Sanadhya  
Mary Scott  
Carol Tan  
Simone Ueki  
Jiaona Wang  
Talia Webb  
Uta Weigelt  
Yeo Lee Cheng

# Docent Graduates

## National Museum of Singapore

Almudena Avendaño	Yukiko Kitajima
Colombe Bally	Linka Lokker
Duane Chen	Diana Loo
Lara Collette	Estelle Montane
Linn de Rham	Joo Yeon Sohn
Mieke Dings - ter Keurs	Teo Chwee Peng
Tessa Fairclough	Wong Choy May
Karen Houtman	Jo Wick
Antje Huebner	Anne Wightman
Linda Kawaratani	

*"Training to be an NMS docent has been an enriching experience. Through learning its history, I have a greater understanding of Singapore and its people. It has been a pleasure to share this experience with a lovely group of fellow trainees and a dedicated and encouraging training team." (Anne Wightman, England)*



## Singapore Art Museum

Cecilia Arellano	Claire Lechevalier
Nicole Bithos	Kyungjin Lee
Ana Carolina Britto	Patsy Meehan
Michela Cavrini	Jacqueline Pagano
Sophie Danselme	Yulia Pak
Tenzin Dolkar	Shweta Ravi
Anna Lisa Ferri	Irma Ruano
Geraldine Gauthier	Alice Russotti
Marie Godart	Luciana Scali
Madhumita Goswami	Zidan Sun
Karolina Jankowska	Fusun Uncu
Emily Johnston	Monika Waltermann
Jung Sun Kim	Vandita Yadav
So Hyun Kim	Jenny Yeoh

## Peranakan Museum

Docent Training 2016-17 is proud to announce its first graduating class. TPM co-heads Sonal Mawandia and Marjon de Winter hosted the TPM graduates' end-of-training with a joyous ceremony attended by FOM President Clara Chan and Overall Co-heads of Training Dorien Knaap and Patricia Welch on 17 January. Congratulations to our newest batch of docents and welcome to the wonderful world of guiding. Introducing our new guides:



Michelle Foo
Maliga Jeganathan
Cecilia Kim
Lo Yiling
Marie-Paule Mitra
Katherine Seow
Gayatri Thati
Tiang Ginn Wah
Cath Vironda

# Singapore's Mosques

By Siobhán Cool

Many factors make Islam the longest established religion in Singapore: the centuries-long stream of Arab and Indian traders; the tolerance of the British colonial authorities and the constitutional commitment of the modern nation-state to safeguard and support the indigenous Malays' religious beliefs. As a result of a variety of influences, Singapore's mosques demonstrate a number of architectural styles: Islamic Saracenic (a mix of Turkish, Persian, Middle Eastern, Classical and Moorish designs), Malay, Indian and Modern.



**Masjid Sultan, Arab Street:** This national monument dominates the Kampong Glam precinct and is one of the most important mosques in Singapore. Locals and tourists alike are captivated by its golden dome representing the vault of heaven. The complex's vibrance is enhanced by colourful notes from the nearby silk merchants and textile traders of Arab Street.

**Masjid Al-Abrar, Telok Ayer Street:** Nestled amongst heritage shophouses and chic restaurants in Chinatown is one of Singapore's earliest mosques, built in the South Indian style. Minaret-like towers with subtle onion domes indicate that this is a house of Islam. Its national monument status may well be overlooked by the weekday lunch crowds who jostle with worshippers looking to park their motorbikes.



**Masjid Jamek, Queenstown:** Lying in the shadow of the HDB flats of Queenstown and Redhill, this Malay-style mosque is humble in design, but far from unassuming thanks to its brilliant blue hue. (Unfortunately, recent renovations have given the mosque a more sober look. It's now painted in hues of yellow and brown). Large angsa trees bring cooling shade to the structure, which invites the Prophet Muhammad's followers to enter.



Siobhán Cool lives in Singapore with her family and steals away when she can, to sketch passing scenes and Singapore moments.

# Above the Treetops, at MacRitchie Reservoir Park

By Anne Pinto-Rodrigues



One of the many walking trails leading into the forest at MacRitchie Reservoir Park



The TreeTop Walk provides a stunning view of the MacRitchie forest canopy

The 12-hectare forest surrounding Singapore's oldest reservoir, MacRitchie, is a rich and diverse ecosystem. It is home to nearly 2,000 plant species and 400 species of fauna. Some of the last remaining vestiges of primary rainforest in Singapore can be found here. Along with three other reservoirs (Upper Peirce, Lower Peirce and Upper Seletar), MacRitchie forms part of the Central Catchment Nature Reserve, a key rainfall catchment area for the island and an important source of Singapore's water supply.

Several designated hiking trails within MacRitchie Reservoir Park allow visitors to experience this remarkable forest. One of the highlights is the TreeTop Walk, a free-standing suspension bridge (about 250 metres in length), which provides hikers with stunning views of the forest canopy. At its highest point, the bridge is about 25 metres above the forest floor.

In recent years, government plans to construct a train tunnel under the MacRitchie forest for the Cross Island Line, have led conservation NGOs and nature-loving citizens to voice their concerns and actively engage with project stakeholders to find alternative solutions. As of March 2017, soil investigation work has begun and its findings will be crucial in determining how this train line will be laid out – either cutting through the forest, to its detriment, or skirting its periphery, thus minimising impact.

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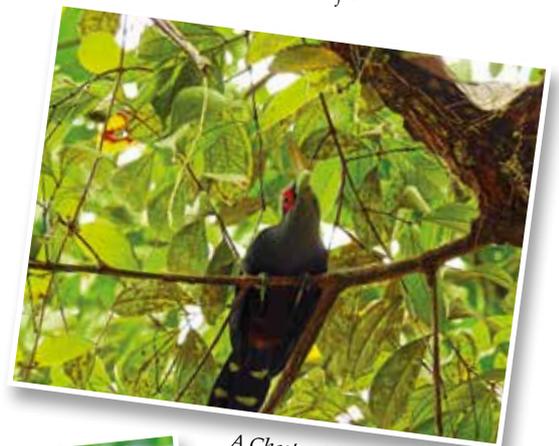
**Anne Pinto-Rodrigues** is a nature enthusiast, who writes about her various wildlife experiences on her blog *No Roads Barred* ([www.noroadbarred.wordpress.com](http://www.noroadbarred.wordpress.com)).

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All photos by the author



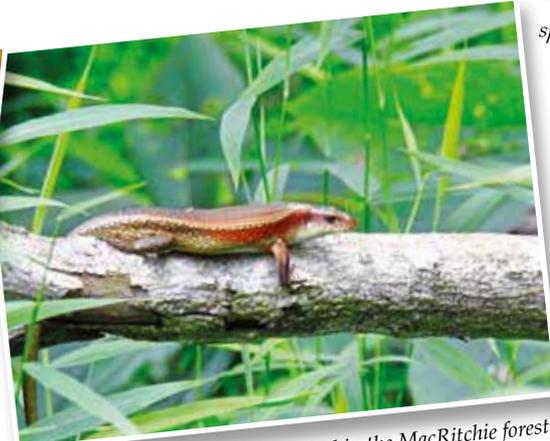
View of the Upper Peirce Reservoir from the TreeTop Walk



A Chestnut-bellied Malkoha (a species in the cuckoo family) seeks refuge in the foliage of a tree



A male Common Parasol Dragonfly spotted near a small stream in the forest



A Common Sun Skink photographed in the MacRitchie forest

# Malayan Tin Animal Money

By Patricia Bjaaland Welch



An example of an ingot used as tin money



An animal figure used as tin money

Metal bestows power. Think about it.

In the ancient world, metal meant weapons; in the modern world, metal is synonymous with another form of power – money. There's a reason historians and scientists categorised late prehistory and early historical periods into the stone, bronze and iron ages. With the discovery of each metal came significant advances in man's ability to overpower nature and one another.

Metal coinage is common in most currencies, yet the discovery of two metal animal figures and an ingot made out of tin, identified as "tin animal money" in one of the display cases in the Asian Civilisations Museum's (ACM) trade gallery, often draws puzzled expressions.

Tin was one of the main attractions of the Malayan peninsula, drawing early traders to its shores. As one of the first metals known to mankind, it was one of the two components of bronze (the other being copper). Tin (whose Periodic Table of Elements designation is Sn) is a heavy and inert substance that is usually found as a vein or in streams. Malaya's tin deposits were so rich, one often didn't even need to lift a shovel, one could pan for it in streams.

Because the metal had a value in and of itself, blocks of tin became one of the earliest forms of money in the region – each block's value determined by its weight. Upon arriving in the region in 1413, Zheng He's interpreter, Ma Huan, carefully recorded the weight of the more common blocks. Later, "during the reign of Mahmud Shah (1488-1511) [these blocks] became the standard unit of money in which all other goods, including foreign coins, were valued."<sup>1</sup>

Indian traders soon arrived, either settling alongside or

displacing the region's earlier waves of settlers. Over time, the coastal settlements, which became convenient way-stations for the large numbers of traders crossing the Indian Ocean, grew into regional emporia. Meanwhile, miners hoping to make their fortunes from Malaya's rich tin deposits were drawn to the region in increasing numbers. Amongst the latter waves of immigrants were Chinese miners from rural Southeast China who brought with them their own cultural traditions and beliefs.

No historical record confirms the exact stimulus behind Malaya's tin animal money, but the most widely-held belief is that it evolved from the pre-Islamic Malay and aboriginal belief in offering a sacrifice at the beginning of new commercial ventures, including the opening of new tin mines. In the Chinese belief system tin, like most metals, was considered powerful, with protective features. What better substitute could there be for a real animal – for local Chinese and Malay tin miners – than a metal animal, especially when made under the supervision of a local magician or *pawang*? Crocodiles, elephants, cocks, tortoises, fish and insects were the most common shapes, and because they were made of tin, which had its own intrinsic value, each animal also had a value that could be calculated from its weight. Hence the evolution of tin animal money from the 15-17<sup>th</sup> centuries that served as both ceremonial figures and a handy medium of exchange.

Of course when the Portuguese arrived in the early 1500s, they collected these figurines, melted them down and re-purposed the tin into the first Portuguese coins minted in India (*bastardo*), which can be seen in the same ACM display case. They are made of pewter, whose composition is traditionally 85-99% tin.

<sup>1</sup> William Shaw and Mohd Kassim Haji Ali, *Tin 'Hat' and Animal Money*, Muzium Negara, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (n.d.), p 2.



An insect figure used as tin money

---

Patricia Bjaaland Welch is a long-term FOM member and frequent contributor to PASSAGE.

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Photos by the author

# An Eminent Collection with a Tumultuous Past

By Oileng Gumpert

The Museum of Indian Art, located in the Dahlem district, SW Berlin, Germany, houses the Museum of East Asian Arts. Its director, Marianne Yaldiz, noted that of the approximately 20,000 objects they own, a mere fraction was on display. So they are in the process of moving to the Charlottenburg Palace, which will afford more space for their artefacts, a 'must-see' for students of Indian art.

The museum's life-size replica of the Sanchi stupa's third gateway, standing outside the nondescript building, gives the visitor a feeling of expectancy. A panel explaining the details of the Buddhist symbols is on the upper level, in the cafeteria, through whose glass walls you can look down onto the gateway.

