

# PASSAGE

Friends of the Museums Singapore

May / June 2018



art  
history  
culture  
people



# President's Letter

Dear Friends,

How time flies! We are already halfway through 2018.

Recently, I was invited to join a group of trainees at STPI Creative Workshop and Gallery, where I had the opportunity to go behind the scenes to see the printing processes of foiling and flocking. It was a great experience learning to understand the techniques used to create some of the artworks in the gallery. This often-overlooked gallery is well worth a visit if you are in the vicinity of Robertson Quay or Clarke Quay. If you visit on a Thursday at 11:00 am or a Saturday at 2:00 pm, you can follow the docent-led guided tour of the current exhibition of works by Vietnamese artist Dinh Q Lê, which includes a visit to the fascinating print-making studio in the basement.

The session with the STPI trainees also brought back fond memories of my early docent training days, spending time in the company of like-minded people, undergoing new experiences and having fun. The first docent training programme I went through was at the National Museum of Singapore; it spurred me on to train in other museums. If you are passionate about history, heritage and culture and enjoy learning and meeting people, why not be a part of our docent community? Come to our Public Information Meeting at the National Museum of Singapore on 17 May at 10:00 am to find out what training programmes the various participating museums have to offer. My heartiest congratulations to our recently graduated trainees who share their experiences on pages four and five of this issue.

An event that I look forward to every year is the Volunteer Appreciation Morning. This special occasion, which will take place on 11 May, will honour the FOM volunteers who serve in the museums, in our office and at our public lectures, as well as those who host the members' programmes. It is a way to thank them for contributing towards FOM. On this day, one special volunteer will be announced as the recipient of the Salome De Decker award, given to someone who has quietly given their time and skills to the society. Who will it be this year? Find out on our website after this event.

With the school holidays just around the corner, you can plan a family outing to the ongoing *Angkor: Exploring Cambodia's Sacred City* exhibition at the Asian Civilisations Museum. Introduce young ones to one of the world's greatest ancient civilisations and have some family fun with the interactive activities organised by the museum as part of the exhibition.

Special thanks to Siobhán Cool who has been sharing her wonderful sketches of places she's visited on the Sketchbook page since 2011. Sadly, she will no longer be contributing to *PASSAGE* owing to other commitments. I am sure many of you, like me, will miss her beautiful watercolours. I would like to wish Siobhán all the best in her endeavours.

Our Buddhist and Muslim friends will be celebrating Vesak Day and Hari Raya Puasa in the months of May and June respectively. I would like to take this opportunity to wish them joyous and peaceful holidays.



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

Clara Chan  
FOM President 2018



Clara with the FOM docent trainees, their trainers and the staff of STPI



## PASSAGE

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**On the Cover:** A collage of different types of Malay embroidery, 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.

# Celebrating Graduation

*By Christine Zeng*



We have graduated! (Well, almost).

As the soon-to-be docents prepare for their first public tours at the National Museum of Singapore, they celebrated the end of the six-month training programme, which started in September 2017. Held at the British High Commissioner's elegant residence, Eden Hall, the graduation ceremony was cordially hosted by Anne Wightman, an NMS docent, and Clara Chan, FOM's president. Singapore's ambassador-at-large, Professor Tommy Koh, captivated the audience with his talk on the island's connection with the rest of the world while also providing snippets from his own professional journey.

Team leaders bestowed encouraging words and presents on each trainee and the trainees in turn surprised each member of the training team with a gift and a specially designed magnet featuring the 50 glass panels on the dome of the National Museum.

The course was successfully concluded, with all trainees finishing with thanks to the NMS docent training team whose members worked tirelessly to make it happen. As a new cohort of docents, we hope to uphold the same high standards that they have set for the next batch of trainees.

Graduation is bittersweet since our time of learning together will be sorely missed. However, it has prepared us for the exciting new adventure that lies ahead.



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**Christine Zeng** was one of the National Museum of Singapore's docent trainees, 2017-2018.

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*Photos by Gisella Harrold*

# Craft Workshops at the IHC

By Jyoti Ramesh

On 3 March, FOM members, docents, academics and aficionados of heritage, history and art congregated at *The Word and the Image in Art & Society* international conference organised by the Indian Heritage Centre (IHC), as part of its ongoing *Symbols & Scripts: The Language of Craft* special exhibition. Divided into moderated segments, featuring prominent international speakers, curators, scholars, artists and collectors, the day-long conference offered perspectives, traditional and contemporary, on the use of scripts and symbols in Indian art and craft.

The keynote speaker for the conference, Professor Vidya Dehejia, the Barbara Stoler Miller Professor of Indian and South Asian Art at Columbia University, New York, set the tone for the conference, keeping the audience riveted with her presentation of inscriptions on Chola temples in South India. These temples, built between 855-1280 CE, display the Chola passion for documentation, carrying mostly Tamil inscriptions that flow along all the available wall space, around niches, along base mouldings and on trellis windows. The erudite speakers who followed, highlighted aspects that not only traced the formation of language and script on the Indian subcontinent, but also the influence of religion, politics and society in the making of the image and the script, and their influence on such forms in Southeast Asia.

Crafts advocate Jaya Jaitly, founder and president of the *Dastkari Haat Samiti* (DHS), described the concept and the execution of the *Akshara Project*, a DHS brainchild that seeks to bring the appreciation of adult literacy back to Indian artisans, using calligraphy in their craft. During the conference, participants were introduced to Indian national-award-winning master craftsman, Sathyanarayan Suthar, a maker of the *kaavad*, who gave an unconventional twist to the brightly-coloured story box of Rajasthan. He crafted a

modern cabinet, using traditional *kaavad* colours and lines to paint the story of a villager in a city.

Craft objects such as Suthar's *kaavad* are featured in the IHC's exhibition that closes on 30 June. The exhibition showcases the historical and contemporary use of symbols and scripts in craft objects. By bringing various craftspeople from the Indian subcontinent to showcase the demonstrative elements of their crafts, visitors to the exhibition have an opportunity to meet and interact with the artists in workshops. Past workshops covered clay painting, block printing, papier-mâché painting, *kaavad* decoration and others.

In his workshops, master craftsman Abdul Razzak Khatri, who comes from a long line of the block-print artists in Kutch, Gujarat (India), patiently explained the 17 processes involved in creating an *ajrakh* textile – dyeing, printing, washing, drying and repeating the process over three weeks. The final result is one of timeless elegance on fabric intricately patterned in flamboyant madder, indigo, turmeric and other natural dyes.

The workshops open participants' eyes to the complex symbolism in motifs, the arduousness of the processes and the high level of artistry and labour involved in creating these handcrafted items. To sign up for the forthcoming workshops with master craftspeople in *kalamkari*, *madhubani* art and more, follow IHC on [peatix.com](http://peatix.com). FOM docents guide the exhibitions on Wednesdays and Fridays (except public holidays) from 3:00 pm to 4:00 pm.



Abdul Razzak Khatri at work on ajrakh printing



Professor Vidya Dehejia



Audience members at the conference



The modern cabinet decorated with the traditional lines and colours of kaavad

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**Jyoti Ramesh** is a docent at the Indian Heritage Centre and National Museum of Singapore, and also guides the Little India Heritage trails.

