

# PASSAGE

Friends of the Museums Singapore

September / October 2017



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history  
culture  
people



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# President's Letter

## Dear Friends,

A warm welcome back to those of you who have been away on your summer break. I hope you had a wonderful time with your family and friends. For those of you who stayed behind, I hope the lull in FOM activities has not made life too dull for you.

If you were in Singapore, I hope you had the opportunity to read the feature on four of our docents in *The Straits Times*. Their stories and passion for guiding are an inspiration to us all. If you were moved by their passion, or know anyone who was, why not take a leaf out of their book and help to expand the docent community? As docent training will start on 12 September, it is not too late to sign up for the course. Our Overall Heads of Training, Patricia Welch and Dorien Knapp, have worked hard this summer to come up with interesting programmes to improve the trainees' learning experience.

Even if guiding is not for you, do join us anyway on 9 October at the National Museum of Singapore for our Open Morning during which FOM's activity groups will be sharing the new programmes they have designed for the coming season. You might find an activity that will interest you. As is our tradition, the Open Morning will be followed by a public lecture, presented by artist and educator Kelly Reedy. She will talk about various regional art traditions and the psychological benefits gained through the creation of these images, as well as their use in ritual traditions.

After attending the Open Morning, do stay on to visit the National Museum's special exhibition, *Witness To War: Remembering 1942*, which will open to the public on 23 September. The exhibition marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942. Some of our enthusiastic docents have spent the last few months researching the history this exhibition reveals and are currently busy preparing to guide the exhibition. Through artefacts from museums in Singapore and across the Pacific, the exhibition offers insights into Singapore's experience as well as that of the rest of the region during World War II.

This issue of *PASSAGE* features articles by nine docents who have written about a hero or heroine selected from artefacts displayed in the museums and heritage institutions where they guide. Among them are the prominent leader and philanthropist Tan Kah Kee, who made extensive contributions towards education, and missionary Sophia Blackmore who devoted her life to promoting education for girls in Singapore. There is also an interesting contribution from the Malay Heritage Centre's Nelly Navarro, who wrote about the fictional character Panglima Awang, the eponymous hero of the novel created by Harun Aminurrashid, a leading Malay writer who based his story on historical events. Nelly feels that Panglima Awang shared many characteristics with Hang Tuah, a legendary hero widely regarded as having been the greatest warrior in the Malay world. Both were patriotic and brave. Who would your pick be?

Our Indian community will be celebrating Deepavali on 18 October this year. Do join in the fun in Little India when its streets will be decked out in beautiful lights and decorations and stalls will be selling traditional crafts and tasty delicacies. Be sure to join our docent-led tours at the Indian Heritage Centre to learn more about Singapore's Indian community and their contributions.

I look forward to seeing many of you at our Open Morning on 9 October.



Clara Chan  
FOM President 2017



# Curio – FOM Foodies Popiah Lunch

*Good Chance Popiah* is a 'typical' local restaurant. Tucked away in an area known as Kampong Silat, it houses one of Singapore's oldest HDB estates. The restaurant's founder, Mr Hou Shen Hu, who recently celebrated his 98<sup>th</sup> birthday, is still very active in the Chinese community. You can catch him singing in Peking Opera performances at the Amoy Association on Saturday afternoons.

*Good Chance Popiah* was established in 1977 and, as is often in the case with local restaurants, Mr Hou used his mother's *popiah* recipe. This might be the reason this type of restaurant is known as *zi char*, a Hokkien term used here to describe a wallet-friendly home-style cuisine.

*Popiah* has its roots in China and is said to have origins similar to the sandwich. A Ming official occupied with his documents, had no time for lunch, so his wife chopped up some ingredients, wrapped them in a flour pancake and served this to her busy husband.

*Popiah* has three main components, a soft, thin paper-like pancake, a Chinese root called *bang kuang* cooked in a clay pot with many herbs, and an array of side dishes such as bamboo shoots, garlic, shrimps, honey, nuts and various sauces. This might sound like a strange combination, but ultimately the different flavours work perfectly together. Usually the *popiah* is wrapped and cut into five pieces. However, this restaurant offers a 'do-it-yourself' version. It requires a bit of practice to wrap the perfect *popiah*, combining all the ingredients without breaking the skin, but the very friendly staff was very helpful showing us how to do this.

The main ingredient, the *bang kuang* (also known as *jicama* or Mexican yam bean), is readily available at all local markets (it is a fantastic, crunchy and inexpensive ingredient for a salad). It arrived in the Philippines with the Spaniards and has many interesting properties such as improving



The Foodies group at the Good Chance Popiah Restaurant

the absorption of calcium. It is also very low in calories.

The restaurant is still run by a family member, the grandson, Boon Kaichun, also known as Ah Boy. During our lunch, he called and treated us to a lovely dessert. However, the 'DIY' *popiah* is not the only signature dish at this place, they are also known for their pork trotter *bee hoon*. What is the secret ingredient? Stewed *bang kuang*.



Bang kuang, also known as jicama or Mexican yam bean

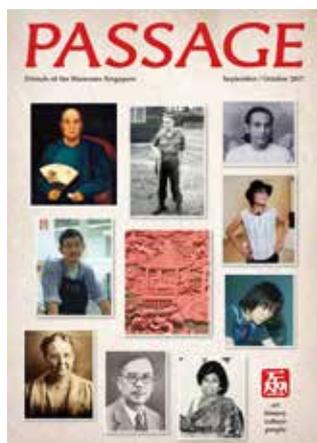
Curio FOM Foodies will soon start a second Foodie group. If you are interested in joining, register at [www.fom.sg](http://www.fom.sg) under activities/curio



The ingredients for making your own popiah



The waitress showing the group how it's done



## PASSAGE

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**On the Cover:** Photo collage of the heroes and heroines featured in this issue. From left to right, top row: Tan Kim Seng (image courtesy of the Peranakan Museum), Donald Alexander Jarvis (image courtesy of Sally McHale), G Sarangapany (image courtesy of the Indian Heritage Centre). Middle row: Eitaro Ogawa (image courtesy of STPI), close-up of the scholar Wang Xizhi from the lacquerware screen at the ACM (photo by Gisella Harrold), Titarubi (image courtesy of Sylvina Halim) and Tamae Iwasaki (image courtesy of STPI). Bottom row: Sophia Blackmore (photo courtesy of Wikipedia), Tan Kah Kee (photo courtesy of the TTK Foundation), Daisy Devan (photo courtesy of Khir Johari).

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.

# Public Information Meetings

FOM's Public Information Meetings (PIMs) are the most public and effective marketing activities we have for informing our members (as well as interested friends and others) about our docent training programmes. We typically hold two PIMs a year – in May and August.

This year's PIMs were held as usual with introductory remarks from FOM's president followed by a short presentation by the Overall Heads of Training, covering the training dates, available programmes, fees, expectations and other important topics. However, our usual format was changed in 2017. Instead of having each museum introduce themselves, we had a more interactive mini quiz show when we asked each museum's training co-heads three questions:

1. Many of our museums feature prominent individuals who have come to represent or have played a significant role in the museum's collection and focus. Select one such historical individual (dead or alive) who represents your museum – tell us his or her name, a little bit about them and why you have selected them.
2. A typical feature of many museums is a major artefact in the museum's entranceway that represents the museum's focus. If you were the director of your museum, which artefact would you select as representative of the collection – and explain why it deserves that recognition.
3. There are many factors that contribute to a museum's character – its architecture, heritage, lighting, internal layout, and others. Today we'd like to stretch that idea a little bit and ask you, if you had to choose an aural environment for your museum – in other words, perhaps music to be played in the main entrance hall – what sort of music would you choose, and why?

Can you guess what the answers were from each of the museums in the May 2017 PIM? Their responses are at the bottom of the page.



From left to right at the May 2017 PIM: representing NMS in red and white, training co-heads Karen Houtman and Diana Pye Fung Loo, the two co-heads from TPM in their colourful sarong kebaya (Ai Lee Shia and Debbie Wong), the two Overall Training Co-heads (Patricia Bjaaland Welch and Dorien Knaap), and the two training co-heads from ACM (Darlene Kasten and Anitha Komanthakkal) wearing their distinctive orange scarves. Photo by Marie Deckers



The PIM audience. Photo by Marie Deckers



The 2017-18 ACM Training Team. Photo by Marie Deckers



The NMS exhibition, photo by Diana Loo

ACM – Faxian, the gold cup from the Tang shipwreck, Yoyo Ma's *Oasis*  
TPM – Madame Wellington Koo, a Peranakan beaded tablecloth, *Baju Pajangan*  
NMS – Sir Stamford Raffles, the Singapore Stone, Jeremy Monteiro's *One people, One Nation, One Singapore*  
SYSNMMH – Teo Eng Hook, the Tan Chor Lam seal, and a mourning song dedicated to Sun Yat Sen  
STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery – Kenneth Tyler, a mask made by Indonesian artist Eko Nugroho, and workshop space sounds

# Postcards from Asia

By Siobhán Cool



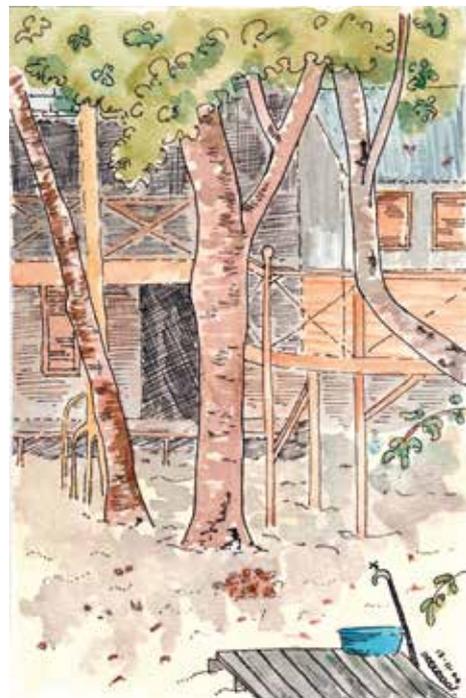
*A temple stands sentry in the magnificent gardens of Yu Yuan, Shanghai.*



*Rows of old dwellings wind through Shanghai's Old Town and outdoor kitchens line the alleyways.*



*This Bajaj sits empty while the slumbering driver rests away from Colombo's noon.*



*Divers' huts sit empty on Pulau Sipadan, Sabah, Malaysia.*

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

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# A Trip to the Singapore Quarry

Where Nature and History Abound

By Jane Iyer

Quarries may not be the first attractions that spring to mind when you think of the many places to see in Singapore, but we have abundant granite, with Pulau Ubin (Granite Island) being the most obvious example. Quarrying activities began as far back as the early 1900s and by the '60s and '70s there were an estimated 20-25 granite quarries supplying much-needed granite for the post-independence building and construction boom.

The hilly areas around Bukit Timah Nature Reserve were home to several active granite quarry sites, with three quarries at the base of Bukit Timah: Dairy Farm, Singapore Granite and Hindhede. After a period of rehabilitation allowing vegetation and wildlife to return, the Singapore Quarry had recovered enough to reopen in 2009 as a freshwater wetland park, complete with a viewing platform. And there, in early June, we ventured with our guide, Ed Lim. At every turn and twist of the path there was something new to point out, observe and explain. Starting from Hillview MRT station, Ed gave an overview of the surrounding area – Upper Bukit Timah Road with its industrial landscape, comprising Castrol Oil, Lam Soon Industries and the Union Carbide factories, plus the significance of Bukit Timah, the highest point on the island.