The Buddhist collection is chronologically, thematically and geographically extensive. The vast geographical area includes India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Tibet, Xinjiang in China, and the Southeast Asian countries of Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Indonesia; the collection dates from the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE to the present day. In terms of the iconographic quality of the images of deities, this collection is probably the richest outside India: stone sculptures, reliefs, bronzes and terracottas, murals and textiles from the northern Silk Road. Special sections include the Gandhara Art Collection (Pakistan and Afghanistan, 1<sup>st</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> centuries CE) and a replica of a Central Asian Buddhist cave with a large section of the original. The Gandharan art includes objects from the Swat Valley.



Gandhara Standing Buddha, schist, 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, Takht-i-Bahi

The School of Arts in Gandhara produced Buddha images that were not necessarily identical in presentation and quality, although they all bore such features as the lengthened earlobes. A high-grade artefact such as the one pictured here, on the left, is rare. The Buddha has changed his worldly attire for a simple monk's robe. The sculpture reveals the evolution of the Buddha from worldly man to spiritual teacher.

Right: The Veneration of the Three Jewels (Triratna), schist, 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, Chorasan, Gandhara



The three wheels mounted on a column represent the 'three Jewels' of Buddhism, the Buddha, the *Dharma* and the *Sangha*. The symbol is embedded in a scene alluding to the first sermon in the deer park at Sarnath, where the wheel of the law was preached. A group of monks in veneration posture can be seen on each side of the column.



The fresco floor of Cave 37, fresco painting, 9<sup>th</sup> century CE, Bezeklik, Xinjiang

The painted floor in Bezeklik's Cave 37 (photo above) was in good condition. This was a rare find and in fact, the painting is the only one left in the world. You can see plump children, ducks, flowers and the symbols of the 'three Jewels'. In the centre is a table holding drums, incense burners and cymbals, with swastikas in each corner – Buddhist motifs that are still used today. The concept of cave temples spread from India to China via the Silk Route when Buddhism spread to China via Xinjiang.

Originally, the whole collection belonged to the Ethnological Museum of Berlin, founded in 1873. In 1906, the Royal Museum of Berlin's director founded the collection of East Asian Art. During a lecture she gave in Singapore in 2014, Dr Frances Wood, a historian and librarian, explained that during the rush to discover things Asian in the late 1800s and early 1900s, German as well as British, Italian, Russian, French and Finnish archaeologists were all involved in exploring ancient sites in India and North China. Each national body worked in a specific area. For example, the German expeditions unearthed numerous artefacts from the Turfan area.

With the help of the Society for East Asian Art, expansion continued up to World War II. Then massive losses occurred because of war damage and the removal of 90% of the collection to Russia as war booty. Today, these artefacts are displayed at the Hermitage in St Petersburg. The loss necessitated recreating the collection, which was done gradually. In 1952, the collection became part of the Indian Art Department.

When the Berlin Wall was built, reorganisation began again. In 1970, the collection moved to new premises and after the wall's fall in November 1989, the two separate collections of Indian Art and East Asian Art were unified in the current premises. To increase exhibition space for more artefacts, the collection will move yet again.

---

**OiLeng Gumpert** is a student of Indian art, but as she does not speak any Indian languages, it is an uphill task for her and she is just scratching the surface.

---

Photos by Dieter Gumpert

# Haji Ali Sanat Early Malay Cartoonist

By Zuraidah Ehsan

The idea for a commemorative exhibition for my grandfather, Haji Ali Sanat, was mooted by my sister, Faridah, between 1994 and 1995. However, the exhibition came to fruition only in 1999. As he had passed away two years earlier, my grandfather was not able to see it. The exhibition was held at the then Malay Village in Geylang Serai.

Haji Ali Sanat was the cartoonist for the Malay-language newspaper, *Utusan Melayu*, which ran from 1939 to 1942, until the fall of Singapore. His cartoons appeared weekly in the Sunday edition of that paper, *Utusan Zaman*. Although he did not write the texts for the cartoons, he nonetheless contributed to their content as he was given total freedom by the editor, Rahim Kajai (who is featured on page 17 of this issue) to illustrate anything that was deemed important and relevant for their 'struggle' at that time.

Ali Sanat was born in 1904 in house Number 15 Kampong Tembaga, Bussorah Street. The name of the village was derived from the trade activities that took place in the area at that time. *Kampong Tembaga* literally means Village of Metals. The term *tembaga* is the generic one used to describe metal; for instance, *tembaga merah* refers to copper, *tembaga kuning* is brass and *tembaga perunggu* is bronze and so on. He was the third child in a family of eight children of four boys and four girls and was schooled at the *Sekolah Melayu Kampong Glam* where he spent four years. After that he stopped and helped his father, Abdul Shukor Sanat, in his *tembaga* shop helping out with the pump for the furnace. At the age of 24 he married my late grandmother, Rupiah bte Ahmad; it was an arranged marriage.

## Life Before *Utusan Zaman*

Haji Ali ran a Muslim undertaking business, but before that he had held jobs making *capal* or slippers. He also made and sold kites and clothing and even started a food business, which lasted for a year. Unfortunately, his forays into these occupations did not last long. Indeed, he was quite worried at the prospect of being without work as it was difficult to find a job. His entry into business as a Muslim undertaker began by chance, but he continued in this business well into his seventies. I remember watching my uncles making the gravestones in our kampong's compound when I was growing up.



Haji Ali Sanat



Some of the rough sketches Haji Ali doodled on a scrap of paper

## Short career as cartoonist of *Utusan Zaman*

My grandfather's short career in *Utusan Zaman* also happened by chance. The editors were looking for someone who would be able to take on the job of cartoonist. He was approached by a fellow Kampong Tembaga resident, Wak Hussein, an employee at the newspaper tasked by the editors to ask around. The message was conveyed to my grandfather, who was invited to meet Rahim Kajai and Yusof Ishak, then an editor at *Utusan Melayu* and later the first president of Singapore. In the meeting, he was asked if he could draw and he replied that he would try. So he went on to sketch basically three characters, the first a Javanese man, distinguishable by his Javanese headgear, a *blangkon*, the second was an Arab, distinguishable by the fez, and the third was a Malay man wearing *baju Melayu*. The editors subsequently chose the Javanese character.



The sketch of the Javanese man was eventually chosen as Wak Ketok.

The character was named *Wak Ketok* and made his first appearance in the *Utusan Zaman* in the 1 November, 1939 issue. He depicted the social, economic and political issues that concerned the Malays. Satire, criticism and sarcasm in *Wak Ketok* were used against various ethnic groups who opposed the Malay nationalist movement. The column satirised the Malays in order to unite them and to improve their standard of living while the character *Wak Ketok* was utilised to encourage Malays to strive hard to uplift their lives. This was illustrated through the different occupations or trades that *Wak Ketok* was depicted in.

*Utusan Zaman* relied solely on my grandfather's contributions for its cartoon illustrations. The creation of *Wak Ketok's* different characters reflected a close yet complex relationship between writer and cartoonist. My grandfather and Rahim Kajai depended on each other to create the series. According to A Samad Ismail, one of *Utusan's* editors who worked under Rahim Kajai before the Second World War, my grandfather would first draw the cartoons for *Wak Ketok*, then Kajai would write commentaries that perfectly exemplified the cartoon.



*Wak Ketok is given the honorific title of 'Datok Panglima Hang'*



*Machan Ketawa Keronchong Orkest (Laughing Tiger Keroncong Orchestra)*

My grandfather's contributions to *Utusan Zaman* ended when Singapore was invaded by the Japanese who took over the *Utusan Melayu* office and renamed it *Berita Malai*. Although the *Utusan Melayu* was revived at the end of the occupation, Rahim Kajai had passed away in 1943, and because his father wanted him to return, my grandfather went back to Java with his family at the end of 1945.

After five years in Java, his work as a cartoonist was temporarily revived when he returned to Singapore at the request of my father, who was working as a journalist with another Malay language newspaper, *Melayu Raya*. He also contributed to the magazine, *Asmara*. When my grandfather retired from the world of newspaper cartoons, he turned his attention to drawing characters from the Javanese shadow puppet pantheon, Malay dance and also Malay musical performances. His depictions of the shadow puppet characters found a ready audience among the people who chartered by his undertaker shop. They considered his sketches to have cultural value. The drawings were sold to anyone who was willing to buy.

### Inspiration

Haji Ali's inspiration came from the cartoon strips of the newspapers and magazines that were available at the time; he used them as a guide to develop his own style of drawing since he did not have any formal training. He often described how stressed he felt when thinking about what to draw for each weekly edition, so he took long walks in search of interesting things to use for inspiration. The result was drawings or sketches of the commonplace scenes of old Singapore.



*A sketch of a Malay man wearing the baju Melayu*

As much as they served as illustrations for Kajai's editorials, they also showed aspects of the lives of ordinary people in their everyday activities. My mother remembers seeing vendors or hawkers plying their trade around the city when she was growing up. His sketches became a visual documentation of those times.

### My grandfather as I knew him

He was a meticulous man, especially when it came to his attire, even when going to work. His shirts were specially tailored as he like having lots of pockets. One of the things I remember the most was his love of music. He liked traditional Malay music, especially what is known as *ghazal*, an Arabic or Indian influenced type of Malay traditional music. This he would play in the early evening just after the *asar* prayers, as he would be back from work at about that time. He would play it loudly enough for people to hear it from a few houses away. He also had a great sense of humour, which he displayed in many of his sketches.

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**Zuraidah Ehsan** worked in the heritage industry for 18 years and is currently doing freelance research for a private company and on her family history, with the hope of publishing it some day.

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*Images courtesy of the author*

# A Tale of Four Mosques

Where the Faithful Gather to Prostrate

By Lim Chey Cheng

History books do not have records of any mosques when Raffles arrived in Singapore in January 1819, but there was probably at least one, most likely in the compound of the Temenggong's residence. Today there are over 70 mosques throughout the island. Most people are familiar with the well-known few that are tourist draws such as Sultan Mosque, Jamae (Chulia) Mosque and Hajjah Fatimah Mosque. But what about the numerous others, some of which are equally, if not more interesting, with fascinating stories to tell?

A discussion with my good friend and Malay culture expert Khir Johari about less well-known, but interesting mosques for the Explore Singapore! group, resulted in him leading a tour of four mosques, a tour that in many ways reflected the history and development of Singapore.

En route, Khir explained the etymology of the Arabic word *masjid*, for mosque. It is derived from the Arabic *sujud*, meaning to prostrate oneself. With the prefix *ma* added to *sujud*, it becomes *masajid*, a place of prostration. The English 'mosque' comes from *mosquee* (Middle French) and *moschea* (Italian).

Our first stop was a long way from the city, near Sembawang Park. From the residential area we turned into a narrow road bordered by forest. The change in scenery was dramatic. Suddenly the road opened up to a large clearing upon which stood a small, single-storeyed building of yellow and green. It was like a painting of a pastoral scene – a rarity in urbanised Singapore. This was the *Masjid Penempatan Melayu Sembawang* (Malay Settlement Sembawang Mosque) – the last *kampung* (village) mosque left in Singapore.

The mosque, built in 1962, used to serve the residents of the five *kampongs* that were there until the 1990s. Most of its residents had worked at the British Naval Base. Today the mosque is still used by people who used to live in the *kampongs*, the nearby housing estates and those working in or passing through the area.