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Images courtesy of the Indian Heritage Centre Resource Library



*"It's been the craziest, most fun and eye-opening experience. The best part was getting to know the warmest people, all from very different backgrounds – we had so many laughs together. If you really want to do something multi-cultural, this is it."*  
(Kazuko Akahane)

## Asian Civilisations Museum

Kazuko Akahane  
Olesya Belyanina  
Chen Cheng (Cissy)  
Cui Tong Tong  
Susanne Geerdink  
Yannicke Gerretsen

Deepali Gole  
Esra Gunerman  
Heo Hyunwoo  
Ridhima Jain  
Christie Jones  
Anuradha Kabra

Rosita Karaya  
KJ Kim  
Sarah Lever  
Isabella Olcer  
Deepali Rihani  
Christina Sante

Priya Seshadri  
Yvonne Sim  
Ivana Skuta  
Anita Stange Klix  
Isabel Urrutia  
Wang Li-Ching

Wang Hong  
Yoon Mijin  
Yu Jinkyung



## Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall

Jocelyn Drummond  
*(not in photo)*  
Karen Houtman  
Leong Lee Chiew  
Lo Yiling  
Joanna Low  
Caroline Oh

Nelly Oh  
Shoshana Saghiv  
Terence Sim  
Florence Tan  
Patricia Ugarte  
Wong Li-Juan

*"Docent training at SYSNMH has been an incredible experience. It's been an exciting and sometimes intense 10-week journey providing insights into the history of the overseas Chinese at the turn of the 20th century. Our training team provided excellent leadership, helping us develop professional docent skills and the confidence to share history with visitors. They also organised fascinating field trips and even found time to have lunch with us afterwards (where we were given the best docent tips). I have learned so much and the whole experience makes me anxious to put all this training into practice as a docent at SYSNMH. Thank you to the training team and fellow trainees for all your support."* (Jocelyn Drummond)



## National Museum of Singapore

Durga Arivan  
Sandra Bloecher  
Carey Cookson  
Renia de Fournas  
Mariet Ewalts  
Gitte Faldmo  
Irina Freymond  
Swati Ganguly Biswal  
Nilofar Iyer  
Gaelle Jacqmin  
Michelle Lim  
Tuyen Nguyen

Jane Ong  
Urvashi Pahuja  
Shannon Palmer  
Millie Phuah  
Ini Raeymaekers  
Jyoti Ramesh  
Nidhi Samani  
Michelle van Zanten  
Paula Velez dos Reis  
Carrie Wiklund  
Christine Zeng

*"A truly enjoyable and intellectually fulfilling journey through the history of Singapore."* (Gaelle Jacqmin)

# cent Graduates



## STPI

Jessica Braum  
Samantha Carle  
Maria Conde  
Durriya Dohadwala  
Sara Fredaigue  
Madhumita Goswami  
Maureen Hellspong  
Alka Kapoor

Akiko Kato  
Kim Heejin (Ellen)  
Lee Sooyoung  
Michiyo Lim  
Lim Yuen Ping  
Ooi Phaik Sim  
Moni Pang

*"The training has been very thorough, highly professional and intense. None of it would have been possible without the participation of all of STPI's docents and Education Team members, who are very warm and passionate. I loved it and have learned so much." (Maria Conde)*



## Peranakan Museum

Samantha Carle  
Chen Jia Yi  
Lowell Chen  
Desirée Handy  
Yukiko Kitajima  
Frederick Lam  
Marie Lee Seung Jin  
Summer Lee  
Dennis Oei  
Caroline Oh  
Lioba Park  
Viviane Pourprix  
Irina Rodyukova  
Vera Tam  
Florence Tan  
Mychelle Tan  
Simone Ueki  
Uta Weigelt  
Wong Siong Lai

*"A group photograph of TPM docents caught my attention – it was a group of Caucasians. 'This cannot be.' I thought. 'What do they know about my culture?' That led me to enrol in the course. After the first few lessons, it struck me that these foreigners and non-Peranakans were very committed to learning about my culture. They were hardworking, doing research and practising their presentations. Many were better than I was. As time passed and we got closer, it was like having an extended family. I have now graduated and am happy to be part of the bigger FOM family." (Baba Fred Lam)*



## URA/FOM Chinatown Heritage Trails

Josephine Vidal Barletta  
Susan Chong  
Maria Conde  
Charlotte Dawson  
Evelyn Henning

Karen Houtman  
Mabel Lee  
Oonagh O'Neill  
Virginie Poncon

*"No question about how much I learned, a dedicated team of docents and a great group of class mates made it possible. Best of all is how much Singapore feels like home now that I recognise its history when I walk its streets." (Maria Conde)*

# Eyes on the Water

By Shivani Kanwal Kulpati

For over a hundred years the Singapore River was the focal point for the port's trading activities. It was a vibrant waterway that witnessed the growth of the early settlement into an important trading hub. Today, the river is a picture of calm and serenity with only a few leisure boats cruising up and down; a scene you wouldn't have witnessed till about forty years ago because until the late 1970s, the river had a very different appearance.

Before 1977, when the clean-up began, this was a bustling waterway that was dirty, had an unpleasant odour and was teeming with boats. It's said that at one time there were so many on the river that it was easy to cross from one bank to the other just by jumping from one boat to the next. The boats, known as lighters or bumboats, were more than just means of ferrying cargo from the big ships moored off the coast to warehouses alongside the riverbank and back again, they were also the workplaces and homes of the boatmen.

In Singapore, these vessels were known as *tongkangs* or *twakows*. *Tongkangs*, meaning 'bumboats' or 'lighters' in Malay, were the larger ones used for ferrying goods. Once bridges were built, these boats ceased plying the river as their large size made it difficult for them to pass under the bridges. Instead they moved their operations to the inter-island routes. The Teochew and Hokkien word for a bumboat or 'broad-beamed goods lighter' was *twakow*. These boats were indigenous to Singapore as they were designed and developed by the local Chinese. Being smaller and faster, they dominated the river routes from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*Twakows* were always painted very colourfully. It was not difficult to figure out which community the boats belonged to as the Hokkien boats were the most colourful. Their prows were painted bright red, white and green. The Teochew-owned boats on the other hand, were simply painted bright red.

A distinctive feature of *twakows* was that they had 'eyes' painted on either side of the bow. It's believed that eyes



A modern bumboat carrying tourists, photo by the author

were painted onto the boats in order to enable them to 'see' if there was danger ahead. Old rubber tyres were often fixed onto the sides of the boats in order to act as shock absorbers. At times these made the eyes look bigger.

The last of the old *twakows* left the Singapore River in 1983 as part of the river clean-up project, thus bringing an end to the old lifestyle of the boatmen. However, the relationship of the bumboats with the river did not end. The boats returned, albeit in a new form. They were refitted and began their new innings on the river as leisure boats for taking tourists on cruises down the river and around Marina Bay. They are still as brightly painted as before and after sundown, they present a beautiful sight with fairy lights festooning their superstructures.

The legacy of the bumboats continues and today taking a cruise down the Singapore River is a wonderful experience that enables one to see the various landmarks along the river's banks and be a part of that legacy.

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**Shivani Kanwal Kulpati** is a docent at the ACM and has been guiding since 2013.

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The Singapore River in 1956, full of bumboats, photo by John Simmer



# Diaspora: Exit, Exile, Exodus of Southeast Asia

By Lucia Cordeschi

The current exhibition at MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum in Chiang Mai offers an inviting platform for conversations on past and current movements of people within and away from Southeast Asia through the voices of 25 works by 18 established and emerging contemporary artists from the region. Crossing geographies and deploying diverse visual and conceptual strategies, the works reflect on the diasporic condition “exploring the everyday significance of territorial and ideological borders, political and religious identity, and home and belonging”, says the curator.

Curated by independent curator, writer and lecturer of Southeast Asian contemporary art, Loredana Pazzini Paracciani, the exhibition is thought-provoking and powerful, but also vibrant, witty and emotionally engaging. It provides an immersive and visually seductive path leading to deep reflection towards a humanistic viewpoint of the condition of the migrant, exiled and transnational identities that the artists have experienced or encountered.

Some of the artworks are imposing: *IDPs* (2016), an embroidery installation by Jakkai Siributr (Thailand) that tells the story of ethnic minorities; Piyarat Piyapongwiwat's (Thailand) *Fabric* (2017), that addresses issues of labour and economic migration. Others, such as *Signal* (2016-ongoing), a site-specific four-channel video installation by Nipan Oranniwesna (Thailand), have a fleeting presence. *Signal* surprises unsuspecting viewers by briefly revealing a man running; the images caught by four monitors dispersed around the exhibition space. Resulting from the artist's research on Burmese workers in Thailand, the artwork underlines their transitional and invisible presence in a society where they are denied an official identity. Research also informs his other works in the exhibition: *The storm continues to rage outside and the wind sweeps relentlessly across the land from the same direction* (2014–15), presents a Myanmar coin cast from a Thai baht embodying the inextricable connections between the two countries; and *2401* (2016), a floor installation that reproduces the 2,401-kilometre-long Thai-Myanmar border, which viewers are invited to cross.