Our ramble began behind the station and the first lovely sight we beheld was a flock of black-naped orioles flying past. We then heard the beautiful song of the straw-headed bulbul, a globally threatened bird that does quite well in Singapore and is seen in many of our forests.

Walking on, we came across the Ministry of Education's

Adventure Centre, which runs outdoor activity programmes for schools. We continued along a well-maintained road with secondary and disturbed forests on both sides. Some of the many interesting shrubs, trees and fauna we encountered included squirrels, spotted doves, monitor lizards, costus spiral gingers, *daun kadok* (piper samentosum), a shrub which the Malays use for cooking and making salads, torch gingers for adding to our



The green lake



The Singapore Quarry



Bukit Timah Railway Bridge

*rojak* dish, *dillenia suffruticosa* (used to wrap food in the past), and both strangling and non-strangling fig trees.

We opened a few of the yellow-stem figs and saw the busy little fig wasps inside. Also spotted were curry (leaf) plants, fragrant pandan for cooking, elephant grass – tall grass that used to be fed to cows, and much more; too much to describe in detail in this short article.

After three quarters of an hour's relaxed walking, with lots of show and tell, we reached the spectacular quarry itself, with its impressive wooded cliffs providing a wonderful backdrop to the lush green lake, clearly a popular spot for amateur artists, two of whom were sketching away that day.

At the quarry there was lots more to be admired, including tiger orchids – the largest orchid species in the world – macaranga and water plants such as borage, cat-tails, sedges and swamp fern, plus a variety of different fish and red-ear sliders – exotic pet turtles. With Bukit Timah Nature Reserve in the background, we also saw some primary rainforest trees such as the Shoreas and Meranti.

Our return journey included a diversion to the old Malayan railway line, now part of the green corridor, where we crossed Bukit Timah Rail Bridge in style. The morning's adventure ended with well-deserved coffees and cold drinks at a café in the Rail Mall.



Ed Lim, the nature guide

**Jane Iyer** has lived in Singapore for 18 years. She served as FOM president in 2003/4, has guided in three museums, coordinated the Explore Singapore! team, led study tours to other parts of Asia and run film and book groups. For more, please see [www.janestours.sg](http://www.janestours.sg)

All photos by the author

# A Poetic Hero and His Geese

By Carolyn Pottinger

Heroes can certainly be found in the galleries of the Asian Civilisations Museum. Up an elegant staircase, for example, you will find Hanuman, the heroic monkey god. Progress into the Ancient Religions Gallery and you may detect the shadow of Alexander the Great behind the beautiful Gandharan art. I have chosen my hero, however, from the unlikely confines of the Scholars Studio.

There you will find a small 18<sup>th</sup> century lacquerware screen which might once have stood on a scholar's desk, perhaps shielding him from the breeze or the sun flooding into his study. The merit of this screen lies in its quality, the superb carving, as well as in the story depicted. Let's start with the first.

This type of carving appeared in China during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Applying layer upon layer of fast-drying lacquer (resin from the eponymous Lacquer Tree), in this case in three different colours, the artist set to work, creating scenes of the great outdoors (we have mountains and a stream) and often, as here, in strong, cinnabar red. Enormous skill has gone into the creation of water and sky (in dark shades of brown and green), both in contrasting diaper patterns (as they are known), with the neat reproduction of symmetrical shapes so intricate that the skill is now a lost art.

But where is our hero? Seated in a small pavilion is a scholar, his name Wang Xizhi, and he is to Chinese calligraphy what Michelangelo is to Western art. He learned his skills initially from the most famous of female calligraphers (a rare entity in ancient China), Lady Wei, and then by incessantly copying the works of the great masters. The occasion is the Spring Purification Festival and the place the Orchid Pavilion in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province. Wang Xizhi has invited 41 of the greatest poets and calligraphers in China for a literary gathering; the year is 353 CE.

The stream carries wine cups floating on lotus leaves and each time one lands in front of a scholar, it is his turn to either write a poem or to drink the wine as a forfeit. By the end of the day 37 poems had been written by 26 of the group and Wang Xizhi, supposedly slightly intoxicated with the wine and the heady effect of his Arcadian surroundings, composed a preface for the collection, which is said to have been so beautifully written that it has become the most famous piece of Chinese calligraphy ever.

Geese can also be spotted and they are not there by chance. Wang Xizhi's love of nature led him to notice with interest the way that the necks of the geese moved. He then applied this understanding to the manner in which he



The 18<sup>th</sup> century lacquerware screen featuring the scholar and calligrapher Wang Xizhi

held his calligraphy brush and so developed the gracious 'Running Style' (*Cao Shu*) for which he is renowned.

In the poem he composed that day, Wang Xizhi laments the ephemeral nature of life and states that "what fascinated yesterday is mere memory today", so it is perhaps only fitting that no original survives. Legend tells us that eight generations later, the *Lantingji Xu* (Orchid Pavilion Preface) was owned by his descendant, a monk called Bian Cai. The Tang Emperor, Taizong, aware of its importance, is said to have tricked Bian Cai into giving it to him and later to have had it buried with him when he died, presumably for appreciation in the afterlife. Later masters of the art though, had copied it, just as Wang Xizhi had copied the work of his predecessors, so that respectable imitations exist today. No Hanuman or Alexander the Great, but his artistic and literary achievements are noble ones and my hero he shall be.

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**Carolyn Pottinger** delights in researching Asian culture in her role as an ACM docent.

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Photo courtesy of Gisella Harrold

# Gillman Barracks – Its History of Heroism

By Sally McHale

“I arrived in Malaya in July 1948 and enjoyed a few days at Gillman Barracks, Singapore. This had to be seen to be believed. Acclimatisation in comfort with the finest swimming pool I had ever seen.”

I didn't discover these photos and the words above until after my personal hero, my father – Donald Alexander Jarvis – passed away. I knew he had served in Malaya during the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960), but had no idea what that had involved until I moved here five years ago. Now I guide at Gillman Barracks (GB) and the heat and humidity as we walk around the old military buildings can be a trial. So how much more of a shock must it have been for a young man from a small town in Wales.

Gillman Barracks today is a beautiful place, set in lush countryside off Alexandra Road. The former British military buildings have been well preserved and now house a diverse range of contemporary art galleries, with constantly changing exhibitions that are always worth a visit. The barracks were named after General Sir Webb Gillman who came to Singapore in 1927 to assess its defence capabilities. Many of the original buildings show the date they were built – 1935.

Today, just 14 buildings constitute the arts cluster, but as a British army camp, there were at least 50 buildings, three miles of roads, a network of canals, accommodation for around 800 men in nine barrack blocks and comfortable quarters for married men and their families where the Interlace Condominium is today. There were four mess halls, regimental institutes, playing fields, parade grounds, a cinema and the renowned swimming pool.



Gillman Barracks during the colonial era, photo courtesy of Paul Cook

withdrawal in 1971 when Gillman Barracks was sold to the Singapore government for \$1. As Gillman Camp, it was home to the Singapore Armed Forces.



Donald Jarvis at the pool

Old photographs show a neatly manicured camp, much of which the jungle has reclaimed today, including all vestiges of the swimming pool. In the post-war years, during the Emergency, the number of British troops in Singapore swelled, before their



Gillman Barracks today

The special draw of Gillman Barracks for me is that we can relive the last moments of the Battle for Singapore on the very site where the events took place. This seems to bring the actions of the heroes who fought here so much closer. I wish I could have shared some of the stories I've learned about the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Loyal Battalion with him. Those men made GB their home from 1938 to February 1942.

The 'Loyals' were part of Fortress Singapore and when the Japanese invaded, they were sent from the barracks to Malaya where they suffered many casualties before being ordered to defend the causeway as the last Allied troops withdrew over it on 31 January 1942. Two weeks later, as the Japanese closed in on Singapore town, only a quarter of the original battalion of men remained to defend the barracks. Under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Elrington (DSO), the Loyals withdrew to nearby Mount Washington as Gillman Barracks was heavily shelled by mortars and dive bombers.

Commander Elrington sent the following message to his company commanders when he heard the news of the surrender: "I congratulate you on fighting so well. Through no fault of yours you have been ordered to surrender. Remember the lads who have fought and died, and show the same spirit of duty and discipline in defeat. Do nothing to bring discredit on the Loyals as prisoners of war. God bless you."

If you would like to visit Gillman Barracks please check out our free guided tours advertised on [www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com)

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**Sally McHale** is an FOM docent who enjoys guiding at NMS, Gillman Barracks and the former Ford Factory. She loves exploring Singapore and its history but misses the "green, green grass of home" being originally from Wales.

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Unless otherwise noted, photos courtesy of the author

# From Indian Immigrants to Singaporeans

By Vasanthi Ravi

A well-known leader and reformist, 'Thamizhavel' Govindasamy Sarangapany, aka Kosa (19 April 1903–16 March 1974) was a pioneer of the Indian community, one who strove to knit its then fragmented groups into a single social fabric. Hailing from Thiruvarur in South India, he was an educated young man who set foot in Singapore in 1924 and began his career as a book-keeper. Within just a few years, he went on to become a manager.

In 1929, Kosa became the Associate Editor of a weekly magazine called *Munnetram* (meaning Progress) and soon became its editor as well. He was also the editor of *Seerthirtham* (meaning Reform) a monthly magazine, before setting up *Tamil Murasu* in 1935. *Tamil Murasu* was originally a weekly magazine and today is the only Tamil newspaper in circulation.

Deeply drawn by the 'Self Respect' movement (founded in India by EV Ramasamy Naicker also known as *Periyar*), he facilitated the visits of *Periyar* to Singapore to spread reformist ideas among the Indian immigrants of British Malaya. He also spearheaded the founding of the Tamils Reform Association in 1932 and campaigned against social evils such as addiction to toddy and the caste system, while also supporting inter-religious marriages and emphasising the importance of literacy.

Kosa not only personally conducted some inter-caste and inter-religious marriage ceremonies, but also ensured that these marriages were registered. Living by what he preached, he married a 19-year-old Chinese Peranakan, Lim Boon Neo. They had six children and although there was an age gap of 15 years between them, their love withstood the test of time.

To unify all the Indian immigrants, he started a yearly gathering called *Thamizhar Thirunal* to showcase his love of the Tamil language, its arts and its rich culture. The event saw some renowned poets from Tamil Nadu, India, being brought in for discourses and seminars while also recognising upcoming local talents in literature.

Kosa also founded *Manavar Mani Mandram*, a youth organisation that encouraged students to write poems, essays and short stories. Membership cards and badges were issued



A billet issued by the Tamils Representative Council for their yearly event, Thamizhar Thirunaal

to its members, who were also trained in literary critiquing and the writing of literary reviews. Their contributions were published in a weekly column in *Tamil Murasu*.

Other key contributions Kosa made included efforts that resulted in Tamil being named one of Singapore's four official languages. An umbrella body, the Tamil Education Society, was formed. It unified poorly run Tamil schools and provided funding for the teaching of Tamil at primary and secondary levels. He also made sure that adequate government grants were given to cover the operational costs of these Tamil-language schools.

In 1957, he became a Singapore citizen and then encouraged other Indian immigrants to apply for citizenship. He personally filled up the necessary application forms and saw to it that Indian immigrants had a stake in nation-building.

It was in 1955 that he was awarded the title 'Thamizhavel' for his enormous contributions to Tamil literature, followed by other awards such as the *Thamizh Kavalal* in 1963 and *Muthamizh Kavalal* in 1966. These titles were conferred on him for his persistent efforts to keep the Tamil language thriving in spite of barriers that remained from the era of colonial rule.