Stepping out of the bus, we were silenced by the serenity and quiet of the lush greenery that greeted us. The ambience was magical. A solitary rubber tree stood towering over the



Participants at the Temenggong Daeng Ibrahim Mosque

mosque. It is over a hundred years old and stories abound about how it has resisted being cut down.

The mosque itself is simple and rustic with a small, carpeted prayer hall. A carved wooden *minbar* (a pulpit in the mosque where the *imam* (prayer leader) stands to deliver sermons) stands against a wall set inwards. The highlight was the old wooden *kentong*, used to call the faithful to prayer. We were thrilled to watch a demonstration by the caretaker who explained that different rhythms were beaten with a wooden stick for each of the five prayer sessions. A specific rhythm was reserved to alert villagers during emergencies, such as fires or accidents.

Completing the pastoral scene just a short walk from the building, was a vegetable, herb and fruit garden. Khir enthusiastically explained to us the various herbs used in Malay cuisine, generating so much excitement that we forgot the time. Reluctantly, we tore ourselves away from this unique spiritual oasis, wondering how much longer it would remain as such.

The next stop was a sharp contrast in setting and architecture – the Abdul Gaffoor Mosque in bustling Little India. We gasped in wonder at its exquisite *rojak* style – a runaway eclectic fusion of Moorish, Mughal and European Neo-Classical, resulting in a mesmerising fairy tale, castle-like building. The mosque was built between 1907 and 1910 to replace an earlier one, the Al-Abrar Mosque (built in 1859), which served the Indian Muslim community of Kampong



Among the greenery of Sembawang Mosque



Rojak style of the Abdul Gaffoor Mosque



Sultanah Khadija's tomb

Kapor. It was named after Shaik Abdul Gaffoor bin Shaik Hyder, the man who spearheaded the mosque's rebuilding.

Beautiful Saracenic cinquefoil arches and balustrades enclose the main building's veranda. The arches are separated by Corinthian pilasters, fused at each corner with large Corinthian columns in a cluster. The exterior walls, accentuated with the Islamic crescent moon and star motifs create a storybook appearance. Above the main entrance is the mosque's most outstanding feature: an elaborately decorated sundial flanked by two fluted pilasters. The intricate sunburst emits 25 rays adorned with the names of the 25 most prominent Islamic prophets – from Adam to Mohammad – in elegant Arabic calligraphy, which Khir read to us. We would have liked to linger longer, but unfortunately, we were already behind schedule. No doubt many of us promised ourselves to return.

Khir had chosen the next mosque for a very special reason. Hajjah Fatimah Mosque has the distinction of being the first and one of the very few, to be named after a woman. We listened with fascination to the story of this extraordinary woman who was probably, in Khir's words, "colonial Singapore's first businesswoman". Hailing from Malacca, Hajjah Fatimah was married to a Bugis prince merchant from the Celebes. After her husband's premature death, she successfully carried on his trading business and amassed great wealth. Her house was burgled twice and on the second occasion, while she was away, set on fire. In gratitude for her life having been spared, she donated money and the land on which her house had stood, for the construction of a mosque, completed in 1846.



The kantung

Purportedly designed by an unnamed British architect, the mosque exudes a charm of its own through its blend of Malay, Saracenic and European architectural styles – its most distinctive feature is a four-level, European-style minaret with Doric pilasters, which resembles the steeple of St Andrew's Cathedral. The minaret tilts about six degrees off-centre owing to moisture seepage and shifting bricks and has been dubbed "The Leaning Tower of Singapore". Chinese elements in the windows and woodwork adorn the building, while Chinese

glazed green tiles on the parapet enhance its syncretic façade. Khir, with his extensive knowledge of the Malay



Khir explaining the minbar in the Hajjah Fatimah Mosque

world's famous personalities, informed us about the Malay-Bugis-Arab alliance forged through the marriage of Hajjah Fatimah's daughter to an Alsagoff. All three of their tombs are in the small mausoleum at the side of the prayer hall. Other family members were buried in the small cemetery in the garden.

We ended our tour at a mosque which does not belong to Singapore, but is an integral part of its early colonial history. The *Masjid Temenggong Daeng Ibrahim* was originally built in 1890 on the site of the Johor sultan's *Istana Telok Blangah* and rebuilt in 1991. Today the mosque and the adjacent mausoleum are owned by the Johor state government and managed by the Johor Religious Department.

The large, octagonal-shaped prayer hall is carpeted in a rich blue, plusher than any of the others we had seen. We were accorded the privilege of entering the royal mausoleum, which is normally not open to the public. Gazing at the tomb of Temenggong Abdul Rahman, one of the two men (the other being Sultan Hussein Shah) who signed the first treaty with Raffles, I could not help but wonder about the course of Singapore's history had he not done this.



The unique sun dial

We gamely trudged up the hill beside the mausoleum to the lush green cemetery holding more of the royal family's tombs. The best known is that of Sultanah Khadija, the Circassian consort of Sultan Abu Bakar, son of Daeng Ibrahim and grandson of Abdul Rahman. Those who guide at the National Museum will be familiar with her portrait.

There are many other mosques in Singapore with enthralling tales to tell. Thanks to Khir, henceforth I will not pass a mosque without wondering what its story is and what more I can learn about Singapore's history from each one.

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**Lim Chey Cheng** is the coordinator of the Explore Singapore! committee and guides at several museums, including NMS. Although Singaporean, she admits there are many places she has yet to discover, including mosques.

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Photos by Gisella Harrold

# Scottish Ceramics in Singapore

By Chan Sau Fong

My first encounter with Scottish ceramics came during a study trip to Singapore in 2012. A group of European ceramics on display at the Malay Heritage Centre (MHC) had caught my eye. The curator told me that they had been recovered from the current site, formerly a Malay royal palace, during two archaeological excavations in 2000 and 2003. I was instantly drawn to a Scottish plate made by J & M P Bell & Co (also known as Bells) in Glasgow around 1887 (Fig 1). It has a transfer-printed design in brown and depicts a fan at the centre containing a port scene with pagodas and junks. The pattern is named 'Johore' after the Malaysian state opposite Singapore. I was intrigued by the story as I knew little about Scottish ceramics, let alone their export trade to Asia.

Scottish ceramics made specifically for the Southeast Asian market were rarely seen in the United Kingdom before 1980. Mr Edwin Robertson, a Scot who worked on rural water supply projects for a Dutch company in Indonesia, accidentally discovered their existence in Sumatra in 1979. He then dedicated his energies to building an extensive collection of Scottish export pottery and brought more than 700 pieces back to Scotland. His collections were later dispersed to the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow and the V&A in London. The Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery in Glasgow also holds a significant



Fig 1. Plate, 'Johore' pattern, J & M P Bell & Co Ltd, circa 1887, © Chan Sau Fong



Fig 2. Plate, 'China' pattern, R Cochran & Co, circa 1880-90, museum no C.91-2007, © V&A, London

collection of Bells pottery that was bequeathed by Mr Henry Kelly, an expert on Scottish ceramics.

Between the 1860s and the 1900s, Scotland became one of the major exporters of British trade goods to the British colonies in South and Southeast Asia. Regular services running between Glasgow, Liverpool and Rangoon were operated by P Henderson & Co and the British and Burmese Steam Navigation Company Ltd. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, one of the most important milestones in 19<sup>th</sup> century maritime history, the distances between European and Asian ports were considerably shortened. The good transport network enabled the enterprising Scots to seek new markets for their goods in the East Indies, especially after the Long Depression of 1879. As one of the major distribution centres for European trade goods in East Asia, Singapore had steamers running daily services to other regional port cities. The whole carrying trade was almost monopolised by the Scottish Oriental line.

J & M P Bell & Co and R Cochran & Co were two of the biggest and best-known potteries in Glasgow. They both exported a large amount of tableware such as plates, bowls and dishes, mostly earthenware with transfer-printed or sponge-printed designs, to India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. Their success in finding new markets in the East Indies was down to both their business acumen and the ability to form a good business network with local agents, mostly run by Scottish expatriates,



Fig 3. Plate, 'Buah Nanas' pattern, J & M P Bell & Co Ltd, circa 1888, museum no C.85-2007, © V&A, London



Fig 5. Plate, 'Makassar' pattern, J & M P Bell & Co Ltd, circa 1890, museum no C.88-2007, © V&A, London

some of whom were former employees of the East India Company. They were no ordinary businessmen, but were extremely hard-working people who would seek business by travelling all over the region and learning first-hand the requirements of their customers. They imported goods that they knew the local people wanted most from the outside world. British goods, from hardware to handkerchiefs, were in great demand.

Bells pottery was founded by two brothers: John and Matthew Perston Bell in 1842. John, the older and more

enterprising brother, also established a shipbuilding and timber yard in Rangoon (today's Yangon) and ran a sawmill and tannery on the site, under the aegis of Bell & Co. It was a prosperous business, trading hides from Burma (today's Myanmar) and muslins from Scotland. The two brothers seem to have judged well by aiming at the mass market in the East Indies for their export pottery business, because the consignments continued to grow.

From 1880 onwards, with growing competition from other European factories, particularly the Maastricht potteries in the Netherlands, Bells acted innovatively and creatively and developed a series of patterns that were specially designed to suit local tastes. Cochran, however, continued producing rather traditional designs with motifs that imitated Chinese porcelain and embroideries (Fig 2). Bells began to produce patterns that had a clear marketing strategy in mind and showed a good knowledge of the local culture. For example, a plate marketed for the Malay-speaking Muslim world (Fig 3) is decorated with pineapples, a tropical fruit that grew locally. The pineapples are framed by a crescent moon, an Islamic motif. The pattern name *Buah Nanas* meaning 'Pineapple' is printed on the back in Malay, in both Roman and *Jawi* scripts (the Malay form of Arabic script) (Fig 4).

Other patterns were named after local place names mostly referring to the East Indies, names such as 'Batavia' or 'Makassar' in Indonesia (Fig 5). Large platter-type dishes were produced to accommodate the demand for communal dining in this part of the Muslim world, while small saucer-type plates such as the Makassar plate were well suited for serving Minangkabau cuisine.

My visit to the MHC led me to pursue research on Scottish export pottery, something unplanned and unexpected. I am truly grateful for their work in creating such a wonderful display and would like to salute my colleagues at the Malay Heritage Centre.



Fig 4. Maker's mark on the back of the Buah Nanas plate

**Chan Sau Fong** is a curator in the V&A's Asian department and looks after the textiles and dress collections from China and Southeast Asia.

# Beginnings of an Industry

By Nadirah Norruddin

From the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Straits Settlements states of Malacca, Penang and Singapore started to assume the role of a literary and publication centre for the Malay-Muslim world owing to the gradual spread of literacy and the growing use of printing technologies. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kampong Gelam in Singapore was one of the most important Malay publishing centres in the region. Although the industry was initially focused on the production of religious texts, it eventually expanded to include newspapers, magazines and novels.

At the same time, Penang and Malacca were abuzz with political and intellectual activities that were shaping their development into Malaya's primary publishing centres. Because of technological, intellectual and social progress in these cities, the Straits Settlements churned out a welter of periodicals with stories driven by Islam, political activism and economic concerns, and left an indelible imprint on the publishing industry of Southeast Asia.