Territorial boundaries are questioned by Aditya Novali's (Indonesia) playfully provocative work *IDENTIFYING SOUTH EAST ASIA: Borderless Humanity* (2017), an LED map



Installation view: Sawangwongse Yawnghwe, *Spirit Vitrines (Memoirs of a Shan Exile)*, 2016-17, rice paper, cotton, silk, holy threads, pigment, spice, water and oil, dimensions variable, collection of the artist.



Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, *The Ground, the Root, and the Air: The Passing of the Bodhi Tree*, 2004–07, single-channel digital video, 14:30 minutes, collection of the artist

of the region where territories are individually connected to unlabelled switches. The public interacts with the map reconfiguring it at will using the switches, but in effect not knowing the “fate” of each territory as a result of that action. *Locus Amoenus* (2017) by Ryan Villamael (Philippines) and *In and Out of Thin Layers* (2006–16) by The Maw Naing (Myanmar) investigate the notion of territorial demarcations further.

Also shown is Ho Tzu Nyen's (Singapore) acclaimed video installation *The Nameless* (2015), familiar to Singaporeans, recently shown at NTU CCA Singapore and also an arresting video work by Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba (Japan-Vietnam), *The Ground, the Root, and the Air: The Passing of the Bodhi Tree* (2004–07). This work poetically illustrates the cultural tensions and shifting values of Laotian youth through a mystical narrative accompanied by Buddhist chants, dramatically culminating near a sacred Bodhi Tree along the Mekong River.

Humanitarian crises are powerfully evoked by Sawangwongse Yawnghwe (Shan State, Myanmar) whose four works draw from the personal experience of exile from his native Shan State, Myanmar. In particular, *Spirit Vitrines (Memoirs of a Shan Exile)* (2016–17) presents a long procession of hundreds of amulets typically carried for protection, suggestive of displaced refugees walking in line. As a counterpoint, *Peace Industrial Complex II* (2017) echoes the homonymous political science conceptual framework and maps the political, social and cultural agents in the Myanmar peace-making process.

The forthcoming exhibition catalogue will present the insights of historians and also of various experts from relevant fields. These insights will expand on the dialogue initiated by the multifarious points of entry and departure offered by these and the other compelling artworks on display.

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**Lucia Cordeschi** holds a Master's Degree in Asian Art Histories from LASALLE College of the Arts.

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All images courtesy MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum

# Angkor: Exploring Cambodia's Sacred City

Special Exhibition at the Asian Civilisations Museum (8 April – 22 July)

By Vidya Schalk

On 8 April, ACM opened a special exhibition entitled *Angkor: Exploring Cambodia's Sacred City*. While many have visited Angkor Wat, the spectacular temple complex that is on practically every 'must visit' list, they might not realise that Angkor Wat (City Temple) is just a small part of Angkor.

Angkor, the capital city of the ancient Khmer Empire, was a vast mega-city with hundreds of temple complexes that in medieval times supported close to a million people. Nothing even close to its size or complexity existed in the western world at that time; London had a population of around 50,000. To put it in current terms, it was almost as large as present-day Los Angeles' urban sprawl.

As the capital city of the Khmer Empire, Angkor got its start in 802 CE when Jayavarman II was anointed *devaraja* or the divine king. For the next 600 years Angkor dominated the region in the areas of architecture, warfare, agriculture and art. At its height, the empire covered not only current day Cambodia, but also parts of Laos, Thailand and Vietnam.

The exhibition starts with the 'rediscovery' of Angkor in 1860 by the French naturalist Henri Mouhot. Although he never claimed to have discovered or rediscovered Angkor, somehow the myth persists. In reality, Angkor was never really forgotten or lost when Henri Mouhot came across it. The temple of Angkor Wat was still in use by the Khmer kings, Buddhists and local and international visitors who went there to perform prayers, as they always had. In fact, the site had been visited by several westerners since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but what characterised Mouhot's visit was the fact that his evocative writings and drawings, published after his death in 1863, captured the imagination of people around the world, especially the French.

This myth was based on the false presumption that the Cambodians had no knowledge of their past, therefore the myth helped the French validate colonial rule by the claim they were "restoring a nation to its past grandeur". The colonial ideology of *mission civilisatrice* (civilising mission – the belief that it was their mission to bring civilisation to non-western countries), played a role in justifying colonial possessions. Angkor literally became the poster child for

many a colonial exposition that took place in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the French came to see themselves as saviours, protectors and incongruous at it may sound, heirs to the Khmer civilisation. While it appears deeply problematic in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, ideas such as these were commonplace during colonial times. Several artefacts in the exhibition, including documents, photographs, artwork, books from expeditions and memorabilia from the French expositions, address this aspect of French colonial rule and their politically motivated propaganda.

Six years after Mouhot's visit, several French military expeditions surveyed and mapped the course of the Mekong river. Louis Delaporte, a young naval officer, was chosen to accompany these missions because of his drafting skills. His famous book, *Voyage au Cambodge*, published in 1880, records his impressions along with detailed drawings. Some of his sketches were fanciful reconstructions or flights of imagination decidedly veering away from reality. Fidelity was secondary to creating a sense of awe and fascination with exotic natives, mysterious ruins and deep, impenetrable landscapes. Several drawings, romanticised paintings and lithographs are displayed in the exhibition and it is wonderful to see them along with the photographs taken at Angkor during the early days of photography. He also made plaster casts and cement mouldings of the temple façades, many of which are on display in the exhibition. The sharpness and detail even after a century are quite remarkable. These casts are in many cases the only records



Central tower of Angkor Wat, Emile Gsell, Cambodia, 1866 or 1873, albumen print



View of Angkor Wat, Le Tour du Monde, Paris, 1863. Print based on a drawing by Jacques Guiaud after a sketch by Henri Mouhot



Naga balustrade at Angkor Wat, Emile Gsell, Cambodia, 1866 or 1873, albumen print

left of the original sculptures that have either been destroyed or have disintegrated over time.

After his 1873 expedition, Delaporte took 70 works of sculpture, architecture and an equal number of plaster casts back to France and hoped to see them displayed at the Louvre. Much to his disappointment, the Louvre refused to accept them and so they remained in the street through rain and sun for months till he was given permission to set up at the Château de Compiègne. In 1888, he managed to establish a museum at the Trocadero and when it closed in 1936, the collections were transferred to the Guimet Museum, where they remain to this day.

Among the most stunning works of Khmer art frozen in stone are the female deities called *devatas* who embody the universe's feminine forces. They take the form of divine beings, female goddesses or celestial maidens (*apsaras*). There are over 2,000 detailed portrait carvings in Angkor and each one is absolutely stunning. A 12<sup>th</sup> century, 49-metre-long bas relief called the *Churning of the Ocean of Milk* at Angkor Wat, tells us how the *apsaras* were created. It is a story about the beginning of time and the creation of the universe. In



*Brahma, Siem Reap, mid 10<sup>th</sup> century, sandstone*

the story, *devas* (gods) and *asuras* (enemies of the gods) fight in order to claim order and power. This can happen only if the elixir of life (*amrita*) is released from the earth and to do that, the *devas* and *asuras* must work together. With the help of Vishnu, they used a great serpent (*naga*) called Vasuki as the divine rope that churns the ocean of milk for 1,000 years, to extract the elixir of immortality. Many amazing and wonderful treasures were produced during the churning of the

ocean, including the beautiful *apsaras*. After many exploits, the elixir was finally consumed by the *devas* to restore their strength and immortality. The omnipresent, multi-headed *naga* seen at Angkor, is a serpent snake associated with the creation myth of the Khmer people. To this day the Cambodians regard themselves as 'born from the Naga' when, according to legend, the union of a *naga* princess and a human king gave rise to the Khmer people. Syncretic belief systems prevail in Angkor and depending on the king in power, either Hinduism or Buddhism found favour. The great temple of Angkor Wat, completed in 1150 CE after more than 30 years of construction by Suryavarman II (1113-1150 CE), was a monument to Lord Vishnu, one of the three gods of the Hindu trinity (the other two being Brahma and Shiva). Several beautiful sculptures representing Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva date from the pre-Angkor (Funan and Chenla period) and Angkorian period (9<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century) grace the exhibition.