The collection of G Sarangapany's photographs, personal effects and documents on display at the Indian Heritage Centre, were donated by his daughter, Mrs Rajam Sarangapany.



Govindasamy Sarangapany with his wife and children

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**Vasanthi Ravi** is a social entrepreneur supporting migrant worker projects locally and girls' education in India. As a strong believer in lifelong learning, she joined FOM and Toastmasters International.

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Images courtesy of the Resource Library, Indian Heritage Centre

# The First Man to Sail Around the World

By Nelly Navarro

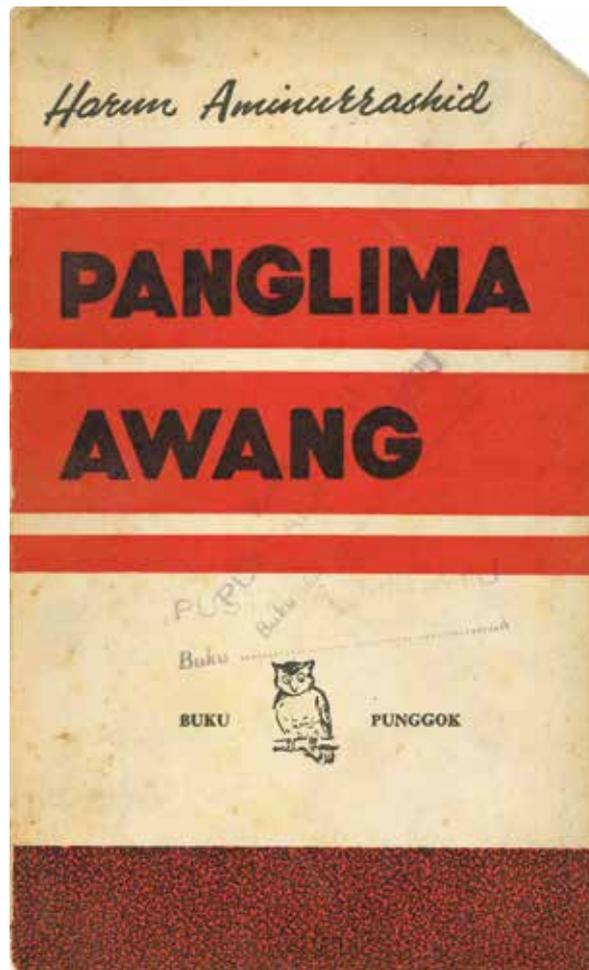
You always thought it was Ferdinand Magellan who sailed around the world between 1519 and 1521, right? Well... he almost did. Magellan was killed in the Philippines, but a few members of his crew continued the journey and made it to Malacca. Among them was a young Malay slave, who was Magellan's interpreter. Although not much is known about him, he is mentioned in some texts as Enrique of Malacca or Henry the Black.

This served as the historical basis of a book of fiction titled *Panglima Awang*, written by Harun Aminurrashid in 1957. The second edition of this book is on display at the Malay Heritage Centre. In the book, Enrique de Malacca is known as Panglima Awang (Captain Awang) a Malaccan warrior captured by the Portuguese during the fall of Malacca in 1511.

The story goes like this: Ferdinand Magellan, the captain of the ship that brought Awang to Europe as a slave, was greatly impressed by his intelligence and righteousness. In spite of their differences in status, culture and religion, respect and mutual understanding developed between the two men. Eventually Magellan made Captain Awang a free man. After Magellan gave up his Portuguese citizenship and became the commander of a Spanish expedition, they set sail together for the very first voyage around the world in search of a westward passage to the East. As equals, they shared knowledge of their respective cultures. Awang learned the use of maps from Magellan and Magellan was fascinated by the powerful secrets of the *keris*, the traditional Malay dagger.

After Magellan was killed, Awang continued the voyage to Malacca. There, he met his former comrades and also his fiancée, Tun Gayah, now the leader of a guerrilla band. Being like "two halves of a betel-nut", Captain Awang and Tun Gayah married soon after. Together with their followers, they continued the struggle to drive the Portuguese out from their land and restore the sultan to his rightful place.

Panglima Awang shares many characteristics with the



The cover of the Malay version of Harun Aminurrashid's novel *Panglima Awang*

epitome of the Malay hero, the legendary Hang Tuah who supposedly lived in Malacca in the 15<sup>th</sup> century during what is believed to have been the Golden Age of the Malay world. Captain Awang was brave, energetic, clever and spoke several languages. He was highly knowledgeable about the *keris* and had mastered *silat* – a Malay martial art. He was loyal to his homeland and the people and remained faithful to his ruler, the sultan, in spite of his questionable conduct when he fled during the Portuguese attack.

The novel is infused with a deep spirit of patriotism, which echoes the atmosphere at the time of the novel's writing. It was completed a few days after the independence of Malaya in 1957. The text and the character of Panglima Awang convey strong elements of the Malay identity, aiming to return a sense of pride and unity to the Malay people. For instance, there is mention of the fact that the Malay-speaking world extends as far as the Philippines. In many ways, the adventures of Awang, his exile, identity and struggles symbolize the Malay nation under colonialism and

the people's hope for better days.

The author, Harun Aminurrashid, a Malay intellectual and nationalist born in Singapore in 1907, dedicated the book to the Independent Federation of Malay States. It served as a school textbook and was reprinted several times. The story of Panglima Awang strongly influenced young students during the decolonisation of Malaya and later Singapore, and the question of the awareness of Malay identity.

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**Nelly Navarro** is an FOM docent at the MHC and ACM. She would be happy to lend the English translation of the book to anyone interested.

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Image courtesy of the Malay Heritage Centre, National Heritage Board

# Sophia Blackmore: Pioneer of Nonya Education

By Anne Wightman

It was a man's world in Singapore when Sophia Blackmore, a young missionary from Australia, arrived here in 1887. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women who lived on the island were predominantly from the local Malay community or were from wealthy European and Asian families. Others were prostitutes and servants and were likely to have received little or no education.

The well-known legacy of Lim Boon Keng and Song Ong Siang to the Straits Chinese Community of a Straits Chinese Girls' School in 1899, was partly in response to the embarrassment of modern young Baba men at the ignorance of their womenfolk (commonly known as *Nonyas*). A Straits Chinese magazine in 1906 even referred to them as the most "ignorant, prejudiced and superstitious class of people in the world". Sophia Blackmore was driven to improve the education of women and had begun to address the absence of schooling opportunities for women many years earlier.

Her arrival in Singapore as an unmarried young woman aroused some suspicion among the *Nonya* community. Before she immersed herself in the education of Chinese girls, she had established a school in 1887 for the daughters of Tamil businessmen. This institution later became the Methodist Girls School. She soon turned her attention to establishing a mission in Chinatown, visiting the homes of Peranakan women, particularly around Neil Road. They spoke Baba Malay, a variety of Malay that Sophia was learning, and were curious to know how old she was, why she wasn't married and why her mother hadn't married her off. They themselves were uneducated and all they knew about the outside world was through the peephole of their traditional Baba homes. Some of them though had the acuity to ask Sophia to give their daughters a Christian education.

In 1888, with a pioneer batch of eight Nonya girls, Sophia opened the Anglo-Chinese Girls' School in Cross Street. It later became known as Fairfield Methodist Secondary School, after a generous American who had donated money to its new building in Neil Road. Sophia went from door to door recruiting new students, in spite of some mothers being suspicious that she might be a government spy (household gambling was illegal at the time) and concerned that their daughters would benefit from education more than their sons.

Another of Sophia's initiatives was a boarding house for school-going girls, runaways, abandoned children and



*Sophia Blackmore with a group of schoolgirls, in 1915*

orphans, known as Deaconess House. Despite money problems, the home took in girls until the beginning of the Japanese Occupation in 1942, by which time it had provided hundreds of girls with a Christian home environment. Many of its alumni became teachers, business women and leaders of the community, as well as good mothers.

Sophia's Christian zeal led her to preach and to lay the foundations for what was to become the Kampong Kapur Methodist Church. She also published a Christian periodical in Baba Malay. This periodical became so popular, it was published in Malaya as well as Singapore.

In 1927, Sophia Blackmore retired and went back to Australia. *The Straits Times* marked her departure from Singapore on 28 January with an article that read, "When Miss Blackmore departs for her home in Australia, she will carry with her the deep affection of several generations of Chinese girls, and she will leave behind in our local annals a fine record of difficult and useful work done, and a memory of personal influence, character and example which has been of very great value in this era of changing traditions and ideas among our Asiatic communities in the Straits."

Aged 88, Sophia Blackmore passed away in 1945, in Australia.

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**Anne Wightman** is a recently qualified FOM docent at NMS and has been a member of FOM since 2015.

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*Photo courtesy of the author*

# The Tan Kim Seng Altar

By Morwenna Lawson

Like most docents, I have a list of crowd-pleasers that never fail to draw appreciation from the guests I take on a tour. Among the delicate, intricate, colourful, complex items in the Peranakan Museum (TPM) there is one big, show-off piece that's too large to miss, too impressive not to love – the Tan Kim Seng ancestral altar, which can be found on the third floor of the museum. People love viewing this great brown lacquered affair as it stands in its own glass case in the Religion Gallery, side-lit by natural light from a window. On top of the layers of lacquer sit silver ornaments that glint in the sunlight – incense holders, cupboards, a floral lamp and two obligatory wall plaques spelling out stories of filial piety.

It's an easy piece to show. A lot of people love it simply because of its scale, its open accessibility. There is no need to push or crane to get a look and nothing hugely complicated about the detail. But over and above the size, the shiny surface items and the grand draped altar cloth, it is the story behind the piece that I love the most.

The altar was once owned by the family of Tan Kim Seng, a third-generation Malaccan Peranakan who went to a private Chinese school and became proficient in both English and Dutch. He came to Singapore in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, swiftly establishing Kim Seng & Company thanks to his business acumen and knowledge of languages, and later setting up branches in Shanghai and in his home town of Malacca.

The many legacies he left ensure that his name has retained its high standing throughout the years. Tan Kim Seng's own schooling left him with a passion for education, and he established a Chinese Free School, with lessons taught in Hokkien. He built major roads and bridges, including Kim Seng Road in River Valley and Kim Seng Bridge in Malacca. The great respect that Singapore's Chinese community had for him, led to his appointment as Justice of the Peace by the colonial government.

Many of the artefacts at TPM come from Kim Seng's family and their large and well-known house, Panglima Prang, which was once on River Valley Road. Built in the 1860s and, like so many other beautiful black and white buildings, demolished in the 1980s, the museum now houses several of its precious heirlooms.

Kim Seng's biggest legacy was perhaps his gift of money towards building Singapore's reservoirs. He donated the money in 1857 and the British Government erected a fountain in his name by way of thanks. But the reservoir money was squandered because of poor choices and the reservoirs were not built in time for their benefactor to see them. It was only some time after his passing that the money was given back to the cause and the reservoirs were constructed. The Tan Kim Seng Fountain subsequently moved to various locations, finally settling in the Esplanade Park where it now serves as a timeless reminder of the great donation.

The story says much about the man, about a government wanting to do the right thing, and about the city we live in today, now well-known for its clean drinking water and



*Altar table, wooden plaque and couplets collection of Peter Wee. Silver altar service and candlesticks collection of Dr and Mrs Mariette*

plentiful reservoirs. We walk the reservoir byways and we drink water straight from the tap; we are all grateful for Tan Kim Seng's donations.