By the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were increasing numbers of active printers, publishers and booksellers in Singapore, most of whom were situated in the Kampong Gelam area. These printers and publishers mostly hailed from the *pasisir*, or coastal regions of Java. One of these figures was none other than Haji Muhammad Siraj bin Haji Muhammad Salih Al-Rambani of Rembang, Northern Java. Besides Muhammad Siraj, there were also Haji Abdul Karim bin Suradin and Haji Muhammad Said bin Haji Muhammad Arshad.

Haji Siraj published lithographs of Malay manuscripts (*hikayat* [chronicles] and *syair* [poetry]) as well as religious books written in Malay, Javanese and Arabic and widely read throughout Southeast Asia. He also had strong affiliations with the Jawi Peranakan community, which had broader overseas associations – acting as a bridge between the provincial Malay culture and the wider world. It has been reported that *Jawi Peranakan* was even circulated in Paris, France.

Since the mid-1800s, the Jawi Peranakans were heavily involved in the printing and publishing of a compendium of religious texts and books as they owned a majority of hand-lithograph presses in Singapore. In 1876, a group of Jawi Peranakans formed an association in Singapore in order to open a printing office and publish a newspaper in Malay, further contributing to the development of Malay intellectual life. The newspaper was named *Jawi Peranakan* and it operated from 1876 till 1895. The four-page weekly was published by Munsyi Muhammad Said Dada Mohyiddin, a Muslim Indian merchant. The fact that it was published by Straits-born Indian Muslims who were acculturated into Malay society and wrote in Malay, hinted at the beginnings of a modern and inclusive Malay identity.

Besides being the first Malay newspaper of its kind, it was also the longest-running newspaper prior to 1941 as it was in operation for almost 19 years. It offered readers general and brief coverage of foreign and local news (the former mostly drawn from the English-language press) as well as frequent reports from elsewhere in the Southeast Asian region. Following that, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a steady number of Malay newspapers, such as Lim Seng Hooi's Criterion Press that introduced *Bintang Timor*, later renamed *Chahaya Pulau Pinang* in typeset Jawi, published by Chinese and Indian Peranakans throughout the Straits



*Jawi Peranakan*, a Monday weekly, was published in Jawi (Malay written in modified Arabic script), 1889, Singapore, publisher: *Jawi Peranakan*. Courtesy of the British Library

Settlements. Owing to the high operational costs and amount of manpower required to print each run, these newspapers ran weekly. Moreover, they published mainly editorials reproduced and translated from world news agencies and the foreign press and also carried commodity and market prices targeted at local, regional and international merchants.

## In search of an editorial voice

*Warta Malaya's* (1930 - 1942) founding editor, Onn Ja'afar, realised that he could not compete with the better resourced English-language newspapers in the dissemination of the latest news. Therefore, he focused on publishing a wide range of opinion pieces and commentaries about Malay life by inviting views and soliciting responses from readers. It was popular with readers who were eager to articulate their aspirations and anxieties on a wide range of issues. After that, editorials and articles comprised a substantial portion of newspaper and magazine content. From this development rose a class of writers, activists and scholars who waxed lyrical on various issues that concerned Malay culture, literature, history and identity.

### Abdul Rahim Kajai (1894-1943)

Abdul Rahim Kajai né Abdul Rahim Haji Salim was a writer, nationalist and journalist for various newspapers that emerged from the pre-war period. He first received his education at Sekolah Melayu Setepak in Kuala Lumpur and later studied Arabic and religious studies in Mecca, Arabia. After spending some time at home, he returned to Mecca to manage his father's business as a *sheikh haji* (pilgrim broker). His writing career began in Mecca, where he established himself as a correspondent of sorts for the weekly *Edaran Zaman*, published in Penang. Following his stint at *Majlis* and *Saudara*, Kajai became an editorial member at *Warta Malaya* for two years before moving on to *Utusan Melayu* as an editor. Two influential figures who shaped his writing and editorial pursuits were Mohd Yunus Abd Hamid and Syed Syekh Ahmad Al-Hadi of Jelutong Press. At *Utusan Melayu*, Kajai worked closely with contemporaries such as Othman Kalam, Ishak Muhammad and Ibrahim Yaakob. His sharp commentaries and insights concerning the Malay community and the British administration earned him and by default also *Utusan Melayu*, a new crop of dedicated followers across Malaya. At *Utusan Melayu*, Kajai remained vocal regarding his nationalistic sentiments and the Malays' welfare in the face of increasing numbers of migrant groups. Most notably, Kajai's collaboration with cartoonist Haji Ali Sanat (whose



Abdul Rahim Kajai (1894-1943), courtesy of Utusan Online



Hiboran, August 1957, Singapore, publisher: The Royal Press, Malay Heritage Centre Collection, National Heritage Board

story is on pages 10 and 11 of this issue) on the pages of *Warta Jenaka* and *Utusan Zaman* was best remembered for its biting and satirical content, mostly directed towards the Malay community. These commentaries were ways in which both Kajai and Ali Sanat encouraged and inspired the Malay community to improve themselves in areas such as commerce and education. In his lifetime, he produced more than 50 essays published in various issues.

### Harun Aminurrashid (1906-1986)

Harun Aminurrashid né Harun bin Mohamed Amin was a teacher, activist, editor, writer and publisher of numerous popular Malay literary digests and novels. Harun was also known by his pen names Pak Har, Gustam Negara, Atma Jiwa and Si Ketuit (usually used in his short stories in periodicals such as *Warta Jenaka* and *Hiboran*). At 17 years of age, Harun studied at Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) in Ipoh, Perak, where he later returned as a teacher. He was banished to Brunei for his nationalist teachings at SITC and served as an education supervisor there from 1939 to 1945. He returned to Singapore after World War II and embarked on what was to become an illustrious publishing and editorial career. From 1946, he went on to edit and

publish popular Malay magazines such as *Hiboran*, *Fesyen*, *Melayu Raya Mutiara*, *Filem Raya*, *Belia* and two newspapers, *Warta Jenaka* and *Warta Malaya* in Singapore. Harun later became acquainted with publishers, writers and intellectuals in both Singapore and Peninsular Malaysia. Raja Mohd Yusof Ahmad, one of the owners of Al-Ahmadiyah Press at Jalan Sultan, established a sister company to Al-Ahmadiyah, HARMY Press – named after



Fesyen, circa 1950s, Singapore, publisher: HARMY Press, Malay Heritage Centre Collection, National Heritage Board

both Harun and Mohd Yusof. HARMY published popular entertainment and literary magazines such as *Fesyen* (an early issue of this magazine is featured on the cover of this issue of *PASSAGE*) and *Mutiara*. Subsequently, he focused his energy and attention on the newly-founded newspaper, *Melayu Raya* (1950). Its controversial reportage of the Maria Hertogh riots centred on the case as a religious issue between Islam and Christianity. This eventually led to the magazine being banned in 1951 and despite regaining its licence, it closed down for good in 1953.

These three personalities were a part of a generation of writers, journalists, editors and intellectuals who contributed to a dynamic literary landscape from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century Malaya. Hundreds of newspapers, magazines and novels were published during this period and each one had a unique tale of beginnings and endings.

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**Nadirah Norruddin** is one of the curators for the *Mereka Utusan* exhibition currently running at the Malay Heritage Centre. Her research interests lie in the traditions and culture of the Malay diaspora.

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# Malay Artists in Singapore

By Yeow Ju Li

Malays in Singapore form the nation-state's second largest ethnic group and have historically been active contributors to Singapore's art scene. The late poet-artist Abdul Ghani Hamid (1933-2014) recorded a prolific array of artistic activities from as early as the 1940s. These were created by Malay artists here and groups such as *Persekutuan Pelukis Melayu Malaya* (PPMM – Society of Malay Artists, Malaya) and *Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya* (APAD – Association of Artists of Various Resources). Their activities included art classes, exhibitions, study tours to neighbouring countries, art publications and even art awards called *Pingat APAD*, initiated in 1974, which the Malays extended to Chinese artists such as Georgette Chen, Liu Kang and Ho Ho Ying, among others.

A brief look at the work of some of Singapore's Malay artists shows that their work can be seen as a response to the complexities of their multifaceted identities, influenced by their family backgrounds, spiritual beliefs and the unique characteristics of Malay identity in Singapore. Their work also reflects their views on local, regional and international issues, providing socio-political commentary on a wide range of topics, such as Singapore's pace of progress and multiculturalism, as well as more universal concerns, including the societal perceptions of women and even notions of what constitutes art.

## Pioneer Generation Malay Artists

According to a classification by APAD, the pioneer generation of Malay artists in Singapore includes artists such as Aman bin Ahmad (also known as Pak Man) (1893-1968); M Sawoot A Rahman (M Sawoot) (1907-1972), Mahat bin Chadang (C Mahat) (1921-1996) and Sulaiman Hj Suhaimi (1922-2008).

## Second Generation Malay Artists

The second generation of Malay artists includes Abdul Ghani Hamid (1933-2014), Mohamed Abdul Kadir (S Mohdir) (1936-2010), Jaafar Latiff (1937-2007), Iskandar Jalil (b 1940) and Sarkasi Said (Tzee) (b 1940).

Broadly speaking, the realist and figurative styles of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Malay artists developed with the adoption of abstraction in the 1950s-60s and the introduction of conceptualism from the 1970s. This led to more individualistic and disparate styles. Among the first Malay artists to use abstraction was Abdul Ghani Hamid, a prolific poet, writer and artist. His *Mata Dan Hati* attracted some controversy, including objections that the painting's modernist influences were not beneficial to local art. He explained, "Abstract is not entirely from the West. It is ours. You'll find that our calligraphy is abstract..." With this mindset and encouragement from such artists as Georgette Chen, Abdul Ghani continued to explore an abstract expressionist style that made "allusions to the empirical", for instance in *Billet-Doux* (*Surat Cinta*).



Fig 1. Hilmi Johandi, *The Waltz*, oil on linen, 2014. Image courtesy of the artist

## Post-Second Generation Malay Artists

Abdul Ghani Hamid recorded other Malay artists who were active alongside those listed above, as well as in the post-second generation. The works of the five post-second generation artists discussed here are a reflection of their identity and an expression of their socio-political views.

Given the complexities behind the concept of identity, there is no single defining characteristic of Malay art in Singapore. The artists responded to their multifaceted identities – Malay, Muslim, Singaporean, global citizen, individual, among others. To question the 'constructedness of culture and identity', some artists produced 'visual oddity' in their art through cut-and-paste collage images that invoke tension and discomfort, rather than a fitting narrative. Artist Hilmi Johandi used the juxtaposition of images in what can be read as a commentary on socio-political and economic changes in Singapore, as well as an expression of the different dimensions that make up their identity. Hilmi's *The Waltz* (Fig 1) is a juxtaposition of scenes taken from various Malay films produced in Singapore in the 1950s-60s. On the painting's right, three Malay men are sitting on the floor in modest surroundings, with a village scene as the backdrop, while on the left, a group of Chinese women are at a more formal table setting. As the groups gaze at each other, the painting conjures up underlying sentiments of how the races view each other, leaving the viewer to decide if the respective gazes are those of envy, condescension or empathy.

As the groups gaze at each other, the painting conjures up underlying sentiments of how the races view each other, leaving the viewer to decide if the respective gazes are those of envy, condescension or empathy.