*Louis Delaporte, France, 1911, collotype print*

A few decades later another great Khmer king by the name of Jayavarman VII (r 1182-1219 CE) with his new capital city, Angkor Thom (Great City), and many times larger than Angkor Wat, embarked on a massive programme of construction: public works, hospitals and monuments. He was a Buddhist and his temples, including the famous Bayon with multi-faced towers, Preah Khan and Ta Prohm, all reflect the Buddhist philosophy, Buddhist beliefs and sculptures. The gorgeous Buddha heads and Buddhist sculptures in the exhibition, including several bodhisattvas from the Mahayana stream of Buddhism, showcase Khmer artistic skill and mastery over stone and bronze.

The Thai siege in 1431 CE, the growing popularity of Theravada Buddhism, the lack of royal patronage, the breakdown of the vast hydraulic system of waterways because of deforestation as well as climatic factors, all contributed to the decline and fall of the once mighty Khmer empire, leading to vegetation overgrowth and the eventual neglect of most of Angkor.

After the devastating effects of the Khmer Rouge's four-year regime of terror in the 1970s when at least 1.7 million Cambodians lost their lives, there followed a decade and a half of civil war after which only two trained conservation architects and four archaeologists survived in the entire country. Post-conflict capacity building and the training of a new generation of Cambodian archaeologists take extreme priority in order that these magnificent 1,000-year-old monuments can survive 1,000 more and continue to capture the awe and imagination of future generations, just as they do for those of us who visit Angkor today.



*Buddha seated on the naga, Cambodia, early 13<sup>th</sup> century, sandstone*

More exciting discoveries in Angkor are yet to come. The exhibition's final section takes us to current archaeology in Angkor and the use of state-of-the-art technology such as Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) in the mapping of the region around Angkor, expanding the range far beyond the temple complexes to the Greater Angkor area. It also deals with excavation and the establishment of ground truth (direct observation) after remote sensing techniques pinpoint areas of interest. In July 2017, excavations at an ancient hospital site by a joint Singapore-Cambodia team unearthed rare, 800-year-old statues of guardian figures and a *Bhaisajyaguru* (Medicine Buddha) at Tonle Snguot. The use of LiDAR is revolutionary in archaeology and many more exciting finds and discoveries await. Buried deep in the jungles of Cambodia lie secrets and mysteries, temples and inscriptions of the once-mighty Khmer empire that dominated the landscape of Southeast Asia for over 600 years and will continue to intrigue us for years to come.

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*All images courtesy of the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques – Guimet, France, and the Asian Civilisations Museum*

# Two Yuan Dynasty Qingbai Vases

By Tara Manser

The National Museum of Indonesia in Jakarta, has an impressive ceramic collection which was formed primarily from the collection of Egbert Willem Van Orsey de Flines (1886-1964). He was a Dutch national who arrived in Indonesia in 1913. He donated his collection of over a 1,000 pieces to the museum in 1929 and continued to build on it as curator of ceramics until his permanent return to Holland in 1959. By the time he left Indonesia, the ceramic collection totalled around 5,000 pieces. He collected 'foreign' ceramics from across the Indonesian Archipelago, not only for their beauty but primarily for what they could tell us about the history of a place – socially, culturally, economically and politically. Therefore the majority of his collection was acquired from within Indonesia.<sup>1</sup> Ceramics had, for many centuries, been the treasured possession of the local Indonesian people. They became precious heirlooms known as *pusaka*, looked after and kept from generation to generation, both as prestige items demonstrating family status and as ceremonial objects used in traditional religious rites.

Within the museum collection are two beautiful, pear-shaped *qingbai* glazed bottle vases, which will be used to explore what they might be able to tell us about the social, cultural, economic and political environment of Indonesia in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. One is mounted in silver with a cover, the other reveals a cut-down neck (Figs 1 & 2).<sup>2</sup> Four sunken quatrefoil cartouches outlined with beading, ornament the belly and frame the high relief designs of flowering plants on one and flowering plants with lions playing with a brocade



Figs 1 & 2: Qingbai pear-shaped bottle vases, Yuan dynasty, ca. 1300, Jingdezhen, China, Museum Nasional. Fig 1 found in Kediri, H: 30.25 cm, Inv. No.: 1101 and Fig 2 found in Malang, H: 24.5 cm, Inv. No.: 2993 (Images authors own)

ball on the other. Made in China at the Jingdezhen kilns, they date to the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) circa 1300. Floral relief work was an innovation of the Yuan era and the beading ornamentation was used only on export wares or Buddhist figures.<sup>3</sup> It is not known why or when the necks of these vases were cut down; it was possibly for the application of mounts. The British Museum also has an example with a cut-down neck (Fig 3). The original shape would have looked much like the famous 'Fonthill' vase (Fig 4).

So what is Indonesia's connection to the Chinese Yuan dynasty? Having conquered China and formed the Yuan dynasty, the Mongols, led by Kublai Khan, then turned their attentions to the Southeast Asian mainland, requiring submission to their over-lordship. Meanwhile, in East Java the king of Singosari, Kertanagara (1286-1292), had expansionist designs of his own and with the conquest of Jambi in Sumatra, obtained hegemony over the Melaka Straits for Java. Kublai Khan, perturbed by this development, sent an embassy requesting that members of the Javanese royal family be sent as hostages to Beijing. Kertanagara, not one to bow to intimidation, refused the demands and the Chinese envoy was sent back to China with a disfigured face. In retribution, a large Mongol expedition was then sent to Java in 1293. The journey was long and arduous for the Mongols and on their arrival in East Java the expedition became embroiled in a confused political situation. Ultimately, they were expelled by their erstwhile Javanese ally, Raden Wijaya, and they sailed back to China the same year. After Kublai Khan died in 1295, relations with Java returned to normal and trade flourished. Raden Wijaya, after expelling the Mongols, went on to found the Majapahit dynasty (1293 – ca. 1527), the largest empire to ever form in maritime Southeast Asia.

It is into this golden era of Javanese history that these *qingbai* vases potentially arrived. Large quantities of ceramics from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries are known from Trowulan, the capital of Majapahit (Fig 5). Both of these vases were acquired from the core Majapahit territory of Kediri and Malang in East Java. Although we have no proof of when



Fig 3: Yuhuchun ping, qingbai glaze, Jingdezhen, Yuan dynasty, found in China, H: 27.5 cm, British Museum, Inv. No. 1961,1021.1 © Trustees of the British Museum

<sup>1</sup> Ekowati Sundari, 'The Ceramics Collection of the National Museum', *Arts of Asia*, Sept.-Oct. (2003), pp. 85-97

<sup>2</sup> Ridho, Abu, *The World's Great Collections, Oriental Ceramics Vol. 3*, Museum Pusat Jakarta. Kodansha International Ltd., Tokyo, Japan (1982), p. 160

<sup>3</sup> Vainker, Shelagh, *Chinese Pottery and Porcelain*. The British Museum Press, London (1991), p. 143; Medley, Margaret, *The Chinese Potter: A Practical History of Chinese Ceramics*. Phaidon Press Ltd, London (2001), pp. 172, 174

they made their actual arrival, huge volumes of shards recovered from the Trowulan area, shipwreck finds, the location they were acquired from and the tradition of preserving heirloom objects down the generations, allow us the licence to conjecture that they were exported and arrived in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Majapahit was at the peak of its glory in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Huge wealth was generated from its surplus rice production and trade in spices. The population became much more socially mobile and there was a boom in demand for luxury foreign goods as evidence of a higher standard of living and status. The rapid appropriation of the goods and style of the court by a prosperous new elite provoked the need for the state to generate rules on consumption. Some luxury items were claimed as monopolies of the ruler himself, a way of distinguishing the king from his subjects. The rulers in the early Majapahit period, carefully controlled the distribution of imported goods throughout the realm. Luxury items of foreign origin played a major role in ensuring the Javanese ruler's hegemony. Items such as these two vases would have been coveted by the wealthy as status symbols as well as evidence of taste and culture, much as Chinese ceramics still are today.<sup>4</sup>