Next time you're passing, take a look at the ornaments on top of the altar and see if you can tell what he is said to have most enjoyed as a snack – among the silver oddities, joss stick holder, floral lamp, etc are coffee pots and ice cream cups, lined up ready for a celebration. To me, the reservoirs echo the celebration theme and should always be as full and life-giving as those coffee cups once were for Tan Kim Seng.

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**Morwenna Lawson** is a website editor, freelance journalist, blogger and also a docent at the Peranakan Museum.

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# Heroines in Contemporary Art

By Uma Nair

There are so many women and men who stand out in the field of contemporary art. What would really define them as heroes or heroines? Is it the fact that they highlight issues, touch a nerve, or is it the sheer skillful application of art bringing all of these elements together?

The Singapore Biennale 2016, titled *An Atlas of Mirrors*, provided a great opportunity to enjoy superb artworks from around the region. One that stood out, for me, was by the artist Titarubi.

Talking about where she gets her ideas from, Titarubi believes that it is common in the arts to talk about justice and about things that annoy one's mind such as, "what is life?" and "what is it like being a woman?" Her ideas come from everyday things. One day while cooking in her kitchen, she noticed certain herbs and spices. That set her thinking about how these spices, which are so commonly used now, had once been highly prized, had led to conflict and wars, changes in the boundaries of various nations and a big change in human civilisation. It was in her kitchen that there arose the idea of using nutmeg for her artwork.

She feels that an artwork is very limited in the sense that it cannot tell the whole story; however, it can set you thinking and trigger the need to know more. This work is a statement about the history of power. The artist has used the spice nutmeg as a prime component because the nutmeg symbolizes conflict and the legacy of colonialism in Indonesia. The nutmegs are coated with real gold. At the height of the spice trade during the colonial era, nutmeg was worth its weight in gold and this is her way of representing or equalising value. The burnt-out ships recall the ominous appearance on the horizon of European armadas during the early centuries of European colonialism. At the same time, they make reference to the brutal slaughter



*History Repeats Itself*, by Titarubi, is an installation with three shining, menacing-looking figures (cloaks made with 45,000 gold-plated nutmegs) riding atop three exquisitely built boats. It is a reminder of Indonesia's golden past and the dark centuries of colonialism. Image courtesy of the Singapore Art Museum

of indigenous peoples and the burning of ships in the East Indies (present-day Indonesia) by the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (the VOC, or Dutch East India Company) in an attempt to quash local maritime power and seize control of the lucrative spice islands.

The artwork is extremely skillful: the sheen of the gold in a darkened room, the menace and the hollowness of the figures, the intricate work on the boats, all manage to bring history to life for the viewer. Standing in that gallery, one can imagine the terror faced by the indigeneous people of the islands and the lustre of the nutmegs that drove the colonists.

Titarubi cleverly brings us back to the present with the title *History Repeats Itself*. Is there a warning here or is she merely putting into words that which we know exists? She has heroically worked towards highlighting Indonesian culture, heritage and history while being mindful of the present. Although her artworks might delve into history, they also bring home the point that the present is something that we have, that we can contribute to, and that we can change.

Titarubi's real name is Rubiati Puspitasari. Born in Bandung, West Java in 1968, she is known for her works across multiple mediums. She is involved in social movements and is a founding member of the Indonesian Contemporary Art Network.

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**Uma Nair** has lived in India, Germany, the USA and now lives in Singapore. She is an ex-banker, a docent at SAM and has recently trained at Gillman Barracks. She loves art and is an amateur painter.

# Collaboration and Trust Create a Lasting Legacy at STPI

By Florence Martellini

*Eitaro Ogawa, chief printer at STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery, and Tamae Iwasaki, STPI Senior Education and Outreach Officer, were interviewed about their 16 years at the creative workshop and gallery as they prepared for their next big adventure.*

## How was your first encounter with Ken Tyler?

In 2001, Ken Tyler was a very energetic, powerful and determined 68-year-old. He made a strong impression on us with his first question, "Do you love your life?" He asserted that loving it meant being committed to what you were doing. We worked for a year with him, learning more about his passion and commitment. We had long communications about lithography and he gave me his technical secrets. It was a shock to be with someone so direct and open. His attitude was very different from what we were used to in Japan.

## What is his legacy?

After Ken left STPI, a journey on a twisting mountain road started for me. I was left to lead the workshop with little expertise, so I adopted Ken's trial and error methods, which are the essence of his legacy. Ken had a symbiotic relationship with the artists and could afford to take the lead since he had mastered the printing techniques. I was aware of our technical limitations, so developed a collaborative team spirit with my staff. That strategy soon turned into a blessing. Since we didn't know all the rules or concepts to respect, we were not afraid of making mistakes. We learned by doing and always moving forward.

## How do you work with artists?

I never say "no". When an experiment doesn't work, I put it aside while involving the team and artists in the decision-making process. When I sense a future in an idea, I let it grow organically and go back to it later. Hence, we never stop thinking about new ideas. That ethos helps create a relaxing atmosphere where the artists do not feel limited.

Ken contributed to the printing revolution by breaking traditional rules. STPI has continued that tradition by inviting artists who are novices to printmaking and are constantly asking technical questions and coming up with unrestrained ideas. As chief printer, I let artists break the rules, while pulling the necessary strings when needed. I create a fluid structure without totally losing control, a sort of "controlled chaos". Without any art history, aesthetic or cultural background against which to evaluate the artists' works, I instead attend to each person as a person.

## What were you looking for?

My first mentor in Japan, Sonoyama Harumi, had trained in France and was following printing tradition, always



*Kenneth, Tamae and Eitaro working on Donald Sultan's Artworks, photo courtesy of STPI*

looking for perfection. While he gave me the fundamental foundation of printmaking, I was ready to challenge it. Ken helped me break my own stiffness and take risks. Of course, this change didn't happen overnight and was eased by the fact that deep inside, I am rebellious.

## Tamae, what would you like to add?

Ken insisted on having both husband and wife on board. Over the years I discovered my husband through his way of treating people – he only focuses on the content, not the mould. He is honest and treats everyone the same, thereby establishing trust. Humility is one of his great qualities. He respects artists and the risks they constantly take. He doesn't mind putting only their name on every artwork that comes out of their rich collaboration.

## Why are you leaving STPI?

Part of our life journey is to take risks and we knew that we would have to leave STPI one day. Such a national institution needs fresh blood to continue growing. Change is uncomfortable, but also boosts creativity.

## What is your next venture?

God is a creator, a maker, an artist. We want to further explore our collaboration with Him to bring His work to people. We are not creators, but facilitators who make His creativity visible.

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**Florence Martellini**, an STPI docent, is fascinated by the creative process. Acknowledgments to Eitaro Ogawa, Tamae Iwasaki and Alexandra Domart.

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# Tan Kah Kee

## Singapore's Legendary Hua' chiao

By Isabelle de Hennin

Any Singaporean wishing to be remembered some day in an MRT station, could be daunted by the Herculean task required to achieve this. Indeed, few of Singapore's MRT stations are named after individuals and in the case of Tan Kah Kee, this symbolizes the country's gratitude for his immense contributions towards education, his entrepreneurship, charitable works, fund-raising and community leadership.

Nothing seemed to predestine Tan Kah Kee to becoming an "Overseas Chinese Legend". He was a *Hua' chiao*, or China-born immigrant, from an educated, Confucian family from Jimei, in Fujian Province. He spoke only Hokkien when at the age of 17, he arrived in Singapore in 1890 to work as an apprentice in his father's rice business. He was unusual in that in colonial Singapore, the financially successful Chinese were usually Straits-born and English-educated. However, during that era, Singapore had a booming economy, one that provided the right environment for achieving wealth and power.

Tan Kah Kee created his business empire with shrewd investments, careful management control and great flair. He invested in pineapple canning factories, diversified into Malayan rubber plantations, which formed the bulk of his fortune, then diversified further into the manufacturing sector and shipping. The scale of his businesses and his integrated supply chain earned him the nickname "Henry Ford of Malaya".

Tan Kah Kee joined the *Tong Meng Hui* (Sun Yat Sen's Chinese Revolutionary Alliance) in 1910 and promptly made a donation. The thread linking him to the other supporters of the *Tong Meng Hui*, was their total commitment to China. The grand plan was the salvation of the motherland, much weakened after decades of wars and internal strife. The alliance wanted to achieve this first through revolution in order to establish a democratic republic, then through education and industrialisation.

Tan Kah Kee spent most of the late 1920s and 1930s uniting the Singapore Chinese community and raising funds for China. The Chinese community was deeply divided and fragmented into dialect-based, socio-political



Tan Kah Kee 1940, photo courtesy of Tan Kah Kee Foundation

groups called *pangs*. Tan wished to see a united overseas Chinese population to reflect the reunification of China by Chiang Kai Shek. The 1928 Shandong incident (in which Japanese troops attacked the Chinese with appalling ferocity) provided the first opportunity for fundraising for China – Tan immediately set up the Shandong Relief Fund. Massive amounts were raised for the victims and their families. He went on to head the Singapore China Relief Fund Committee to help China resist Japan. He was also elected as president of the Southeast Asia Federation of the China Relief Fund Union, which raised substantial amounts from 1937 until Japan invaded Singapore in 1942.

His lifelong concern with education resulted in the creation of ten schools in Singapore and a similar number in his native Jimei. Another key educational achievement was the foundation of Amoy University in Fujian, which Tan Kah Kee financed almost single-handedly for 16 years. The whole point of creating this university was to provide China

with graduates who would become competent leaders in the economy, education and government

By 1941 Tan Kah Kee had reached such a level of leadership and authority within the Chinese community that Sir Shenton Thomas, the British Governor, had to take the unprecedented step of enlisting his help in order to mobilise the Chinese community in the civil defence of Singapore. Tan himself fled to Sumatra just before Japan invaded Singapore and spent the war years in Indonesia, sheltered mainly by graduates from his schools and university. He returned to Singapore after the war and threw his weight behind Mao Tse Tung during the Chinese Civil War, then returned to China in 1950.

Tan Kah Kee's most substantial contributions to the advancement of Singapore and China can be found in Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall's Gallery 4, which deals with the legacy of Sun Yat Sen's revolution.

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**Isabelle de Hennin** is a docent at SYSNMH and the ACM. She has been living in Singapore since 2013 and takes a keen interest in Asian history and culture.

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# A Tribute to Singapore's Mother Music

By Khir Johari

The earliest known recording in Singapore was made by recording engineer Fred Gaisberg and his assistant George Dillnutt, while travelling through Asia for The Gramophone Company in 1903. It was entitled *Lagu Nuri Terbang Malam* (Parrot's Night Flight Song) and was the first 78rpm record produced in Singapore. This cosmopolitan city eventually became the regional hub for the development and dissemination of music.

This story concerns a global music conglomerate. Affected by the Great Depression, its predecessors – The Gramophone Company and the Columbia Graphophone Company agreed to a merger, forming a new company called Electric and Musical Industries, or as it is better known to the world – EMI. In the colonial era, EMI's Singapore office and studio were managed by Anglo-Americans. However, that changed after Malaya's Independence.

In 1957, Daisy Devan, a young Indian woman invariably dressed in a sari, became the first Asian to helm the Anglo-American recording giant's operations in the Far East. Already a path breaker – she was the only woman executive in the local rubber industry, Daisy Devan was headhunted and given the designation of Artists and Repertoire Manager at EMI. A six-month stint in Middlesex, England, at EMI's headquarters ensued. There, Mrs Devan learned the ropes of the various phases of record-producing: from the embryonic stage of an idea to post production. She spent time at the famous Abbey Road Studios to understand the intricacies of recording. Closer to home, she spent time at the massive record manufactory in Dum Dum, Calcutta (EMI India's base), which was the main record-pressing centre for most of the recordings done in Southeast Asia.