Fig 2. Rofi, *Time for Change*, 2011, acrylic and batik on canvas, private collection of Thomas Meichl

Rofi makes use of icons traditionally associated with Malay culture, as well as visual elements common in Southeast Asia, including batik and the outlines of Balinese masks. However, he uses these in a non-traditional manner, one that questions the relevance of Malay heritage in today's society. Rather than paying homage to the fabric and heritage, the artist's practice of cutting batik into strips is reductionist,



Fig 3. Rofi, *Wrath*, 2015, acrylic on canvas

rendering the medium a metaphor for fragments of his identity. In *Time for Change* (Fig 2), a man appears to struggle with removing a batik garment. While his torso becomes free and unrestrained, in the process his head gets smothered, as if the shedding of tradition is both a relief and a handicap. The work *Wrath* (Fig 3) features a traditional Balinese mask, which the artist attributes as a reference to linking his identity to the *Nusantara* or Malay Archipelago. The mask sits uncomfortably atop a torso, and as with the batik in *Time for Change*, these symbols of the man's roots and who he is, ironically leave him faceless and identity-less.



Fig 4. Juliana Yasin, *Untitled #4*, 1992, mixed media. Image courtesy of Koh Nguang How

The late Juliana Yasin was one of the few female Malay artists. Her work provided important perspectives on universal issues, including the status and treatment of women. *Untitled #4* (Fig 4) dealt with the objectification of women through presenting female torsos nestled within packing material in crates. Faceless, the women can only be evaluated through their bodies. Broken glass atop the crates could be taken to signify the fragility of physical beauty, but also the proverbial glass ceiling that continues to face women today.

Many of the artists were influenced by the complex interplay between their family background, sometimes complicated by mixed parentage and by ties to Indonesia, as well as their spiritual beliefs. This is reflected in their art which explicitly or implicitly captures their philosophies, personal identity and attachment to their roots. Sunar

Sugiyou's works, for instance, express various aspects of his identity and heritage and are based either on historical references or symbolically reflect his religious beliefs even if they are not overtly spiritual. For instance, in the *Cosmology* (Fig 5) series, a pair of diptychs that appear to be abstract paintings, join to form completed concentric circles and reflect the artist's strong belief in the existence of pairs for balance and harmony in life, as in the concepts of *yin* and *yang*, black and white. An earlier work that similarly references his spiritual leanings without being explicitly religious, is entitled *To the Arab Man* (Fig 6). According to Sunar, this piece, acquired by the National Museum Singapore, captures the "simple everyday life practice about being a Muslim".

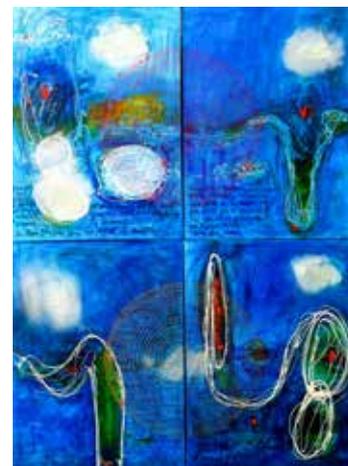


Fig 5. Sunar Sugiyou, *Cosmology*, 2015, mixed media on canvas, set of four. Photo by the author



Fig 6. Sunar Sugiyou, *To the Arab Man*, 1988, mixed media on paper, collection of National Gallery Singapore

Apart from challenging notions of identity, Khairuddin Hori also questions the concept of what constitutes art. For instance his performance, *Teaching a Fish the Alphabet* (Fig 7), in which a fish is repeatedly shown the letters "Oo" and "Pp" and the words "orgy" and "performance", appropriate John Baldessari and Joseph

Beuys, simplifying and expanding the idea of performance by asking the viewer to consider the question of when art stops being art or when non-art becomes art. While the examples above may not reflect the artists' entire bodies of work, they provide a glimpse into the rich artistic practice of Malay artists in Singapore. Their art not only employs a great diversity of disciplines and styles, but serves also as a reflection of their identity and an expression of their socio-political considerations, thus giving voice to the views, concerns and hopes of an important segment of Singapore society.

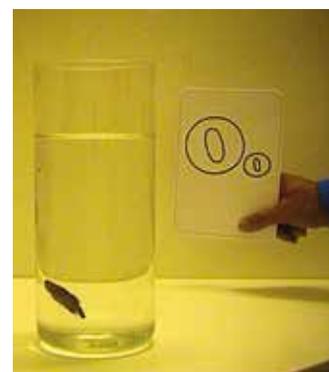


Fig 7. Khairuddin Hori, *Teaching a Fish the Alphabet*, performance, 2006, image courtesy of the artist

**Yeow Ju Li** completed her MA in Asian Art Histories at LASALLE College of the Arts in 2016, with her research interest being Malay artists in Singapore.

# The Malay Pantun

By Suhaimi Nasrain

A *pantun* is a traditional Malay rhyming verse, usually written in quatrain form (four lines). However, it can also be written as a couplet (two lines) or any even-numbered stanza. This includes a sestet (six lines) and up to an octave (eight lines). The quintessential aspect of the *pantun* is the division of each stanza into two halves. Thus, in a quatrain, the first half, lines 1 and 2, is known as a *sampiran* or *pembayang maksud*. And the second half, lines 3 and 4, the *isi* or *maksud*. In short, the first half of any *pantun* becomes the rhyming base for the lines that follow. It is also the precursor to the intended meaning that follows in the second half of the *pantun*. Far from being haphazard, ‘anyhow-write’ gibberish, the first half, the precursor portion of a *pantun*, has its own story to tell. This may or may not be connected to the second half, which is where the intended meaning lies. Consider the *pantun* ‘Pisang Emas’, below.

<i>Pisang emas dibawa belayar</i>	<i>With the bananas, I’ll be sailing away</i>
<i>Masak sebiji di atas peti</i>	<i>Lay one aripening upon the chest</i>
<i>Hutang emas boleh dibayar</i>	<i>A debt of gold, I’ll easily repay</i>
<i>Hutang budi di bawa mati</i>	<i>A debt of deed, to the death is owed</i>
	<i>- no less</i>

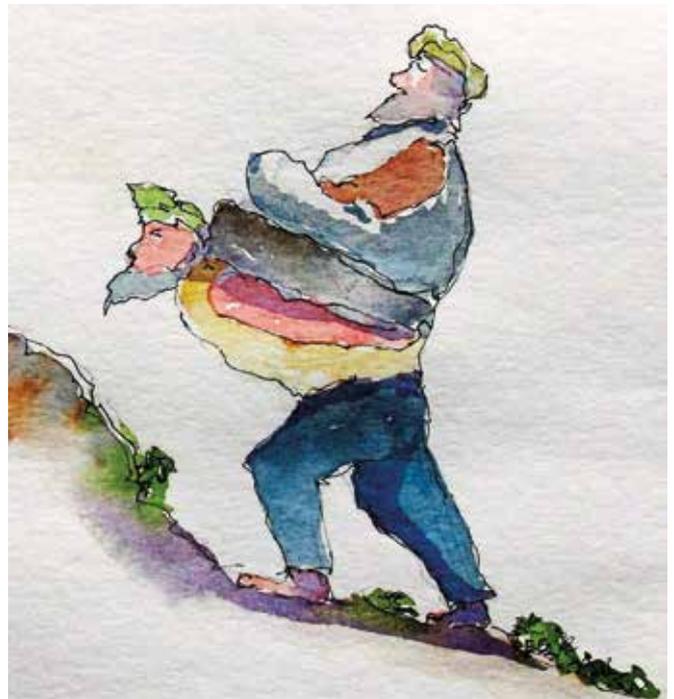
The precursor half, that is, the *sampiran* or *pembayang maksud*, is rooted within the context of Malay philosophy, cosmological perspective and a very Nusantara-derived socio-environmental context. Hence the precursor portion of the heritage *pantun* is:

<i>Pisang emas dibawa belayar</i>	<i>With the bananas, I’ll be sailing away</i>
<i>Masak sebiji di atas peti”</i>	<i>Lay one aripening upon the chest</i>

*Pisang emas* is a variety of banana found in Southeast Asia. It is small, with very thin, delicate skin, has a strong floral bouquet and is almost smokily, caramelly sweet on the palate when ripe. This banana is prized for its flavour and medicinal properties. It was brought partially ripened on board a ship and allowed to ripen fully during the journey. When it was ripe, it was given to those afflicted with seasickness, to alleviate the debilitating effect. So it is certainly not gibberish at all and not merely a base for the rhyming structure. The ABAB rhyming structure itself sees the rhyme present at both the tip and the middle of the alternate lines of the stanza. The first line goes with the third and the second with the fourth.



Sailing away with a ripening bunch of bananas on a chest



Be wary of accepting a good deed lest you are beholden for life

<i>Hutang emas boleh dibayar</i>	<i>A debt of gold, I’ll easily repay</i>
<i>Hutang budi di Bawa mati</i>	<i>A debt of deed, to the death is owed</i>
	<i>- no less</i>

The second half of the *pantun* is where the intended meaning lies. In two short lines, the *pantun* describes the sophisticated Malay ideation of the concept of *budi*, a good deed. To a Malay, the squaring of a good deed, *budi baik*, is never equated with material wealth or a monetary debt. While the latter is squared away when payment is settled in full, the former isn’t necessarily. A good deed bestowed can never be paid up. Even when it is repaid, the standing of the person who initiated it, will be remembered by the debtee to the end of his life. Goodwill will always be shown to that person. Being called an ingrate, “*tahu makan budi, tak tau kenang budi*”, is a grave insult to any Malay. Hence, a Malay is always cautioned to be wary of accepting a good deed or help, “*baik baik memakan budi*”, lest one is held beholden to the helper for life. Or to be commensurate in bestowing one. “*Buat baik berpada pada*”, lest one is seen to be unmindful in causing others to be beholden to himself.

The *pantun* is an age-old verse form, clearly enunciating the value of a good deed, of living the balanced, close-knit social life that the Malays are known for, where one is at once taught to value the good deeds of others, yet understands how heavy the burden of accepting and remembering those deeds is for any individual.

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**Suhaimi Nasrain** is a keen writer of Malay verse, both modern and traditional. He has been writing *pantuns* since his school days. His love of *pantuns* is evident in his research and sharing of its deep and hidden history.

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Sketches by ES Tung, a Kuala Lumpur-based journalist and artist

# The Great Mosque of Demak, Central Java

Where Faith, History and Culture Intertwined

By Khong Swee Lin

Southeast Asian cooperation and collaboration ostensibly commenced with the formation of the ASEAN community in August 1967. Perhaps it had begun much earlier, way back in the mighty kingdom of Majapahit of East Java, one of the last major empires of the region. This Indianised kingdom of the 13<sup>th</sup> century had 98 tribute states, stretching from Sumatra to New Guinea (including the familiar Temasek).

The kingdom's epic poem, *Nagarakretagama*, composed in 1365, tells of the Hindu-Buddhist empire's trade connections to Champa and Yawana (present-day Vietnam).

As empires waxed and waned, so did that of the Majapahit. At the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Demak, a Majapahit port fief, established itself as the first significant Muslim entity in Java. Achieved by no fewer than nine Muslim saints or *Wali Songo*, they not only spread Islam, but were also instrumental in setting up Demak's first sultanate. One of these saints, Sunan Kalijaga, helped build its great mosque in approximately 1479, during the rule of Raden Pateh, the first Sultan of Demak.