Fig 4: The 'Fonthill' vase, c. 1300, Yuan Dynasty, Jingdezhen, China, National Museum of Ireland © National Museum of Ireland, Dublin

One interesting thing to note about these vases is that they are very similar to one of the earliest recorded Chinese porcelains exported to Europe. Made around 1300, the 'Fonthill vase' as it is known (Fig 4), had definitely reached Europe by 1381 and became the prized possession of the Anjou kings of Hungary and Naples in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, and even passed into the possession of Louis, Grand Dauphin of France (1661-1711). Like one of the National Museum vases, this vase was also mounted and its new form was captured in a watercolour for François Roger de Gaignières in 1713 (Fig 6). It changed hands again over the years, surviving the

French Revolution before coming into the possession of the owner of Fonthill Abbey in England, giving the vase its name. In the 1860s it came to its current resting place in the National Museum of Ireland.<sup>5</sup>



Fig 5: Map showing the Majapahit empire and the location of its capital, Trowulan

The Fonthill vase indicates the extraordinary value placed on the first few porcelains to reach Europe during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. As Europeans were unable to make porcelain until over four centuries later, such objects were treated with great reverence. With few exceptions, such as this vase, the porcelains that travelled westwards in the 14<sup>th</sup> century remained in the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia.<sup>6</sup> They were the premier export market for Chinese ceramics whose markets absorbed it all. Europe had to wait until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the Portuguese established trade routes to the Far East, for Europe to gain access to the quantities of porcelain that the rest of Asia and the Middle East already took for granted. Whilst Europe had little access to porcelains at this time, the same was not true for Indonesia, whose archipelago received large quantities of Chinese ceramics owing to it being a fulcrum in the world trade system of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

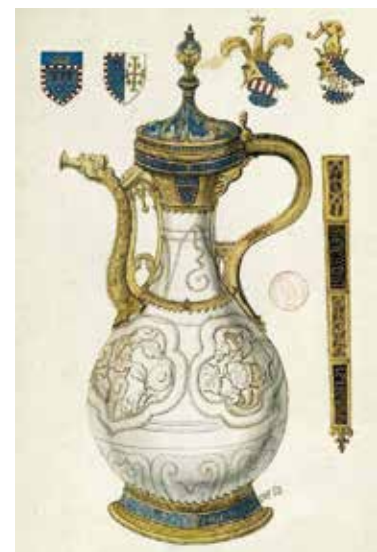


Fig 6: Watercolour of the 'Fonthill' vase made for François Roger de Gaignières by Barthélemy Remy, 1713, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris © Bibliothèque nationale de France

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<sup>4</sup> Hall, Kenneth, 'Personal Status and Ritualised Exchange in Majapahit Java', in *Archipel*, Vol. 59, (2000), pp. 52-56, 71; Hall, Kenneth, *A History of Early Southeast Asia: Maritime Trade and Societal Development, 100-1500*, Plymouth UK (2011), pp. 259 & 271; Flecker, Mathers, *Archaeological Recovery of the Java Sea Wreck*. Pacific Sea Resources (1997), pp. 8, 23

<sup>5</sup> Harrison Hall, Jessica, *A Catalogue of Late Yuan and Ming Ceramics in the British Museum*. British Museum Press, London (2001), pp. 59-60; National Museum of Ireland and the Fonthill vase: <http://www.museum.ie/Decorative-Arts-History/Exhibitions/Current-Exhibitions/Curator-s-Choice>; Lane, Arthur, 'The Gaignières-Fonthill Vase; A Chinese Porcelain of about 1300', in *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 103, No. 697 (Apr. 1961), pp. 124-133; Watson, F.J.B & Wilson, Gillian, *Mounted Oriental Porcelain in the J. Paul Getty Museum, California* (1982): pp. 2-3; Fuchs II, Ronald W., *A History of Chinese Export Porcelain in Ten Objects*: <http://www.chipstone.org/article.php/691/Ceramics-in-America-2014/A-History-of-Chinese-Export-Porcelain-in-Ten-Objects>; Pierson, Stacey, *Collectors, Collections and museums: The Field of Chinese Ceramics in Britain, 1560-1960*, Peter Lang AG, Bern (2007): p. 17-18; Rose Kerr, 'Chinese Porcelain in Early European Collections', in *Encounters: The Meeting of Asia and Europe, 1500-1800*, edited by Anna Jackson and Amin Jaffer, V&A Publications, London (2004), pp. 44-51

<sup>6</sup> Finlay, Robert, *The Pilgrim Art: Cultures of Porcelain in World History*. University of California Press, Berkeley (2010), p. 156

# The 'Paths of the Storms' and 14<sup>th</sup> century Singapore

A Portuguese Chronicle of the mid-16th Century

By Peter Borschberg

Among the few Portuguese works that make explicit reference to Singapore, João de Barros' *Décadas da Asia* (Decades of Asia) features a passage that contradicts the traditional retellings of Singapore's decline. The passage translated from the original Portuguese reads as follows: "[...] And even though this new state of Melaka was the undoing of the other ancient/old state of Singapore, the main reason due to which the city became totally depopulated was the path of the storms [*curso dos temporaes*], because from the month of September until the beginning of December the westerly and north-westerly winds blow, which enter through this channel formed by the island of Sumatra and the coast of the mainland of Melaka."

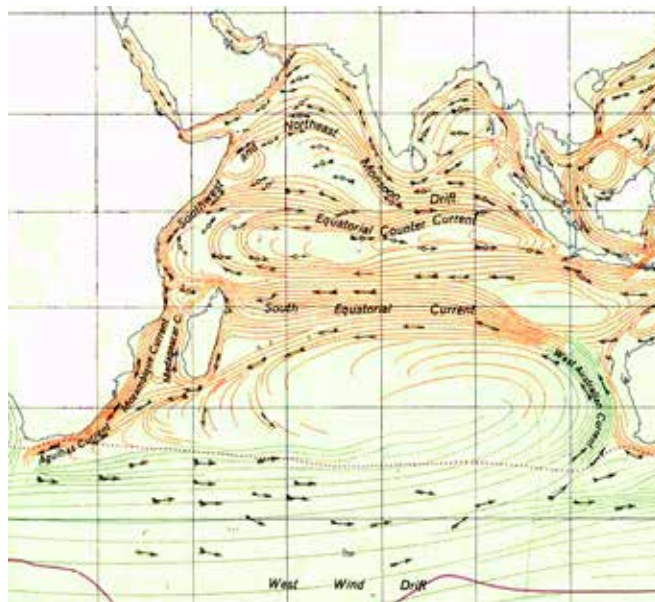
There are two points of note here. First, Singapore's decline was intertwined with the rise of Melaka. As Barros has related, ships began calling at Melaka's shores instead of Singapore, contributing to the former's growing prosperity and population and inevitably causing the decline of the latter. This account contradicts other reports that Singapore was destroyed in a single blow by an external invader. Second, and perhaps more crucially, is what Barros pinpoints as the main reason as to why this decline came to pass. As he intimates, Singapore disappears from the trail of history because of 'the path of the storms'. This is a curious statement: what exactly does the 'paths of the storms' mean? For a long time, only the man hailed as the 'Portuguese Livy' knew the particular import of these cryptic words. But almost five hundred years later, it could very well be that we finally have the information to unravel what Barros himself has so casually intimated.