Upon her return from these study stints, one of Mrs Devan's first accomplishments was the establishment of Singapore's first record-pressing factory in Jurong. This was followed by the setting up of retail outlets across town, in high-traffic shopping areas, furnishing them with promotional material such as posters and hanging mobiles.

Her appointment at EMI, whose office and studio were in MacDonald House on Orchard Road, was at the time when records were making the transition from shellac to vinyl. She worked towards creating an impressive roster of artists handpicked to meet her tough selection criteria: voice, personality and commercial value. Highly respected (and feared) by broadcasters, rival record companies and show business people, she had the clout to walk into an orchestra practice to scout out and poach the best musicians from both sides of the causeway for record-making. While some regarded

her as the Iron Lady of MacDonald House for her no-nonsense work ethic, everyone under her wing recognised that behind this firmness was a mother figure, nurturing the careers of her artists so they would become stars. To *The Quests*, Singapore's most

celebrated boy band of the 1960s, Daisy Devan was Mother Music, who signed them on and groomed them.

A champion of local music, she strongly believed that while EMI was running a business, it also had the social responsibility to act as the documenter of musical heritage. The repertoire included folk songs, various genres of traditional Malay music such as *ghazal* (a poetic form), *keroncong* (dance music) and songs in Kristang, a Portuguese-Malay creole, all of which have become archival material for entertainment as well as research.



Collage of albums Daisy Devan recorded



HMV Stars

Daisy Devan broke new ground by recording children's songs and Qur'anic recitation. She propelled a market for local listeners interested in local artists singing covers. During the 1963 Singapore-Malaysia merger, the music she recorded played a role as a vehicle for disseminating a form of national culturalism that advocated inclusiveness and cosmopolitanism. Singapore's separation from Malaysia in 1965 saw Mrs Devan being commissioned to record the national anthem, *Majulah Singapura*.

Mrs Devan's leadership at EMI was marked by novelty, variety, preservation and the birth of some of the biggest stars in the local music firmament, from Anita Sarawak to Tracy Huang to Sharifah Aini. *The Quests* were right. She truly was Singapore's Mother Music.



Mrs Devan with Ravi Shankar

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**Khiri Johari** recently performed for the Singapore International Festival of Arts Open Homes event, a unique home theatre experience featuring Mrs Daisy Devan in the show *When Mother Music Comes For Tea*.

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Photos courtesy of the author

# Academia Sinica, Taipei

By Patricia Bjaaland Welch



A jade elephant on display at the museum, photo by the author

When one thinks of museums in Taiwan, one tends to recall only Taipei's famous National Palace Museum, but there's another museum that has unexpected treasures awaiting your discovery – it's less famous, but definitely worth seeing and far less crowded than the National Palace Museum. This is the Museum of the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, and its collection is the result of the labours of some of the archaeologists and historians who have worked in China and Taiwan since the early 1900s.

Among its archaeological treasures are artefacts dating to the Shang Dynasty (16<sup>th</sup> to mid-11<sup>th</sup> century BCE), excavated between 1934 and 1935 in Anyang. The Longshan culture, the ruins of Yin, and the Western and Eastern Zhou periods are also represented.

Unusual for a museum are extensive ranges of artefacts representing individual areas, but here you'll find, for example, an entire wall display of human skulls confirming the common practice of human sacrifice during the Shang dynasty. Another room features dozens of metal helmets and weapons such as halberds and spears, testifying to the period's advanced metal weaponry when stone implements were far more common. There are also graded sets of important bronze ritual vessels known as *ting*, a bronze basin famous for its inlaid copper battle scenes and the largest ancient bronze ox cauldron (*niu fang-ding*) yet to be found.

Also remarkable is the anthropomorphic marble sculpture of a kneeling figure with a tiger head and claws, covered with dragons with bottle-horns on its arms and vertical dragons with curved tails on its legs and hips. Among the Anyang figures are also a pair of double-sided owl ornaments that are unique – each has a beaked owl's head front and back, with its plumage and details in high relief, while a hole in the centre of each piece suggests they were intended to be attached to poles or shafts.

A temperature-controlled (bring a sweater) ultra-modern, glass exhibition hall displays a collection of archival textual

documents such as 10,000 W and E Han Dynasty wooden slips from along the Edsen-gol River in Gansu province, banquet seating charts and diverse literati memorabilia that include the 1844 Military Palace Examination 'golden placard' (a board that listed the names of those scholars who passed the *jin-shi* examination). Special attention has been paid to collecting different versions of important books to trace a work's genealogy.

But the most impressive documents on display are the grand official proclamations of various Qing dynasty emperors, including the 'Proclamation of the Ascension to the Throne of the Shunzhi Emperor' (the dynasty's founder in 1644, who also named Beijing as the Qing dynasty's capital), and the Qianlong emperor's abdication edict from 1796 – the last edict of the Qing dynasty's most famous emperor who stepped down so as not to reign longer than his adored grandfather, the Emperor Kangxi (whose Last Testament is also part of the collection). Another case houses an original letter written by the Seventh Dalai Lama sent to the Yongzheng Emperor in 1728.

Having sparked your interest, there are some hurdles to be overcome. This fascinating but free and decidedly more academic museum (founded in 1986) is only open on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays from 9:30 am to 4:30 pm. For details, go to the website: [www.museum.sinica.edu.tw](http://www.museum.sinica.edu.tw) where you can download an English-language brochure. It's also off the beaten track; the best way to find it is to take a taxi. The address is 130 Section 2, Academia Road, Nangang, Taipei 11529, Taiwan. There is, however, good signage in English and Chinese. There's also a tiny, but very good gift and bookshop right inside the main entrance where you can purchase the museum's excellent English-language guide, *Exploring History*.

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

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# The Astrolabe

By Jo Wright



Astrolabe, Iran, 19<sup>th</sup> century, copper alloy, currently on display at the ACM, collection of the ACM, photo courtesy of Gisella Harrold

Nestled at the bottom of a glass-fronted cabinet at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) is a curious object that many visitors probably miss. Looking something like the inside of an old-fashioned pocket watch and made from copper alloy, it seems somewhat out of place beside the beautiful calligraphic books and elegantly decorated boxes next to it. This curious object is an astrolabe, one of the most important scientific instruments employed throughout West Asia and further afield from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. A similar astrolabe was displayed last year at the National Museum of Singapore, in the special exhibition, *Treasures of the World from the British Museum*.

Used by astronomers and astrologers throughout the Islamic empire, the astrolabe was the subject of possibly the first scientific paper written in English by the poet Geoffrey Chaucer in 1391. Although they are most often associated with Islam, astrolabes were the treasured possessions of

European kings and queens and also popes, as well as the wealthiest scholars of the day.

What exactly is an astrolabe, where did it come from and how did it become an object to show off learning and wealth? The name 'astrolabe' derives from the Greek words *astron* and *lambanien*, meaning "the one who catches the heavenly bodies" or perhaps simply as "star-taker". This gives a hint as to what it is: a 2D map of the heavens, a picture of the entire known universe translated onto a flat surface. It can be used to measure the position of heavenly bodies in the sky, to find the latitude if you know the exact time, and the time if you know your exact latitude.

Its origins are lost in the mists of uncharted history, but there is a charming, if apocryphal, story concerning the second century philosopher Claudius Ptolemy. According to legend, he was returning home with his precious celestial globe (I like to imagine something similar to a beach ball engraved with a map of the sky) when he accidentally dropped it and it fell beneath the hooves of his donkey (or camel, depending on the source of the story.) The globe was crushed, transforming the sphere into a flat plate. Rather than lament his loss, Ptolemy no doubt recognised the possibilities that this new design afforded in terms of easier transport, storage and use. Thus was born the idea of the astrolabe – a map of the three dimensional heavens projected stereographically in two dimensions.

From the mid-eighth century onwards, the Islamic empire's scientists well understood the device's possibilities – eventually it developed into the instrument we see today in the ACM. About the size of a small dinner plate, it has a silken cord attached to a ring at the top. The face of the astrolabe shows a straight bar called the alidade, across the middle, fastened in the centre so that it rotates around the central point. The silken cord is used to hold the astrolabe so that it hangs perfectly vertically for readings to be taken. Since this astrolabe is displayed in a case, bend down so the alidade is at eye level and you



Wooden quadrant, Turkey, 1907 or 1908, ACM collection, photo by the author

will see two little holes perforating the small 'ears' or projections that stick up from the alidade. These are sighting holes used to line the alidade up with your object of interest – say a star or planet, or even the top of a mountain or building. At its simplest, the astrolabe can be used as an inclinometer by measuring the angle that the alidade makes with the horizontal. Using basic trigonometry, it's then possible to work out elevations and heights and even map the night sky.

This simple use of the astrolabe as an inclinometer was employed to great effect by the 11<sup>th</sup> century polymath Abu Rayhan al-Biruni to calculate the circumference of the earth. Contrary to popular belief, many of the ancient cultures suspected that the earth was not flat. An early attempt at measuring the earth's circumference took place in 240 BCE, in Egypt, by the Greek astronomer Eratosthenes. He displayed a good understanding of the mechanics and maths involved, but recorded his calculations in *stadia*, a unit of measure that has defied accurate definition.

Fast-forward well over 1,000 years into West Asia and the Abbasid Caliphate, which was keen to find the earth's circumference, as it had a direct impact on how Mecca's direction could be found from any point in its vast empire. A team of the day's best scholars was put onto the problem. They began by finding the distance over which the sun's angle at noon changed by one degree. Multiplying this value by 360, they arrived at a value from which the earth's circumference could be derived. The figure they achieved was accurate to within 4% of the actual value, but the method they used was cumbersome and needed a huge team of people.

Al-Biruni devised and carried out an elegantly simple method for achieving the same result, with just four measurements that he achieved relatively easily. He determined the height of a nearby mountain, using two separate readings from his astrolabe. The third measurement was the distance between these two points, from which he worked out the mountain's height. Finally, he climbed to the mountaintop and measured the angle of dip, or depression, of the flat horizon from there. Using simple trigonometry, he could then calculate the earth's circumference – the value he arrived at was accurate to within 200 miles of the one we use today.

What else was the astrolabe used for? A paper published in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, written by Adb al-Rahman al-Sufi, a noted astronomer who lived at the court of the Emir Adud ad-Da'ula in Isfahan, Persia, describes over 1,000 uses in areas as diverse as astronomy, astrology, casting horoscopes, navigation, timekeeping, surveying, finding direction to Mecca and setting prayer times. Certainly, an astronomer could make accurate measurements of the position of celestial bodies, work out the time and measure the time of year. All very useful if you want to know when to start the fasting month of Ramadan, the time of sunrise and sunset and when to initiate the five (or more) daily prayer times.

Astrolabes such as this were very expensive as they were generally made of brass, in order to keep the instrument as accurate as possible. They were (and still are) fiendishly tricky to use, except for the most basic operations, and represented the cutting edge of technology for hundreds of years. To know how to use an astrolabe was the mark of a highly educated person. It was to this end that the English writer Geoffrey Chaucer penned a letter to his ten-year-old son, Lewis, explaining its workings. It's possible that young Lewis would even have made his own astrolabe from paper; we know that astrolabes were also made of wood in an



*Astrolabe, Isfahan, Iran, circa 1700, copper alloy, ACM collection, image courtesy of the Asian Civilisations Museum. Currently on loan to the ArtScience Museum.*

effort to keep the cost down. Interestingly, beside 'our' ACM astrolabes are wooden quadrants – effectively a quarter of an astrolabe with a plumb bob attached; these could be used as inclinometers for surveying purposes.