Who were the Magnificent Nine? It is not known whether they were Gujaratis, Chinese, locals from Samudra Pasai or even Arabs, but these nine Muslim saints gave their all. Possibly one of the oldest mosques in Java, the Great Mosque is a testament to Demak's integration of multicultural influences. A classic example of Javanese mosque architecture, the roof of the Great Mosque is quite unlike the Saracen-styled



Worshippers at the mosque

onion dome that became *de rigueur* in the region's mosques from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Its pagoda-style three-tiered roof is perhaps an acknowledgement of the vagaries of capricious equatorial weather, as well as a reminder of Hindu-Buddhist architecture. However, to an approaching visitor or worshipper, the overall appearance is one of quiet elegance. One surprise is the choice of material – timber.

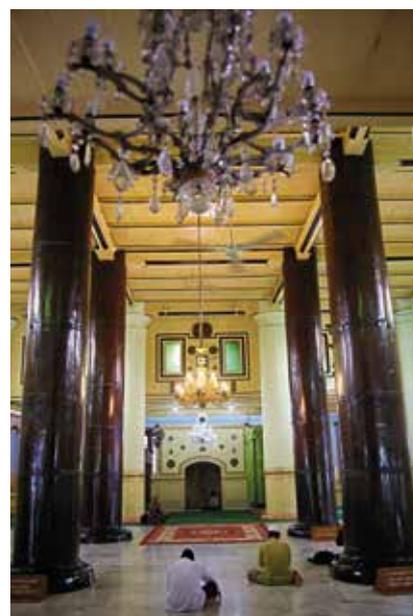
Surprises aside, within the hall, four large teak pillars provide support, lending a majestic tone to the interior. The wooden element is an important part of the building materials since the mosque's main wooden door bears florid motifs of plants, vases and crowns and the face of an open-mouthed thunder-catcher or *Lawang Bledheg* in Javanese



Demak Mosque

parlance, and as a nod to Javanese culture.

The Great Mosque's most distinctive feature seems to refer to its past glory – its front wall and the *qibla* wall (indicating the direction of Mecca), are lined with 66 blue and white tiles, which appear to be of Ming origin. Another view is that they originated from Champa and could be the very porcelain of the Majapahit empire, wrested from their clutches by the victorious warriors



The mihrab inside the mosque

of Demak. Like its predecessors, Demak grew prosperous, trading with the Spice Islands and being a major rice exporter to Malacca. Tomé Pires, the Portuguese author of the *Suma Oriental* (his account of the East), remarked, "The Lord of Demak stood for all of Java." And if it may be added, so did its Great Mosque, the symbol of the founding of Java's first Islamic kingdom.

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**Khong Swee Lin** is an FOM docent who enjoys guiding at various museums and heritage centres.

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Photos by Carl-Bernd Kaehlig

# Joseon Korea: Court Treasures and City Life

By Vidya Schalk

For more than half a millennium, the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910) in Korea asserted its influence over the everyday lives of people in the unified Korean peninsula. That influence echoes to this day. This April, the Asian Civilisations Museum welcomed visitors to marvel at the wonderful collection of treasures and artefacts from the Joseon courts as well as those from the everyday lives of people from the Joseon dynasty's cities.

In recent years, Korean dramas, cuisine and K-Pop have captured our imagination and generated interest in Korean culture. However, modern-day Korean dramas pale in comparison to the actual political intrigues of this dynasty. The treachery and political strife were so intense that parents hesitated to have their daughters marry into royalty in case their family was falsely implicated in conspiracies or rebellions, where punishment would have been swift and very unpleasant. Even a whiff of disloyalty often led to deadly purges.

Tracing the origins of the Joseon dynasty, the exhibition takes you inside the palace and showcases the splendour of Joseon court culture. With the establishment of this dynasty by King Taejo, neo-Confucianism became the state ideology. Rituals and ceremonies assumed great importance. Neo-Confucianism was a blend of Daoist cosmology, seeking order and harmony, blended with Buddhist spirituality, bringing in a strong sense of morality. From king to commoner, rigid Confucian values were asserted so people

acting rightly could reform and perfect society. The rituals and ceremonies of the royalty were meticulously recorded in exquisite objects such as the folding screens of the *Sun, Moon and Five Peaks*, royal seals and special items of dress, which bestowed dignity, status and legitimacy to their rule. Priceless artefacts from the National Palace Museum are on display, among them is the standing portrait from 1796 of the scholar Seo Jik-su, painted in astonishing detail.

Under the king, a privileged ruling class of men, the *Yangban*, governed society. They held public office and followed the Confucian doctrine through study and self-



*Six-fold screen of The Sun, Moon and Five Peaks, 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century, colour on silk, National Palace Museum Korea*

cultivation, by example setting the moral standards of Joseon society. The role of women underwent a dramatic change; from being equal to men, they were relegated to the domestic sphere, bearing and raising children and performing traditional feminine roles. The visitor is invited to explore the public and private lives of the *Yangban*, their households and their aristocratic lifestyle.

The great reverence for and love of nature and harmony inspired uniquely Korean artistic creations such as 'true view' paintings depicting the mountainous scenery, differentiating them from the earlier literati traditions of China. The exhibition showcases several paintings and ceramic wares in a section titled *Earth, Fire, Water and Mountains*.

An enduring element created during the Joseon dynasty under King Sejong was the Korean alphabet, *Hangeul*, to promote literacy among the common people. As you walk through the gallery, you will experience the lively *Streets of Hanyang* (modern day Seoul) and the everyday life of commoners, along with colourful celebrations, ancestral rites, rites of passage, harvest celebrations, sumptuous feasts and resplendent items of clothing.

The powerful Joseon dynasty, which spanned the same timeline as China's Ming and Qing dynasties and Japan's Muromachi, Momoyama, Edo and Meiji periods, held on for 500 years despite attacks by Japan and China. It ultimately came to an end, despite its self-imposed isolationist 'hermit status' when Korea was invaded and annexed by Japan in 1910, which led to Japanese colonial rule until 1945.

The legacy of the epic Joseon dynasty continues to this day and this wonderful exhibition, *Joseon Korea: Court Treasures and City Life*, brings the dynasty to our doorstep till 23 July.

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**Vidya Schalk** is a docent at the ACM and heads the Special Exhibition Research team including the current exhibition on Joseon Korea. Her fields of research range from healthcare to history.

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*Images Courtesy of the Asian Civilisations Museum*



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# The Bujang Valley

Older than Malacca

By Dharmalingam Vinasithamby

My estimation of Kedah's place in history shot up after a working holiday to the Bujang Valley. For many years, I had heard that ruins of Hindu temples more than 1,400 years old had been discovered in the area, about 60 kilometres north of Penang. But the state, embarrassed by the Indian side of its history, has kept it out of the limelight.

I visited the area with my family in January 2016. We toured the temple ruins and inspected the statues of various Hindu deities and other objects at the Bujang Valley Archaeological Museum in Merbok. But what impressed me most were the latest discoveries at an oil palm plantation in Sungei Batu. An area as large as six football fields is now being excavated by the Archaeological Department of Universiti Sains Malaysia. Students digging up the soil and sifting through rubble are discovering objects 2,500 years old. Although they lack the 'wow' factor of Angkor Wat in Cambodia or Borobudur in Indonesia, the remains are much more ancient than those.



Iron slag. Students from Universiti Sains Malaysia measuring iron slag unearthed from the digs for sorting and labelling



Clay furnace. A furnace excavated from the digs at Sungei Batu. It would have been filled with charcoal and air forced in with bellows to create the high temperature needed to turn iron ore into slag

dating. The finding: the furnace had been used in 474 BCE, the oldest historical remains unearthed in Southeast Asia. According to written records in India, China and the Middle East, the iron from this area was much sought-after for making swords.

We then walked over to another shed with an enigmatic structure – it had a brick formation with a round base and a square top with a round pit in the centre. Prof Mokhtar said labs in South Korea, Tokyo and

I interviewed Professor Mokhtar Saidin who directs the research. He took me around the digs, all under roof cover. One had brick and mud structures of what he said were jetties along the banks of a now silted up river. It was once large and deep enough for ocean-going vessels, said Prof Mokhtar. Next, we saw the remains of an export industry that had churned out the products that kept the ships busy – an iron-smelting industry. Prof Mokhtar showed me the remains of a furnace and a fragment of a pipe-like object. He said it was a tuyere used for pumping air into furnaces and that charcoal found nearby had been sent for carbon-



Tuyere fragment. Prof Mokhtar holding part of a tuyere, a pipe used for pumping air into an iron-smelting furnace



Archaeological site. One of several sites in a former oil-palm plantation in Sungei Batu in the Bujang Valley. It lies near a now silted-up river that was once deep and wide enough to allow boats used for iron export

Washington University in Seattle had examined mineral traces in the bricks. They used optically stimulated luminescence to determine when the minerals had last been exposed to the sun, in other words, when the bricks were made. Prof Mokhtar said the round base was built in 110 CE and the square in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. He believes the structure was a temple, first for animists and then for either Buddhists or Hindus. "The artisans would probably have prayed there before beginning their work for the day," he said.

V Nadarajan, a local resident and author of *Bujang Valley: The Wonder that was Ancient Kedah*, says the remains reflect the civilising influence of India. He says that Indian records reveal the area was known as Kadaram. It was the first port of call for traders on their way to China. "They called it *malai oor*, a Tamil phrase meaning a mountainous land," he said. "Over time, it was shortened to 'Melayu'."

So who were the people who had lived in Sungei Batu? That is a question where historical research can clash with the political sensitivities of the ruling class, which believes in Malay supremacy. Prof Mokhtar has taken DNA samples from local residents, but does not appear to believe that to be a definitive test. "We are waiting to unearth a skeleton," he says.

Whatever that finally reveals, one thing is clear; the Bujang Valley has unseated 600-year-old Malacca as the nation's historical centre.

Readers may also enjoy the article *In Search of the Origins of the Kedah Buddha* (PASSAGE March/April 2011) which can be downloaded from the FOM Website.



Ancient temple. The round base of this brick and mud structure dates back to 110AD and the square top to the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The mirror suspended above reflects a round pit in the centre

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**Dharmalingam Vinasithamby** is a freelance writer and editor based in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. He covers a broad range of subjects and can be contacted at [pulai100@yahoo.com](mailto:pulai100@yahoo.com).