## The economy of sail

While it is difficult to imagine this today, wind was an important ingredient in the economy of sail. This was of particular significance in monsoonal Asia where the seasonal winds and storms had a direct hand in the wealth of nations. Not only did traders and mariners make their fortunes at the caprice of the waves and wind, the Asian monsoon, as has often been wryly remarked, was the true finance minister. A strong hand bestowed agricultural abundance and flourishing trade exchange; a weak one conversely meant death and ruin. Fourteenth century Singapore and the polities around the Straits were



Sketch by David Roberts showing the use of the nilometer



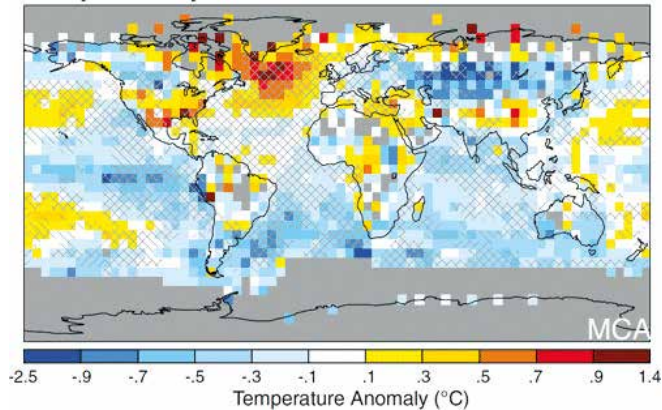
Indian Ocean gyre

part of this monsoon trading system. Between October and February, the northeast monsoon dominates. This switches during the period of the southwest monsoon from April to August. The question then arises: how are we to understand Barros' claim in the light of what we know about climate and trade in this part of the world? What exactly does 'path of the storms' mean, and how does that relate to the incongruous time frames?

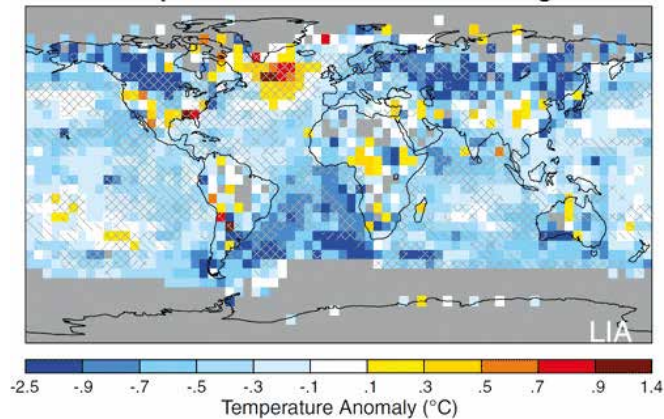
## The winds fail

Barros was certainly writing while the Julian calendar was still in force. Therefore, the September-December timeframe could possibly be, with slight discrepancies, October-January, bringing it closer in line with the trade winds of the northeast monsoon. The 'path of the storms' that Barros thus claimed, refers then to the historical trade winds that brought traders down the Malay Peninsula from the Indian Ocean. Hence, when Barros intimates that the 'path of the storms' was responsible for Singapore's demise, he could be suggesting that the monsoon winds began to change or fail. The strong winds that usually reached all the way down to the tip of the peninsula where Singapore is located could have stopped halfway down the coast. Where was the approximate location where the winds failed? At Melaka. The area around Muar would then have naturally become the new rendezvous point for trade and commerce, prompting Parameswara and his followers to move up north to take advantage of the changing weather conditions and (re)found his new city. This is exactly the scenario that Barros outlined. The 'path of the storms' was no longer the same. The storm winds had weakened in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, eventually failing. This led to the establishment

### Temperature pattern for the Medieval Warm Period



### Temperature Pattern for Little Ice Age



Two charts showing the temperature anomalies of different time periods, lending credence to the theory that unusual weather conditions around the 14<sup>th</sup> century affected early Singapore's fate

of a new emporium, Melaka, which diverted commerce and depopulated a vulnerable Singapore.

### The gathering storms

A more straightforward interpretation would be that Barros was referring to the transition period between the monsoons. In Singapore, this usually lasts over a period of two months during October and November and is characterised by light winds, heavy rainfall and intense electrical storms. This falls roughly in line with what Barros claims as 'the month of September to the beginning of December.' During this period, the creation of squall lines, or *sumatras*, usually developed at night by unstable atmospheres, sweep towards Singapore and the west coast of the peninsula. The result is the formation of widespread thundery showers, especially between the predawn hours and early morning. This could be what Barros meant by the 'path of the storms.' The wild tempests and unstable weather conditions, perhaps exacerbated in and around 14<sup>th</sup> century Singapore, could have forced a move up north to Melaka, where there was a much safer, protected harbour for ships. This search for a hallowed harbour is corroborated in other literary accounts. Whichever interpretation floats one's boat, it would seem that climate was very much involved in the fate of early Singapore.

### The scientific data

In recent years, scientific studies done on Asian climate seem to lend weight to Barros' writings and validate the theories explained above. In a study done on Asian monsoon failure and mega-droughts during the last millennium, Cook and colleagues have found, through research on tree rings, corals, ice cores, speleothems and ocean sediments, that there were indeed persistently weak monsoons in tropical South and Southeast Asia during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. This was especially so in the 17 years lasting from 1351 to 1368, the period in which Singapore was said to have declined as an entrepôt.

Scientific studies on rainfall pattern also hint at climatic changes in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, especially for the Indian Ocean trading network. The prosperity of Egypt for example, was acutely linked to the monsoon rains. Heavy precipitation in the highlands of East Africa would usually signify high water discharge in the lower reaches of the Nile. Although ancient records are scanty, we have recorded data by nilometer, a structure used to measure the Nile River's clarity and water level. Between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, the water levels recorded were highly variable, indicating volatile weather conditions. The period from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century was even more telling. From 1180 to 1350 the region was marked



Portrait of João de Barros

by severe droughts. Reports of structural collapse and famine seemed to be order of the day. In the same period, similar climatic consequences were also prevalent on the Indian subcontinent and unequivocally extended to Southeast Asia, which can be seen with the structural collapse of Angkor and problems in Siam. The data therefore pointedly reveals that it was an era of weak monsoon winds and rain. It would be difficult to imagine how 14<sup>th</sup> century Singapore could have avoided the implications, even if it

wasn't directly impacted. These two studies do more than vindicate Barros' view; they help us substantiate with greater concrete evidence his very hazy hints and our preliminary explorations.

### Finding the path of the storms

The puzzle has undoubtedly yet to reach its logical completion, but the pieces are coming into place. While man has always lived in the natural world, it is only in recent years that the historical interactions between man and the natural world have been systematically studied. As more scientific data about climate is made available, the hope is that we will be able to better our understanding of its historical impact on politics. As Barros suggests, climate could have had a big part to play in the fortunes of 14<sup>th</sup> century Singapore and even the region as a whole. Therefore, studying 'the path of the storms' may yet tell us something new. The next time someone asks about 14<sup>th</sup> century Singapore, lift your eyes to the skies. The answer could be blowin' in the wind.

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Images courtesy of the author

# Archaeology, Pottery and Malay Culture

By John N Miksic

Pottery is the most abundant type of artefact made by humans throughout history and was first made in East Asia about 15,000 years ago. Since that time potters have made artefacts for almost every conceivable form of human activity. Even the US Space Shuttle was covered in ceramic tiles because they were the only materials that could withstand the heat of re-entry into the earth's atmosphere. Owing to pottery's ubiquitous nature, it can shed light on all aspects of human life during the period in which people evolved from hunters and gatherers to forming civilisations. We can use pottery to study art, technology, religion, economics, migration and even gender. Most pottery in history has been made by women, while men dug the clay and helped with the firing.

Pottery has been made in Southeast Asia for at least 8,000 years. During the Neolithic era, pottery was being made in the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra. It belonged to the cord-marking tradition, which is also found in other parts of mainland Southeast Asia.<sup>1</sup> By about 2,000 years ago, a new style of pottery appeared along the coasts of the Straits of Melaka, from south Thailand through the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Riau, the coasts of Borneo and even West Java.