Knowledge of astrolabes spread from West Asia into the far reaches of the Islamic empire and beyond. Although information about astrolabes reached Europe via northern Spain in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, they were not widely used there until the 13-14<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is less clear when the astrolabe first arrived in South Asia, although it is thought that this probably occurred in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In 1370 Mahendra Suri, the Jain astronomer and mathematician, wrote the Sanskrit treatise on the astrolabe entitled *Yantra-rajya* (The King of Instruments) and it is thought that production of astrolabes began in India shortly afterwards.

If you want to see a good exhibition of astrolabes today, perhaps the best place to visit is the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford, UK. It boasts the largest collection of astrolabes in the world; certainly, those on display offer an intriguing hint into their importance. Perhaps the most splendid one there belonged to England's Queen Elizabeth I and was made in 1559. Despite being a functional, scientific instrument, it is a work of art as it is perfectly symmetrical about the centre line. It's one of many examples in this museum showing that astrolabes were prized as symbols of learning and prestige during the Renaissance in Europe, as well as further afield.

So, next time you are at the ACM do consider sparing more than a cursory glance at the astrolabe. What you're looking at is the culmination of thousands of years of scientific design and discovery and has influenced many of the great thinkers throughout history.

We are indeed fortunate to have such an instrument on display at the ACM.

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**Jo Wright** has been guiding with FOM for over eight years and delights in bringing museum artefacts to life with her stories.

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# The Nezu Museum in Tokyo

## Ancient Art in Serene Surroundings

By Liisa Wihman

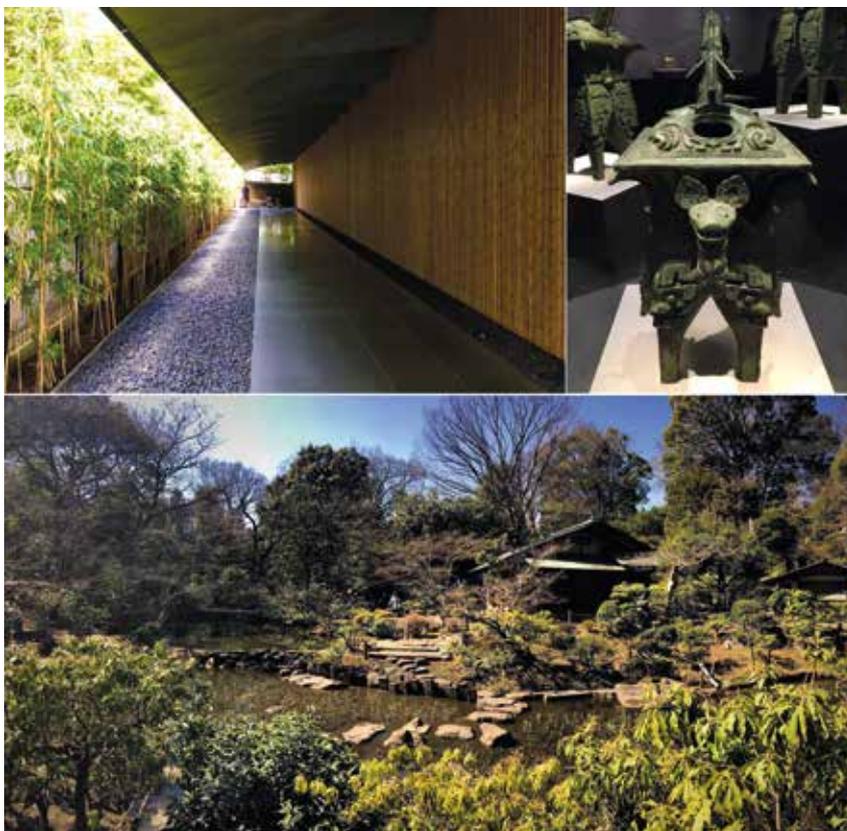
At first glimpse, Tokyo might seem an endless maze of concrete dotted with neon signs, sliced through by elevated expressways and criss-crossed by airborne powerlines. But after a closer look, sites of great calm, elegance and charm reveal themselves among the precincts of the hectic megalopolis. The Nezu Museum in Minami-Aoyama is one of those serene refuges – a gem of a museum surrounded by an elegant strolling garden, a stone's throw from the bustling Omotesandō district filled with luxury fashion stores, cafés and restaurants, close to the famous Meiji Shrine and Yoyogi Park.

The history of the Nezu Museum reaches back over a century, to a time when Western influences were rapidly changing Japanese society and Japanese works of art were being exported at low prices. Kaichirō Nezu I (1860-1940) was an esteemed Japanese industrialist and a passionate collector of Japanese and East Asian antiquities, who became concerned about these developments. He felt obliged to take action to keep important and rare artefacts in Japan. During his lifetime, Kaichirō Nezu held viewings of his collections in the family home. Well-connected to business people and collectors around the world, he saw art as an important means for exchange and understanding among cultures. He was also eager to educate the public – both Japanese and foreign – about Japanese and East Asian arts, which led to him establishing a museum to organise and display his treasures.

The first Nezu Museum opened in 1941, a year after Kaichirō Nezu's death, at the family residence – the same place where the current museum is situated. The original displays consisted of a bequest from Kaichirō Nezu, to which several important donations have since been added. The museum now holds more than 7,400 Japanese and East Asian works of art, including seven works designated in Japan as 'National Treasures', 87 'Important Cultural Properties', and 94 'Important Art Objects' – an extraordinary collection for a private institution, as works of this calibre and quality are usually held only by state institutions and museums.

Today, the collections are housed in a stunning purpose-built museum designed by the internationally acclaimed architect, Kengo Kuma. A discreet sign and a simple gate flanked by bamboo guides visitors through a long, pebbled passageway into the museum building. The approach is both humble and magnificent, detaching the visitor from the busy streets while creating a feeling of expectation.

The museum combines the contemporary with the traditional Japanese idea of *wa*, or harmony. And that is how the space opens to the visitor; the long eaves of the building offer cooling shade, but let the light in. In the entrance hall, a selection of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas from Gandhara to China are frozen in eternal, soft smiles against a backdrop of pines and maples, seen through glass walls that offer



From upper left: Entrance to the Nezu Museum; Chinese bronze He with a Taotie design, from the Shang dynasty, an extremely rare example belonging to a set of three pieces; the strolling gardens with a pond and tea houses

uninterrupted views of the gardens beyond.

In order to show as much as possible of the vast collections, while also being careful about the often-sensitive condition of the artefacts, seven temporary exhibitions are arranged every year. The permanent exhibits display a selection of Chinese late Shang and Zhou dynasty bronzes, and exquisite items related to the Japanese tea ceremony. The museum website gives information in English about the latest happenings.

A visit to the Nezu Museum would not be complete without a stroll in the tranquil gardens with their four traditional tea houses – if you are lucky, you can get a glimpse of kimono-clad ladies on their way to a tea ceremony (you can even attend one, if you are organised enough to book in advance). The pathways meander through the hilly site, revealing ancient sculptures, small stone bridges and well-chosen plants that offer something for every season, from plum and cherry blossoms in the spring, to glowing red maple leaves in autumn. Nestled in the gardens is a discreet but charming museum café, with a translucent ceiling clad with traditional *washi* paper and glass walls framing views of the changing seasons – a perfect place to reflect upon art and life before returning to the busy world outside.

If you would like to visit this museum, here is the link to its exhibition schedule: [www.nezu-muse.or.jp/en/exhibition/schedule.html](http://www.nezu-muse.or.jp/en/exhibition/schedule.html)

# The Kitsune of Japan

## Divine Messengers and Foxy Ladies

By Liisa Wihman

Temples and shrines are an essential part of one's experience of Japan. As a resident of Tokyo, I've often wondered how, in such a tightly built-up metropolis, nearly every block houses its own shrine or temple – the shrines are the devotional places of Japan's indigenous Shinto religion while the temples are Buddhist, a faith that arrived in Japan in the early sixth century.

While the architecture and features of both have melded over the centuries, it is easy to spot a Shinto shrine from the handsome, vermilion-red *torii* or gates (literally 'bird-perch') that mark the transition from the worldly to the sacred. Like their Buddhist counterparts, Shinto temples usually have guardians to ward off evil spirits and these are unique to Japan – slender foxes.

Despite many sources claiming otherwise, these foxes are not gods; they are messengers of the important *Inari Kami* – *Inari* deriving from *Ine nari* or *Ine ni naru* (reaping of rice) and *kami* meaning a spirit or a god, the heavenly guardian of agriculture, fertility, rice, sake and even tea. Keeping *Inari* content has been important in Japanese culture since ancient times, so there are over 30,000 *Inari* shrines in Japan.

The Japanese word for fox is *kitsune*, which refers to both those that serve *Inari* and those that roam wild. The revered fox messengers and shrine guardians are additionally called *byakkosan* (white foxes), or *myobu*, after a court rank reserved for ladies, and are thought to be invisible to humans, just like their master, the *Inari Kami*. Fried tofu is thought to be their favourite food, so *inari sushi*, rice-filled tofu pockets, are frequently offered to them in order to smooth the message delivery process.

Wild *kitsune* are called *nogitsune* (literally field fox), and have far more complex characters. They are mischievous and mystical transformers who, according to various Japanese folk tales and legends, can assume the human or any form they choose, or bewitch and possess human beings. According to some stories, a female fox can even procreate with a human male. In most, a *kitsune* transforms into a beautiful young woman and seduces an unsuspecting man who emerges deeply disgraced by the incident. However, a transformed *kitsune* can never completely escape its foxy origins; dogs, the natural enemies of the fox, will always detect it. Also, its shadow never loses the fox's form – a



Several byakkosan, white kitsune, ready to deliver messages to *Inari*

dramatic moment often depicted in Japanese woodcut prints, with the foxy shadow of a lovely lady revealing itself against a rice-paper screen.

What decides which foxes roam wild in the countryside, which become mystical transformers and which end up in as the divine servants of the *Inari Kami*? Supposedly all foxes have the same potential. A smart and cunning animal, the fox is thought to develop its magical skills and intelligence with age. At 50 years it learns to transform itself into a human, at 100 it develops the ability to know things from 1,000 miles away, at 1,000 it can communicate with gods. Some even grow additional tails; it takes about 1,000 years to grow nine – the highest number possible.

There are two fox species indigenous to Japan, both red in colour. Smart, cunning and nocturnal,

they have probably inspired stories and legends since ancient times, just as they did in many other parts of the world. Aesop's fable, *The Fox and the Grapes*, is one of the earliest on record. The first Japanese written reference can be found in *Nihon Shoki* (The Chronicles of Japan) from 720 CE; it mentions *kitsune* as an animal of good omen.

During the Tang dynasty, new lore arrived from China and Korea – for example, the nine-tailed celestial fox that appears in all three countries. These stories merged with the existing Japanese folklore and continued to evolve until unrecognisable from their origins. Many of them were adopted in kabuki plays, bunraku puppet theatre and woodblock prints, and spread to a wide audience. But while some of its 'capabilities' trace back to predecessors in Asia, the Japanese *kitsune* achieved something that no other fox managed: it became part of the official religion. Not a slight accomplishment for a small, nocturnal and rarely seen animal.