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Photos by the author

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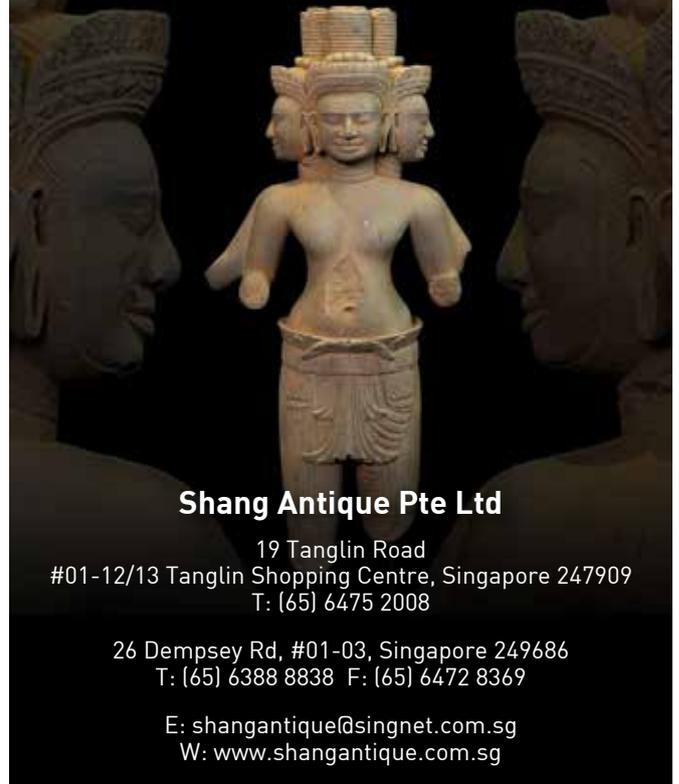
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# Singapore Art gallery guide

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Photo © Felix Hug (Eyes on Asia)

## Japanese Docents

The new JD committee was launched at the beginning of 2017. Our committee members' tenures are shorter than those of other FOM committees, as a way to engage more docents in JD activities. After serving as committee members, they become more active in guiding, studying and supporting our work. This is my third time on the committee and I am thrilled to be a co-coordinator.

I have been guiding for about four years at NMS, ACM and TPM and I feel passionate about student guiding and children's tours. Although most Japanese students tend to just listen to the guide, I practise interactive guiding, which is not familiar to them, but is more enjoyable. ACM is an eye-opening experience for young people being exposed to Asian cultures and religions. Students are amazed when I show examples of Japanese traditions that are the result of cross-cultural interaction. At NMS, we welcome many school trips from Japan as well as Japanese schools. Guiding students provides me with new perspectives and gives me pleasure.

JDs will run tours of the NMS Farquhar Collection's *Desire and Danger* and *Story of the Forest* from April to August. I am looking forward to seeing many visitors there.

### Akiko Kato, JD Coordinator 1

My name is Akiko Sakai and I have been JD Coordinator 2 since March this year. I came to Singapore three years ago, with my husband. Just before coming here, a fortune-teller advised me to learn more about traditions and history while in Singapore. A couple of months later, I heard about the JDs and joined.

My home town, Nagoya, is famous for Nagoya Castle, built by Shogun Ieyasu Tokugawa, the founder of the Edo Shogunate. The castle has two shining objects on its rooftop, a pair of golden *shachihoko* (金鯱). The *shachihoko* is an imaginary creature with a fish-like body, head like a tiger and a dorsal fin and is believed to bring heavy rain if there is a fire. Museum collections have similar creatures and the *shachihoko's* origins could be the *makara*, a mythical creature. When I saw a *makara* during the Singapore Biennale, I was surprised but happy to discover the origin of the *shachihoko*.

While here, I hope that along with my colleagues, I can contribute to Singapore society.

### Akiko Sakai, JD Coordinator 2



Akiko Sakai and Akiko Kato

# Textile Enthusiasts Group

**Programme:** Collector's Corner: Part II by Peter Lee

**Date:** Friday 2 June

**Time:** Arrive at 10:00 am for 10:30 start

**Speaker:** Peter Lee

**Location:** TBA

**RSVP:** Email Digna at [fomtegsingapore@gmail.com](mailto:fomtegsingapore@gmail.com)  
Limited to 20 members only

Mark your calendars for another exclusive opportunity to visit Peter Lee's home and his special textile room, particularly after the ACM exhibition, *Port Cities: Multicultural Emporiums of Asia, 1500–1900*.

## About Peter:

Peter Lee is an independent scholar and the Honorary Curator of the Baba House, a historical house museum managed by the National University of Singapore. In 1998 he co-authored *The Straits Chinese House – Domestic Life and Traditions* with Jennifer Chen, published by the National Museum of Singapore in 1998 and 2006. *Junk to Jewels – The Things that Peranakans Value* was both an exhibition and catalogue he produced for the Peranakan Museum in 2008. Three years later he

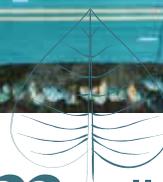


co-curated *Sarong Kebaya*, which opened in April 2011 at the same museum. A book he wrote on the subject was published in 2014. And recently Peter was a guest curator of *Port Cities: Multicultural Emporiums of Asia, 1500-1900*.

His family's collection of textiles focuses on the links between batik and Indian trade textiles and how both are part of an interconnected history. The collection comprises mainly batiks from the north coast of Java, and Indian trade cloths from Europe, Japan, Iran, Sri Lanka, and the Malay Archipelago.



Dress from the Peter Lee Collection



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10:00 am – 12:00 pm  
Fee: \$25

This tour winds its way around Bukit Pasoh (Hill of Pots), a little-known area that holds many stories of the famous Singaporean personalities associated with its early days of development. Our guide will introduce you to the different styles of shophouses, the clans, clubs and places of worship.



## Singapore River Heritage Walk

Thursday 25 May  
10:00 am – 12:00 pm  
Fee: \$25

Since 1819, when modern Singapore was founded, the Singapore River has served as an artery of international commerce drawing people from all over the region to work, trade and seek their fortunes. Today, after a major clean-up that ended in 1983, the river bustles with life, flowing past modern skyscrapers and historical buildings alike. Join us on a walk along its banks to see the quays, bridges and landmarks that remind us of the communities that once lived and worked alongside this river.



## Want to know about Taoism (Daoism)?

Thursday 11 May  
10:00 am – 12:00 pm  
Fee: \$25

Taoism (Daoism in Pinyin) is one of the two major religions among the Chinese in Singapore, the other being Buddhism. There are two aspects to Taoism – the philosophical and the ritualistic. Join ES! on this visit to San Qing Gong, one of Singapore's largest Taoist temples, and learn about the fundamentals of Taoism from a practising priest.



## Ramadan Walk with Khir Johari

Thursday 8 June  
5:30 – 7:30 pm  
Fee: \$30

Join Khir Johari as he takes you to the heart of the Ramadan celebration in Singapore's Kampong Gelam, where he grew up. Find out how Ramadan is observed, the various traditions related to this Islamic holy month and their significance. Discover the foods associated with fasting, and the eventual preparations for the end of Ramadan festivities, Hari Raya Puasa.

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# Study Group

Join the Asian Study Group in late September to nourish your brain, your soul, and even your tummy. Meeting once a week, this group of 12-16 participants studies many facets of one broad topic for roughly eight weeks. There are two sessions each year. Previous topics have included the Silk Road, SG50, UNESCO World Heritage sites in Asia, and Rivers of Asia.

Each participant picks a sub-topic that she finds particularly interesting, researches it, and then presents her findings to the group – and a very friendly, supportive group are we. We learn a ton, have a lot of fun and wind up the morning with an always scrumptious pot-luck lunch.

So, curious about Asia? Looking for interesting friends? Eager to share recipes? The Asian Study Group is for you. Stay tuned to the FOM website for specific information that will be coming your way in August.



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## New FOM Programme



Uncover the rare, unusual and authentic with FOM members in Singapore. Curio offers spontaneous opportunities, from a night at the theatre to discovering the best *kaya* toast.

We've had a very successful start to the FOM Foodies group. A review of our April outing will appear in the next issue of *PASSAGE*. Although the initial group is full, we may consider creating another Foodie group later this year, so do register if you're interested.

The *La Cage aux Folles* musical and the Mobile Phone Photography class have sold out, but there are still tickets available for the film, *Under the Turban*, on Thursday, May 4 at 7:00 pm. A Q&A session with the film director will follow the screening. Details and the registration link are provided on the Curio webpage.

We are considering a Wine & Cheese Evening, a sketching class and an Ikebana class as possibilities for future programmes. If you have any suggestions or would like to volunteer, please contact the Curio team via the link provided on the webpage.



# Monday Morning Lectures

Free public lectures are held in the auditorium of the Asian Civilisations Museum on Mondays. Everyone is welcome to arrive at 10:30 am for coffee or tea before the lecture, which begins promptly at 11:00 am. For safety and fire hazard reasons, there may be times when we cannot admit all those who wish to attend our lectures. Please take your seat early to avoid disappointment.

**1 May • NO LECTURE** May Day, Public Holiday

**8 May • Court Intrigues, Ceremonies and Cultural Legacy of the Joseon Dynasty**

*Speaker: Dr Vidya Schalk*



For over 500 years (1392-1910) the epic Joseon Dynasty ruled over a united Korean Peninsula and left behind a lasting legacy that shaped and continues to influence society even today. Modern-day Korean dramas pale in comparison to the actual political intrigues that took place during this dynastic rule. Neo-Confucianism became the state ideology and rituals and ceremonies were of great importance. The cultural landscape was not only influenced by the king and his court, but also by local artists, artisans and common people. This intriguing dynasty's background and cultural legacy come to life, providing a basis for appreciating the current ACM special exhibit, *Joseon Korea - Court Treasures and City Life*.

**15 May • National Gallery Singapore – City Hall and the Supreme Court under a New Light**

*Speaker: Jean-François Milou*



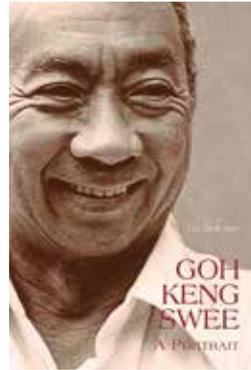
The National Gallery Singapore opened to the public a year ago, to widespread acclaim and admiration not only for its superb art collection, but also for the architectural innovations introduced in the renovation of two of Singapore's national monuments, the buildings housing the collection.

This presentation by Jean-François Milou will focus on how Studio Milou's approach combines a deference for existing structures and local contexts with classical traditions, to create enduring, widely appealing and elegant design.

structures and local contexts with classical traditions, to create enduring, widely appealing and elegant design.

**22 May • Dr Goh Keng Swee: A Portrait**

*Speaker: Tan Siok Sun*



Are leaders born or made? Author Tan Siok Sun will attempt to answer this question by focusing on Dr Goh Keng Swee, Singapore's first Deputy Prime Minister (1980 to 1984): his childhood, his motivations and the times. Tan Siok Sun is Dr Goh's daughter-in-law and she will share the process of how she went about researching and writing his biography: *Goh Keng Swee: A Portrait*.

**29 May • Finding Liu Kang in Shanghai**

*Speaker: Gretchen Liu*



formed almost a century ago? Gretchen Liu shares her adventures in research as she tracked down Singapore pioneer artist Liu Kang's fascinating Shanghai experiences in art and friendship in 'the Paris of the Orient' 1926-1937.

What happens when you go in search of family history? Or in this case the history of your husband's family? Is it possible to find traces of the past in a city as complex as Shanghai, one that has rushed to modernity? And what about friendships

**5 June • Anjaneyam – The Ramayana of Hanuman**

*Speaker: Aravinth Kumarasamy with Apsaras Arts*



Apsaras Arts are planning for their next adventure with a mega dance production on the Anjaneyam, Hanuman's Ramayana, co-produced with Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay. The production, premiering

in November, features dancers and musicians from Java and Indonesia, as well as Apsaras Arts' dancers and musicians. The audience will go on a spectacular journey as the tale of the Ramayana unfolds through the life of Hanuman, the revered monkey god. During this lecture, you will hear about the concept from the artistic director, Aravinth Kumarasamy, and catch a sneak preview of both Javanese and Indian dance sequences through an exclusive talk-preview performance.