This pottery adopted a new technique of decoration using a carved wooden paddle. The distribution of this new style pottery is the same as that of the Malay language today. We cannot prove that this pottery was always made by people who spoke Malay, but we can say that pottery defines a cultural sphere which coincides with that of Malay society today. In archaeological terms, this signifies that a group of people with similar artistic traditions had emerged. Similar pottery



*Traditional Malay pottery was mainly made by women. The women of Galogandung in West Sumatra still carry on the tradition of making pottery using the ancient paddle and anvil method. This woman is making a cooking vessel*

is found in the area of Sulawesi, Maluku and the southwestern Pacific; the term Lapita has been coined for the latter area. It seems likely that the ancestors of the modern Malays were migrating both eastward and westward around 2,000 years ago from a centre of dispersal somewhere around Sulawesi or eastern Borneo.

For 50 years, archaeologists have believed that the ancestors of the Malays spread into the Philippines from Taiwan around 4,500 years ago.<sup>2</sup> More recently, scholars have begun to study the results of DNA analysis, which suggests to some that the Malays actually first became an ethnolinguistic group somewhere in the southern Philippines or north Borneo, and spread both east and west from there.

The first scholar to specialise in the earthenware pottery of insular Southeast Asia was W G Solheim II. He began his research in the southern Philippines in the 1950s<sup>3</sup> and published an influential article, *Pottery and the Malayo-Polynesians*, in 1964.<sup>4</sup> He had a long and very productive career. In 2003 he updated his research in a detailed article.<sup>5</sup> In 2006 he produced another extensive book entitled *Archaeology and Culture in Southeast Asia: Unraveling the Nusantao* (The University of the Philippines Press: Quezon City) in which he discussed at length the Malayo-Polynesian groups of Southeast Asia, Madagascar and the Pacific Ocean, of which the people now called Malays form a member, along with the Javanese, Balinese, Minangkabau, Batak, Iban and many others. One of his objectives was to explore the link between pottery styles and the formation of ethnic identity.

Solheim tried his best to make the case for the argument that pottery is a very important indicator of linguistic and cultural affiliation. This link has been found to be statistically probable, but not 100% reliable. Pottery can be traded



*Bau Malay-type ware as defined by W G Solheim II utilised decorations such as circles and wavy lines. These sherds were found at the 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century trading port of Kota Cina, near Medan, North Sumatra*

<sup>1</sup> Kamdi Kamil. 1975/76-1976/77. "Bentuk dan tradisi tembikar pra sejarah di Malaysia: satu diskripsi ringkas." *Jebat* no. 5/6: 124-146.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Bellwood, 1997 *Prehistory of the Indo-Malaysian Archipelago*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. P. 219.

<sup>3</sup> W.G. Solheim II, 1964 *The Archaeology of Central Philippines*. Monograph 10. Manila: National Institute of Science and Technology.

<sup>4</sup> W.G. Solheim II 1964 "Pottery and the Malayo-Polynesians." *Current Anthropology* 5/5: 360, 376-384.

<sup>5</sup> W.G. Solheim II 2003 "Southeast Asian earthenware pottery and its spread," in J.N. Miksic, ed., *Earthenware in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, pp. 1-21



over long distances between unrelated groups of people and some pottery styles and techniques of manufacture can also be transferred from one group to another. It is therefore necessary to be cautious when drawing conclusions about the ethnic composition of the population of an archaeological site from pottery. With these caveats in mind, we can still rely on pottery to paint a picture of the formation and spread of Malay identity and the economy and social structure of the Malays during the last 2,000 years.

Solheim identified what he defined as three pottery “traditions” in the Philippines, which he termed *Sahuynh-Kalanay*, *Novaliches*, and *Bau Malay*. He used data from a survey made in the Philippines by Karl Guthe from the University of Michigan. This is not an ideal procedure, since Guthe did not conduct excavations, so the stratigraphy and chronological distribution of the pottery is difficult to specify. Based on association with Chinese pottery, Solheim determined that the *Sahuynh-Kalanay* pottery was oldest, followed by *Bau-Malay*, which was then replaced by *Novaliches*.

The name *Sahuynh-Kalanay* is taken from two archaeological sites: Sahuynh in South Vietnam, and Kalanay in the Philippines. Similar pottery is found in both areas. South Vietnam is the area where the Cham ethnic group was most numerous until the Vietnamese moved in during the 15<sup>th</sup> century; the Cham are speakers of a Malayo-Polynesian language. It is thus not surprising that the two areas should display an early correlation.

Bau Malay pottery is more common in Borneo, western Indonesia, and peninsular Malaysia than in the Philippines. Some of the oldest examples have been found in the Musi River valley of south Sumatra. Solheim’s three types have been criticised by later archaeologists, especially the *Novaliches* type, which does not seem to be important. The Bau Malay incised and paddle-marked types seem to be the most widespread. They have even been found in southern India; Indian archaeologists believe that it was taken there by early Malay sailors.<sup>6</sup>

Research in Sumatra and Singapore in particular has yielded many examples of this type of pottery.



*Paddle-marked Malay sherds from the Padang, Singapore, 14<sup>th</sup> century*



*White, fine paste ware kendi from Jambi, Sumatra, 12<sup>th</sup> century*

Scholars are still gathering new data that will refine our understanding of its development over 2,000 years and also of local variations. One other important type of pottery made in the Malay zone exists. It was probably made in the Satingphra area in what is now southern Thailand, still mainly inhabited by Malays. Potters there achieved a high level of skill in making ceremonial water vessels called *kendi*. They utilised a clay deposit of particularly high quality to make vessels which were so attractive that they were traded to places as far away as Singapore,<sup>7</sup> Java and the Philippines. The normal colour of this pottery was white, but the potters also made red *kendis* for the Javanese.

When Islam came to Southeast Asia, another type of pottery began to appear in the Malay area, especially at the north end of the Straits of Melaka, including Aceh, Kedah, Perak and Patani. The main product of this new style was also *kendis*, but the favourite colour changed from white to black, and the spouts changed from long and slender to short and bulbous. This type of black pottery, sometimes polished with a pebble until it gleamed, is still made in northern Perak today. The paddle-marking and Bau Malay type decorations faded away during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, though some nice examples have been found in archaeological excavations of this period at Johor Lama and are now in the Heritage Conservation Centre.

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*Images courtesy of the author*

<sup>6</sup> Tansen Sen 2014: Maritime Southeast Asia between South Asia and China to the sixteenth century. *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and –National Studies of Southeast Asia* 2: 31-59; Selvakumar, V. 2011: “Contacts between India and Southeast Asia in ceramic and boat building traditions,” in Pierre-Yves Manguin, A. Mani and Geoff Wade (eds.), *Early Interactions between South and Southeast Asia: Reflections on Cross-Cultural Exchange*, pp. 197–220. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

<sup>7</sup> John N Miksic 2013. *Singapore and the Silk Road of the Sea*. Singapore: NUS Press/National Museum of Singapore; Chapter 6, “Products of ancient Singapore.”

# Needlework and Embroidery of the Malay World

By Rossman Ithnain

Cross-cultural links cannot be ignored when studying the material culture of a particular community. The Malay community is no exception. Former Malay sultanates and kingdoms such as Melaka, Langkasuka and Johor-Riau-Lingga, had coastal locations with major ports and were thus trade emporiums. With regard to their material culture, trade opened them to new ideas and outside influences. The seafaring nature and 'merantau' philosophy of certain communities such as the Bugis and Minang, further aided the inter-mingling of the various cultures and the transmission of new forms of artwork and handicrafts. Furthermore, marriages between royal houses from different corners of the Malay world<sup>1</sup> contributed to this exchange of ideas. Hence, the development of the Malay needlework and embroidery tradition cannot be seen in isolation.