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**Liisa Wihman** is an FOM Docent from Finland, where the mythical Fire Fox sweeps the winter sky with its tail to light up the *Aurora Borealis* – hence called *revontulet*, the foxfires in Finnish. She lives in Tokyo.

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All photos for these two articles by the author

# The Shikoku Henro: The Road to Nirvana

By Arlene Bastion



*Ryozenji, Temple One, with henro starting out on the pilgrimage trail*

For over 1,200 years, pilgrims on the Shikoku Henro walk its arduous 1,400 kilometres visiting 88 temples with hopes of nirvana or heaven ahead. Shikoku means ‘four provinces’, and the pilgrimage, Japan’s oldest, transverses all four. Each represents a progressive stage of the pilgrimage. Tokushima, the first stage, is Awakening; Kochi, the second stage, is Ascetic Training; and Ehime, the third, Enlightenment. Kagawa, the fourth stage, after all that hard work getting there, is of course Nirvana. For me, nirvana was the paradise of ancient shrines and temples, ancient trees galore, that stud the pilgrimage route. The routes could sometimes be a pain, but gee whiz, I was walking on history.

The origins of the Henro can be quite murky. Some say it originated with *hijiri*, wandering ascetic monks from Mount Koya in Honshu, searching in Shikoku for the most tortuous spots to discipline and train, to attain magical and spiritual prowess. Documents date the pilgrimage and the *hijiri* from the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century, but the temples are never mentioned.

The most dominant belief is that the revered Buddhist monk Kobo Daishi (774-835) set it all up. I have read of documents that aver Kobo travelled to many of the temples,

if not all 88, but also documents that repudiate this. Most confusingly, there are also documents that deny Kobo ever came to Shikoku or even existed. Yet all the Henro temples, rites and rituals, are founded upon Kobo. He is the Henro’s centrifugal force, with his presence visible in all the temples, whether in the form of a Kobo story, a statue, a carving or calligraphic piece, a miracle, a belonging, or an amulet. The poor *hijiri*, despite their whip lashings and worse, don’t figure at all.

Recommended traditions exist, but are not cast in stone. Direction-wise, the majority visit temples in a chronological order. Brownie points are for going in the opposite direction, especially to expunge grief and guilt. You visit any number of temples at your own pace. The basic accoutrements are a staff, a jacket, a sedge hat, temple cards and name cards, but pilgrims can also be bedecked with all the bells and whistles, from rosaries to holy banners.

The staff is the most sacred item. It represents Kobo Daishi. Each staff has four sides representing the four stages of the pilgrimage. Staffs, like the white jackets, have *dogyō ninin* imprinted on them, meaning ‘two people, one heart’, to



*Kobo Daishi at Daisanji, Temple 56, sandwiched between an ancient venerated boulder and deities*



*Niomon, guardians of temples, at Ishiteji, Temple 51*



A marker along the pilgrimage trail

remind us of Kobo's constant presence. This is heartening to know especially when it is getting dark and one is panicking about whether one is at the correct bus stop. Rituals of respect are rinsing the staff at the end of each day and not dragging or tapping it on the ground when crossing a bridge. On being refused lodging for the night, Kobo once spent the night under a bridge and could still be sleeping under any one of them.

The white jacket symbolizes purity, as well as, well, the shroud of death. Pioneer pilgrims wore white in case they died on the spot from the horrors of the pilgrimage. The conical sedge hat bears holy inscriptions around it, and has to be worn in a particular way.

Basic temple rituals are the washing of hands at a stone fountain, the ringing of the temple bell to inform the in-house deity of one's arrival, followed by prayers, burning incense and candles, the throwing of coins and clapping of hands. Pilgrims then drop off their name cards and prayer cards. Many collect calligraphic holy messages and prayers signed by the temple priests, or get a special book stamped with the insignia of the temple. A Henro tradition is *ossetai*, the giving of food, shelter, even money, to *henro*, as offerings to Kobo. I was blessed many times by such kindness even when I was not wearing my pilgrim jacket.

The temples, their architecture and contents, reflect a rather eclectic brew of ascetic Buddhism and Shintoism, with strong streaks of animism, as well as mountain and nature worship. It is said to be indicative of *Shugendo*, a religious school attributed to Kobo Daishi. It creates a variety of sights in many of the temples. Statues of Kobo and Kannon, the Goddess of Mercy, and the holy Buddha usually abound, as do assorted stone deities or *jizo*, religious relics and paraphernalia. Humungous straw sandals, symbols of the *henro*, sometimes hang at the temple gates, usually guarded by *Niomon*, fiery and warlike statues of demon gods, muscles a-rippling.

Also evident are stone horses and occasional live ones, stone dogs (hardly cuddly) and foxes. Ancient belief is they were intermediaries used to transport *kami*, sacred spirits and deities, between our world and the *kami*'s. The first temples were reportedly sacred groves or heavily wooded forests where *kami* were detected. Belief in *kami* is a cornerstone of Shintoism, that natural objects such as trees and boulders, house sacred spirits and deities.

The beauty of the Henro temples lies in their antiquity and heritage. Stories of each temple indicate they began between the 500s and 800s. The temples, like the pilgrimage itself, display and revel in a veneration of things old. Many temples appear worn and faded. Time-eroded boulders, pilgrimage markers and other historical remnants, remain objects of reverence. But what bowled me over was the presence



Tanuki kami at Yashimaji, Temple 85. They are also referred to as badgers, but tanuki is an animal in itself

almost always, of a centuries-old tree or trees, still verdant, in the compound. Some trees had only gnarled skeletal bark to show for themselves. They were still cared for and worshipped. All this lent an air of sombreness and awe to the pilgrimage, maybe at the passing of time, but more too, that some things, like faith, never change.

The present number of 88 temples can beg questions. Some say it is because 88 is a lucky number and believe me, luck is a necessary blessing on this pilgrimage. The writer of a 1689 temple guidebook stated he had no clue why 88. There are theories postulating that we have 88 evil passions and so we need to go to 88 temples to extinguish each one. This number is also the total of all the 'unlucky' periods in everyone's lives. But this would make 88 a not so lucky number.



Grand finale at Okuboji, Temple 88

The Henro is about faith whether we believe in Santa, unicorns, or Excalibur. It's hard not to feel some faith at the astounding sights and scenery of the Henro, some kind of holiness from being part of a tradition of faith and prayer started centuries ago. The Henro is egalitarian. It welcomes absolutely all. There must be as many reasons for undertaking it as there are pilgrims, an estimated annual 80,000 to 140,000. It unifies and equalises differences as everyone brings to the temples their dreams, fears, sorrows, hopes and aspirations.

The temples can be spartan, austere, moody, but their looks are not the point. Each time a pilgrim visits a temple, it is as if they are knitting a stitch into a fabric being continually woven through time and over time. Each stitch adds to the incredible fabric that is the Shikoku Henro.

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**Dr Arlene Bastion** is currently lecturing part-time at a Singapore university.

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All photos by the author

# IHC Graduates



*Olesya Belyanina: I've lived in a number of countries in the course of my life. And during the last four months I have a feeling that I became a citizen of Little India; I am very thankful for all the Indian heritage knowledge we received, for all the new friends I met here, for the amazing atmosphere we had during our studies.*

*Doris Lee: Actually I enjoyed the challenge to link the artefacts because this is where creativity comes in.*

*Madhushree Maheshwari: This opportunity at IHC has revived my interest in history, which was lying dormant for many years. It has inspired me to read and explore more as I realised that there are so many cultural and religious footprints of India strewn all over Southeast Asia.*

IHC graduates, in alphabetical order: Olesya Belyanina, Constance Blanchard, Joyotee Ray Chaudhury, KV Godha, Dr Evelyn Henning, Anisha Jacob, Roderick Kow, Bageshree Kulkarni, Doris Lee, Madhushree Maheshwari, William Ngoh, Priya Seshadri, Shia Ai Lee, Florence Tan



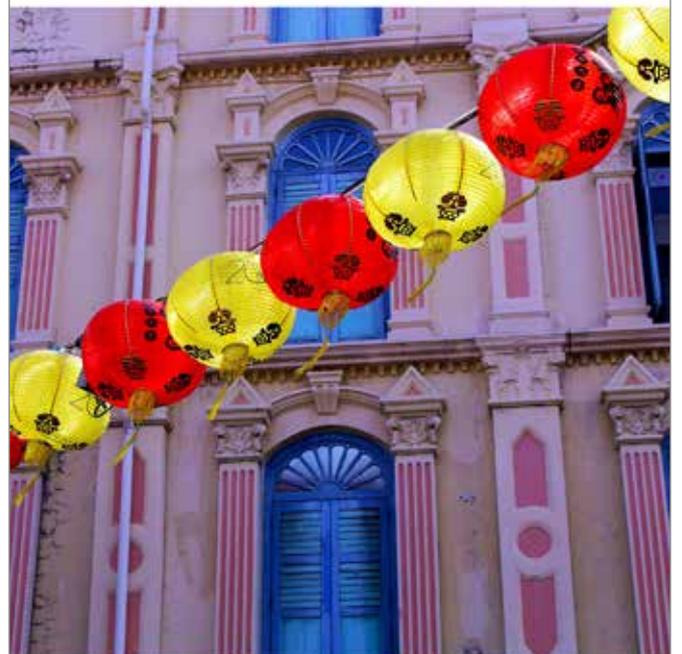
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Photo © Felix Hug (Eyes on Asia)

## Island Notes

# Hari Raya in Geylang Serai

By Darly Furlong

The festival of Eid, known in Singapore as 'Hari Raya Puasa' is celebrated with great pomp every year. One of the grandest Hari Raya celebrations takes place at Geylang Serai. Stalls selling food, traditional clothes and other items line the streets, drawing crowds of celebrants who come to break their fast each evening.

Interestingly, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a large lemongrass estate owned by an Arab merchant, led to the area being known as Geylang Serai (*serai* meaning lemongrass in Malay) and over time it has become the focal point of the Hari Raya celebrations for the Muslim community in Singapore.



**Darly Furlong** is an avid history and mythology buff. She enjoys living in the Katong district and exploring Peranakan culture.

# Textile Enthusiasts Group

**Programme:** A Weaving Experience with Lynelle  
**Date:** Friday 22 September  
**Time:** Arrive at 10:00 am for 10:30 start  
**Host:** Lynelle Barrett  
**Location:** TBA  
**RSVP:** Email Lynelle at [girdleofaphrodite@gmail.com](mailto:girdleofaphrodite@gmail.com)

Try out a craft that has flourished since prehistoric times. Join TEG member and textile artist Lynelle Barrett for a special hands-on opportunity to try weaving on different types of looms. Co-teachers for the event will be fellow TEG member Kim Arnold and Lee Yi Yong from *The Blessing Thread*. The event will start with a short introduction to weaving and looms, followed by demonstrations. Then the participants will have a chance to try each loom – a rigid heddle loom, an eight-shaft table loom, a Lao back-strap loom and an eight-shaft floor loom. Attendance is limited to 12 participants.



*Louet Jane 8-shaft table loom. Photo courtesy of The Blessing Thread*

## About Lynelle:

Lynelle Barrett is a passionate textile enthusiast and artisan. Exposure to traditional textile arts through TEG and research to teach fashion students at LASALLE College of the Arts have inspired her to pursue the study of weaving, spinning and natural dyes. Her goal is to learn from indigenous weavers and translate that knowledge to her own creations.



*Lynelle and Yi Yong at the Singapore Maker Faire in July.*

## About *The Blessing Thread*:

*The Blessing Thread* was started in order to share the love of weaving and unique handmade items. Although traditional Asian textiles are valued all over the world, this ancient art is not easily accessible in Singapore. The online store was created to offer weaving equipment and yarn to weaving enthusiasts in the Asia-Pacific region. Learn more at [www.theblessingthread.com](http://www.theblessingthread.com).