# Museum Information and Exhibitions

## Asian Civilisations Museum

1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555  
Tel: 6332 7798  
[www.acm.org.sg](http://www.acm.org.sg)

### Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am - 7:00 pm  
Fri 10:00 am - 9:00 pm

### FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm, Fri 7:00 pm (English)  
Tues to Fri 10:30 am and every second Saturday 1:30 pm (Japanese)

### 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. The new and refreshed permanent galleries are arranged along broad themes that highlight cross-cultural connections, rather than being segmented by geography or culture.

The ACM connects the cultures of Asia across two broad themes: trade and the exchange of ideas, and faith and belief. Beginning with the ninth century Tang shipwreck, the galleries explore Southeast Asia as a trading hub. Chinese porcelain, Southeast Asian ceramics, Indian textiles and furniture are showcased along with the Asian luxuries that were in demand in the global market. Asia was also a source as well as a crossroads of faith and belief and the ACM galleries display works of art showing the development of ancient Indian faiths and the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism across Asia. Christianity and Islam in Asia reveal the Asian origin and evolution of these global faiths.

### Joseon Korea: Court Treasures and City Life (Through 23 July)

FOM Guided Tours:  
Mon - Fri 1:00 p.m. (English)

Intrigued by sets and costumes from Korean historical dramas and films? Then you will want to see actual furniture, fashion, and decorative arts from Korea's Joseon era (1392-1897). Spanning some 500 years, Joseon was Korea's last dynasty, and the legacy of its courtly culture and vibrant city life lives on in South Korea today. Treasures from the National Museum of Korea, the National Palace Museum of Korea, and the Deagu National Museum will be displayed for the first time in Singapore.

## Gillman Barracks

9 Lock Road, Singapore 108937  
[www.gillmanbarracks.com](http://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: Tues to Sun – Refer to individual gallery pages online for opening hours  
Closed Mondays & Public Holidays

### FOM guided tours:

Sat 4:00 pm: Art & History Tour  
Sat. 5:00 pm: History and Heritage Tour  
To register please visit [www.fom-gillman-barracks.eventbrite.com](http://www.fom-gillman-barracks.eventbrite.com)

### LOCK ROUTE

Various locations around Gillman Barracks  
Open 24 hours to the public  
(Through June)

LOCK ROUTE, a public art showcase takes inspiration from Gillman Barracks' address and the route march army recruits typically undergo during their training. Situated outdoors, it features 16 arresting outdoor artworks by world-renowned and emerging international and Singapore artists, including several new commissions. The artworks consist of site-specific installations, sculptures and murals, and visitors are invited to traverse the grounds of Gillman Barracks and experience a closer encounter with art out in the open.



## The Making of an Institution

NTU CCA  
(Through May)

The exhibition captures different moments in the development of the CCA connecting artistic projects, discursive manifestations, and the institutional apparatus in a seamless display. The exhibition is curated by Ute Meta Bauer, Founding Director, Anna Lovecchio, Curator, Residencies, and Anca Rujoiu, Manager, Publications.

## Indian Heritage Centre

5 Campbell Lane, Singapore 209924  
[www.indianheritage.org.sg](http://www.indianheritage.org.sg)

Open Tuesday to Sunday & public holidays. Closed on Mondays.

Tues to Thurs 10:00 am to 7:00 pm, Fri & Sat 10:00 am to 8:00 pm  
Sundays & public holidays 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

### FOM guided tours: Tues-Fri

11:00 am for the main galleries  
2:00 pm for the special exhibition

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 our only purpose-built museum.

### Once Upon a Time in Little India (Through 21 July)

*Once Upon a Time in Little India* tells the story of Singapore's Little India through historical and contemporary lenses and draws parallels with diasporic settlements across the globe. Recreating moments past and present, this exhibition presents an appealing and arresting mix of historical artefacts and contemporary art installations. This exhibition is a parallel project of the Singapore Biennale, 2016.

## Malay Heritage Centre

85 Sultan Gate, Singapore 198501  
Tel: 6391 0450  
[www.malayheritage.org.sg](http://www.malayheritage.org.sg)

### Opening hours:

Tues to Sun 10:00 am – 6:00 pm (last admission 5:30 pm), closed on Mondays  
FOM guided tours: Tues to Fri 11:00 am; Sat and Sun: 12:00 pm (Subject to availability of a docent). Please call ahead to confirm the availability of a docent).



### Mereka Utusan: Imprinting Malay Modernity, 1920s – 1960s (Through June 2017)

The Malay Heritage Centre's fifth special exhibition, *Mereka Utusan: Imprinting Malay Modernity, 1920s – 1960s* affirms the importance of language to a community by tracing the development of Malay modernity and identity through print, advertisements and editorial cartoons. Gain insights into how the Malay community in Singapore used the power of the mass media to discuss and respond to historical events such as the Great Depression, World War II, and the nationalist movements that swept across Southeast Asia afterwards.

## National Museum of Singapore

93 Stamford Road, Singapore 178897  
Tel: 6332 3659  
[www.nationalmuseum.sg](http://www.nationalmuseum.sg)

### Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am – 7:00 pm

### FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm (English)  
Mon to Fri 10:30 am and every first Saturday 1:30 pm (Japanese)  
The Singapore History Gallery

In celebration of 50 years of independence, this gallery has been refreshed with updated stories and content on Singapore's history, capturing the nation's defining moments, challenges and achievements from its earliest beginnings 700 years ago to the independent, modern city-state it is today.



# Museum Information and Exhibitions

## Desire and Danger

Discover the fine line between desire and danger at this stimulating new exhibition at the Goh Seng Choo Gallery. Featuring creatures that arouse appetites and instill fear, and exotic plants sought for their ability to induce pleasure or pain, this selection of drawings from the William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings explores the complex and sometimes uneasy relationship between man and nature.

## NUS Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts

University Cultural Centre  
50 Kent Ridge Crescent, Singapore  
119279  
Tel: 6516 8817  
[www.nus.edu.sg/museum](http://www.nus.edu.sg/museum)  
Free admission



### Opening hours:

Tues to Sat 10:00 am – 6:00 pm, Closed on Sundays and Public Holidays

### Guided tours:

Tues to Fri (by appointment), Sat 2:00 pm – 3:00 pm (selected exhibitions only – phone for details)

## Ng Eng Teng: 1+1=1

Through the motifs of spacing and difference, this exhibition features works by the artist Ng Eng Teng produced between 1958 and 2001. The title of the exhibition takes as its point of reference a series of sculptures developed by the artist during the 1990s. While the series  $1+1=1$  has not been seen as characteristic of Ng Eng Teng's practice, here it is proposed as an alternative point of entry into the artist's body of works.

**"There are too many episodes of people coming here..."**

(Through 1 July)

This exhibition builds on the previous exhibition's interest in the textuality of exhibitions, bringing in materials by artists Charles Lim, Dennis Tan and Zai Kuning as a means of rewriting and opening up newer points of departure.

## NUS Baba House

157 Neil Road, Singapore 088883  
Tel: 6227 5731  
[www.nus.edu.sg/museum/baba](http://www.nus.edu.sg/museum/baba)

Baba House is a heritage house dating back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It exhibits the Peranakan community's material culture in a domestic context. Visits are by appointment only owing to conservation concerns. Please sign up in advance for free heritage tours which are offered on Mon 2:00pm, Tues 2:00pm & 6:30pm, Thurs 10:00am & Sat 11:00am.

## The Peranakan Museum

39 Armenian Street, Singapore 179941  
Tel: 6332 7591  
[www.peranakanmuseum.sg](http://www.peranakanmuseum.sg)



### Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am - 7:00 pm  
Fri 10:00 am - 9:00 pm

### FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm (English), Tues to Fri 10:30 am (Japanese), every second Wednesday of the month 10:45 am (French).

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.

## Nyonya Beadwork and Embroidery: Craft and Heritage

(Through 18 June)

### FOM Guided Tours:

Wed & Fri 12.30 pm (English)

Tues to Fri 11.30 am (Japanese)

This exhibition explores the art of embroidery with glass beads, silk, and gold produced by and for Peranakans. The cosmopolitan nature of this rich artistic tradition will be revealed, recovering a history never fully recorded. The familiar look of the beaded slippers, purses, bed hangings, and embroidered handkerchiefs

and kebayas of the Peranakan communities of Southeast Asia is the result of diverse Chinese, Indian, Portuguese, Dutch, and local Malay influences. The exhibition is curated by Dr Cheah Hwei-Fen, of Australian National University."

## Singapore Art Museum

71 Bras Basah Road, Singapore 189555  
Tel: 6332 3222  
[www.singaporeartmuseum.sg](http://www.singaporeartmuseum.sg)

### Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am – 7:00 pm, Fri 10:00 am – 9:00 pm

### FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm, Fri 7:00 pm  
(English), Tues to Fri 10:30 am (Japanese)



## Once Upon This Island (permanent)

SAM's Learning Galleries showcase a series of contemporary works by Singaporean artists, from the Singapore Art Museum's permanent collection as well as commissioned works. The exhibition navigates the ideas of home, community, identity, and memory.

## Imaginarium: To the Ends of the Earth

(Through 27 August)

How much do you know about the planet we inhabit? The Singapore Art Museum welcomes you back to the seventh edition of our family-focused exhibition. Taking a closer look at the surroundings and environments we reside in, we see how people, flora and fauna, adapt to their ever-changing surroundings. With the technological progress that we have made, we now have a better insight into far-flung locations and are better connected than before, but are we really any closer to appreciating earth's many marvels? Through inspiring and engaging artworks, Imaginarium 2017 introduces explorers to new ways of seeing and experiencing the world around us.

## STPI

41 Robertson Quay, Singapore 238236  
Tel: 6336 3663  
[www.stpi.com.sg](http://www.stpi.com.sg)

### Opening hours:

Mon to Fri: 10:00 am – 7:00 pm, Sat: 9:00 am – 6:00 pm

Closed Sundays & Public Holidays

FOM guided tours: Tues and Thurs, 11:30 am, Sat 2:00 pm

Please refer to STPI's website at [www.stpi.com.sg](http://www.stpi.com.sg) for STPI's public programmes.



## Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall

12 Tai Gin Road, Singapore 327874  
Tel: 6256 7377  
[www.wanqingyuan.org.sg](http://www.wanqingyuan.org.sg)

### Opening hours:

Tues to Sun 10:00 am - 5:00 pm, closed on Mondays

FOM guided tours: Tues to Fri 2:00 pm (English)

FOM Special exhibition guided tours: 10:30 am on Fridays in English



## Stitches of Love: Hidden Blessings in Children's Clothing and Accessories

(27 May 2017 through March 2018)

A collaboration between Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall and the Memorial Museum of Generalissimo Sun Yat-sen's Mansion in Guangzhou, this special exhibition showcases children's clothing and accessories from the late Qing to early Republican period. It reviews the wide range of images rich in symbolic meanings that were employed to bestow good fortune, longevity, male progeny, health, wealth and career success. The collection includes clothing, hats, ear muffs, bibs and shoes that feature a variety of motifs derived from the natural world, history, literature and folklore.

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5/30 11:00 - 17:00



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