*Undulating twill on the loom. Photo by Lynelle Barrett*



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# Japanese Docents

The Japanese Docents (JDs) welcomed 11 newcomers in April 2017. They completed lectures on various subjects – History, Culture, Religion and Arts of Singapore and Asia – and now they are in the midst of mentor tours. Here is a message from one of the trainees, Miyuki Ueda. Please join us in welcoming them to the FOM community.

I had several reasons for joining the JDs. First, I wanted friends who have the same intellectual interest in Singapore as I do and who are motivated to learn new things. Since joining, I have gotten to know 10 highly motivated ladies and many well-experienced senior docents, so one of my dreams has come true. Second, although I moved to Singapore on account of my husband's work, I wanted to do something while here. I hope I can help museum visitors learn more about Singapore and would be glad if they liked Singapore more after my tour. Nowadays, many Japanese tourists come to Singapore and many Japanese live here. We JDs would like to continue to show the charms of Singapore to them. Third, my father-in-law is a volunteer guide at historical sites in Fukuoka, Japan. Previously, he talked about his experiences as a volunteer guide. One day, I want to be able to explain about Singapore while visiting the museum with him here.

On behalf of the 11 new docents, I would like to say that



Back row L to R: Naoko Higuchi, Aya Goto, Miki Saito, Hiroko Nakasu, Yuka Hara, Yuka Hara, Junko Sato, Mariko Omasa  
Front row L to R: Tatsue Kamo, Naoko Morimoto, Hiroko Ogata, Miyuki Ueda

we are extremely grateful to the senior docents for giving us such opportunities for learning and would also like to thank our predecessors for all their hard work in building up the JD group.

**Miyuki Ueda, Japanese Docent Trainee**

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# Study Group

Join the Asian Study Group in early October 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 we are. We learn a ton, have a lot of fun, and wind up the morning with an always scrumptious potluck 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.



## Tribes of Asia: Starting Wednesday 12 October

Southeast Asia is home to many, many different ethnic groups. In this study group, we hope to explore the diversity of the peoples in this region. We might also learn about communities that have chosen to come together and would welcome topics on cultural or special interest organisations.

## Possible Topics (please feel free to develop your own):

- Overview of the over 50 ethnic groups found in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia,
- Or specific research into one group, for example:
  - The Viet
  - The Hmong
  - The Khmer
  - The Cham
  - The Katu (Co Tu)
- The three major Asian ethnic groups: Han, Yamoto and Korean
- Freemasons in Asia
- Overview of Sino-Tibetan ethnic groups, or specify study of one group, such as
  - The Karen
  - The Yao
  - The Lahu
- Indigenous peoples of Taiwan
- The Ainu of Japan
- Tokyo Cosplay Groups
- Ethnic groups of the Philippines
- Ethnic textiles of Northern Vietnam/Laos/Cambodia
- Chinese clan associations in Singapore
- Indonesian ethnic groups overview, or specify study of one group, such as
  - The Dayak
  - The Minangkabau
- Ethnic jewellery – different makers, materials and styles
- Geography and migration: why some groups move and others stay put
- Difficulties faced by indigenous peoples

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# Explore Singapore!

To join an ES! event, please go to the FOM website or FOM*flash* to register on line, or register at the ES! table at any Monday Morning Lecture. If you have any problems call the FOM office at 6337 3685



## Bukit Brown Cemetery Tour

Thursday 7 September  
10:00 am – 12:00 noon  
Fee: \$25

Just off Lornie Road, behind the lush greenery of country roads, lies a very special space – Bukit Brown Cemetery. It was the first Chinese municipal cemetery in colonial Singapore and buried here are ordinary people as well as important pioneers. Our guide, Millie, a Bukit Brown 'descendant', will share the fascinating stories and history behind the graves and their *feng shui* elements. Walk with us to gaze at the art, sculptures and beautiful art deco tiles in this atmospheric place.



## Tour of the Sri Senpaga Vinayagar Temple

Thursday 14 September  
10:00 am – 12:00 noon  
Fee: \$25

Join us and Abha Kaul on a tour of a small, pretty and historical Hindu temple off the beaten path, the Sri Senpaga Vinayagar Temple. This temple on the East Coast was established by early Sri Lankan Hindus at a spot you will learn more about on this visit, including the temple's unique name, history and statuary. Come and learn about Indian and Sri Lankan immigrants to Singapore and about Hinduism and its philosophy. There is an optional lunch after the tour.



## Little India Deepavali Walk

Thursday 5 October  
10:00 am – 1:30 pm approx.  
Fee: \$35 (including lunch)

Walk through the streets of Little India and see how the community prepares for the colourful Deepavali festival. Abha Kaul will explain the meaning of Deepavali and the rich customs and traditions associated with it. Why is it called the Festival of Lights? What are the stories surrounding the

festival? Hindus consider this one of the most important festivals to celebrate. Not only is this a very colourful time, but one associated with wonderful food. Enjoy a light lunch to conclude the programme (included in fee).



## Dou Mu Temple and Neo Clan Association

Friday 20 October  
9:30 am – 11:30 am  
Fee: \$25

This ES! programme is a double bill that will provide you with a learning experience about Chinese religious traditions. We will visit a temple and a clan association where both gods and men are deified and worshipped. Among the pantheon of Chinese gods, the Nine Emperor Gods are venerated and are believed to be the star deities *beidou jiuxing*, (Northern Dipper) the sons of the goddess Dou Mu. About a dozen temples in Singapore are devoted to these gods and Dou Mu. Each year these temples hold a festival to welcome and send off the gods. Join us for a visit to the oldest temple, Hougang Dou Mu Gong, during the festival, followed by a visit to the Neo Clan Association.



## An Introduction to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

Thursday 26 October  
10:00 am – 12:00 noon  
Fee: \$25

For more than 2,000 years the Chinese have used a system of medicine – traditional Chinese medicine (TCM)-that is different from western medicine. The underlying concepts and theories of TCM treat man's body, mind and emotions (or spirit) as a single entity, and its practices take a holistic approach in prevention and cure. If you are curious about TCM, join us to learn about its basic principles and practices, followed by a visit to a traditional Chinese medical shop.

## Study Tours



A new study tour to India will be launched around 1 September - please be on the lookout for more information on *The Land of the Buddha: Pilgrimage Circuit 2018*, which will take us to important and iconic sites associated with the Buddha's life and teachings. Tour dates are February 3-16, 2018. Contact Tour Leader Abha Kaul at [abhadkaul@gmail.com](mailto:abhadkaul@gmail.com) for further details

# Coordinators Contact List



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# 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 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 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 the broad themes of 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.



## 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 on-line 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)



## Indian Heritage Centre

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

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. Closed on Mondays.

### 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.

## 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: 2:00 pm (Subject to availability. Please call ahead to confirm the availability of a docent).

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



## National Museum of Singapore

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

### 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.



*Free general admission to all NHB museums  
for FOM members and one guest.*

# Museum Information and Exhibitions

## NUS Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts

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



Free admission

### Opening hours:

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

Monday: Visits by appointment for schools/faculties only.

### 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.

### NUS Baba House

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

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

Visits by appointment only. Free-of-charge tours five times a week. Email [babahouse@nus.edu.sg](mailto:babahouse@nus.edu.sg) to reserve spaces.

## 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.

## 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)

The Singapore Art Museum focuses on international contemporary art practices, specialising in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Housed in a restored 19<sup>th</sup> century mission school, it opened its doors in 1996 as the first art museum in Singapore. Also known as SAM, the museum is now a contemporary art museum.

SAM has built one of the world's most important public collections of Southeast Asian contemporary artworks, with a growing component in international contemporary art. SAM draws from its collection and collaborates with international contemporary art museums to co-curate and present contemporary art exhibitions.

## STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery

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.

### STPI Annual Special Exhibition: David Hockney: A Matter of Perspective (Through 9 September)

STPI Gallery continues its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations with David Hockney. The exhibition of 36 carefully selected works drawn mostly from Singapore's National Collection presents how Britain's most celebrated living artist continues to push the boundaries of print techniques, investigating the one intrigue that defines his entire prolific career: perspectives.

## 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: 10:30am on Fridays in English

### Stitches of Love: Hidden Blessings in Children's Clothing and Accessories (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 the 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 on display includes clothing, hats, ear muffs, bibs and shoes that feature a variety of motifs derived from the natural world, history, literature and folklore.

Interested in learning about FOM programmes?

Join us for coffee & programme information at our

[Open Morning & Monday Morning Lecture](#)

## THERAPEUTIC IMAGINATION: THE HEALING ASPECTS OF ASIAN RITUAL ART-MAKING PRACTICES

**Kelly Reedy, BFA, MA Ed, MA Art Therapy**

As an artist and educator, Kelly Reedy has long been aware of the power of images to move and inspire. In this lecture, she will revisit her research on early Japanese Buddhist prints, Taoist ceremonial papers, Indian popular paintings as well as other regional traditions, seeking new perspectives on the psychological benefits gained by individuals and groups through the act of creating images as well as using them in ritual traditions.

The exploration of these practices will demonstrate how engagement with the therapeutic imagination leads to states of healing, protection and harmony for the makers and their communities.

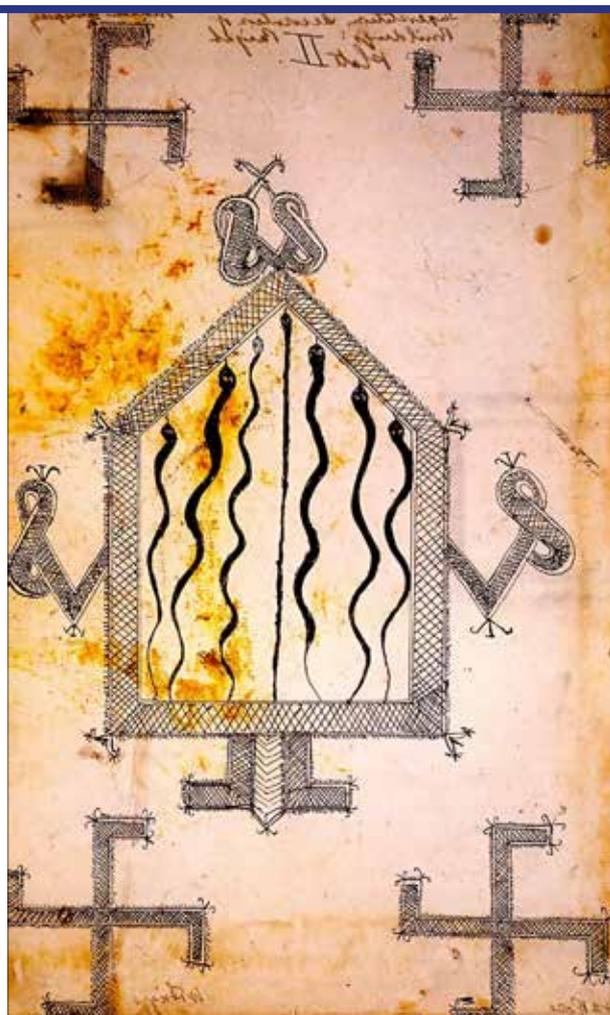
**Monday, 9 October 2017**

10:00am – 12:30pm

National Museum Singapore

Gallery Theatre

93 Stamford Road, Singapore 178897



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*FOM programmes include:*

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