Today, much of the needlework and embroidery found in various Malay areas of Indonesia and Malaysia, resemble each other. An example would be the *tekat kertas perada emas*. Examples from Riau look similar to those from the East Coast of Malaysia. Likewise, the *tekat gubah* of the Minangkabau can sometimes be mistaken for the *tekat gubah* from Negri Sembilan. Sumatran influences are pervasive in the works of Negri Sembilan given the state's close links with its Minangkabau roots. Influence from faraway lands such as Egypt, Turkey (Ottoman Empire), India (Mughal Empire) and China can also be seen in Malay needlework and embroidery. For example, *kelingkan*, the flat ribbon or lametta thread embroidery was inspired by Egyptian *assuit* embroidery. Turkish influence can be seen in the *tekat timbul*, similar to the Turkish *dival* embroidery and also the Indian *zardozi*.

Whilst the Malay needlework and embroidery tradition may not have survived here, Singapore (particularly Arab Street) remains an important source of the materials needed for embroidery work. This is Singapore's connection with the arts of the Malay World.

## Malay Aesthetic and Sensibility

The Malay aesthetic in needlework and embroidery can be seen in the extensive use of gold and silver threads against a mono-coloured base. Beads are not typically used as the main decoration in Malay needlework and are instead used as decorations to fill in the background. The material used for the backing of an embroidered piece can indicate the age of the embroidery. Backing materials include batik, woven *pandan*, velvet and even newspaper. Woven *pandan* backings, a material unique to Malay embroidery, are often indicative of an older piece. The very fine woven *pandan* was the backing of choice in Malay villages before the arrival of newspapers. Later, layers of newspaper were glued together to form the template of the *tekat* embroidery whilst others were used as backing. Sometimes the newspaper's date provided another clue as to its age.

The motifs employed in Malay needlework and embroidery are mainly inspired by nature, typically flowers and foliage and, when used in designs, are generally stylised and subject to the re-interpretation of the craftsmen, based on



An example of needlework showing a domestic animal, a rooster

the existing repertoire. Contrary to popular belief, animals do feature in Malay embroidery and needlework, usually domesticated animals reared in a Malay kampong – ducks, birds, cockerels and hens, insects and butterflies. Mythical animals such as the phoenix, dragon or *qilin* do not feature in Malay embroidery, exceptions are the *bouraq* in Achenese embroidery. The human form is absent in Malay needlework and embroidery. Geometric patterns are typically seen in the *tekat perada emas*. The crescent moon and stars and the crown were also popular motifs.

## Categories of Malay Needlework and Embroidery

There are four general categories of Malay needlework and embroidery, namely: *tekat timbul*, *tekat gubah*, *tekat kertas perada mas* and *kelingkan*. Some of the embroidery incorporates a combination of these techniques as well as further embellishment with purl threads, multi-coloured sequins and silver decorative pieces. The silver pieces come in the shape of flowers and leaves, as well as the tree of life motif. Typically, this type of embroidery and needlework is used for special occasions and is found on accessories such as shoes, fans, bed hangings, pillow cases, bedspreads, pillow ends, food covers, betelnut box covers, prayer mats and accessories for the wedding dais and the bridal bed.

## Tekak Timbul

*Tekak timbul* is a couching technique with the gold or silver embroidery raised above the surface of the base velvet material stretched over the *mempulur* or cardboard template. The threads 'float', hence the reference to *timbul*. The velvet is usually a deep colour (red, navy blue, purple or green) so that the embroidered parts stand out. The *mempulur* itself requires great skill to make and includes gluing pieces of paper together to form the template. This type of needlework is usually associated with Perak. However, it still features in certain parts of Johor, Selangor, Pahang and

<sup>1</sup> By 'Malay World', I am referring to the Malay settlements and communities in what are today the Southern provinces of Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia (particularly coastal Kalimantan, Riau provinces and various parts of Sumatra) and the southern Philippines.



Various examples of tekat timbul embroidery

Negri Sembilan. *Tekak timbul* is also known as *sulam bersuji*. The motifs used in *tekat timbul* are primarily flowers and foliage and tend to be very stylised, with no resemblance to the actual plant or flower. New interpretations of the existing design repertoire further reduced the connection to actual plants or flowers. Popular motifs include chrysanthemums, begonias, sunflowers, ferns, yam leaves, bamboo shoots and paddy stalks, orchids and hibiscus.

### Tekak Gubah

*Tekak Gubah* is a flat-surface embroidery as opposed to the raised embroidery of *tekat timbul*. This technique is also described as outlining embroidery. Gold or silver threads are laid down following outlines of patterns that were previously drawn on the base cloth. These outlines are then secured with red thread stitches.



Examples of tekat gubah

The embroidery is typically enhanced with coloured silk threads, glass pieces or coloured paper. *Tekak gubah* is a common embroidery technique found in Malaysia and Indonesia and practised by the Chinese, Peranakan and Malay communities. In Indonesia, it is prevalent in Sumatra, especially amongst the Minangs and Achinese. The technique would have been introduced to Negri Sembilan by their Minang ancestors.

### Kelingkan

A lesser known Malay embroidery today is *kelingkan*, which employs the technique known as *tikam tembus* (pierce through). It is known as *keringkam* in Sarawak and *keringkan* in Palembang. This technique uses a special two-eyed flat needle and narrow and flat metallic gold or silver strips. One



These pieces display examples of kelingkan embroidery

view is that the term *kelingkan* originates from the French word *clinqant* which means *glittering*. Typical motifs used in *kelingkan* include chained bay (*teluk berantai*) flowers and bamboo shoots. The *kelingkan* of Kelantan and Selangor were inspired by the more geometric form of the Egyptian *assuit*. Interestingly, Egyptian *assuit* shawls were popular gifts brought home by pilgrims returning from the Haj. The shawls typically come in black, red, green or white, while their Negri Sembilan counterparts are typically orange or pink. Today, *kelingkan* is still practised in Sarawak and Lingga Island, Riau, usually for shawls known as *selayah* and *tudung manto* respectively.



An example of tekat kertas perada mas

### Tekak Kertas Perada Mas

Another lesser-known type of Malay embroidery is the *tekat kertas perada mas*, the technique of sewing and securing appliques made of gold paper to a cloth using a stitch known as *gigi belalang* (grasshopper's teeth). This technique is used for valances, pillow ends and decorations for the dais. While typically associated with the east coast states of Malaysia, this craft is also practised in the Riau islands, especially in Lingga. This type of embroidery looks similar to the cut-outs used in *wau* (kite) making in the east coast states of Malaysia.

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**Rosman Ithnain** is a public servant. He started collecting Malay needlework and embroidery in 2012 as part of his general interest in Malay material culture. The needlework and embroidery pieces are from his personal collection.

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All images courtesy of the author

# Langkasuka and the Malay Art of Woodcarving

By Fistri Abdul Rahim

Those who attended the *Spirit of Wood* exhibition at the ACM in 2003, or had the privilege of being a guide for it, would probably have marvelled at the intricately carved masterpieces of one of the most prolific, self-taught Malay woodcarvers of his time, the late Nik Rashiddin Nik Hussein.

The master carver graciously opened his home in Kelantan to the public as a centre of Malay wood-carving. About an hour's drive out from centre of Kota Bharu, the property sits on a six-acre plot of land overlooking the South China Sea and an almost deserted beach. There's an expansive field dotted with coconut trees, lines of potted frangipanis and a gentle sea breeze, so it is easy to understand how one can be inspired to be fully immersed in one's passion here. My friends and I were welcomed into his immaculately maintained bungalow by his friendly wife. The unassuming brick *rumah panggung*<sup>1</sup> is at once a museum/gallery (now called Akademi Nik Rashiddin) and a repository of his artwork. It was a good place for a newbie like me to get a crash course on the highly specialised art of Malay woodcarving.



This is carving of a gagak suro, image courtesy of the Akademi Nik Rashiddin

Upon entering, a familiar figure greeted me, a huge wood-carving of a bird, the *gagak suro*, last seen in the Southeast Asian Gallery of the Asian Civilisation Museum (ACM). This was redder and less colourful than the one in the ACM's collection and while the ACM's has a crocodile mouth, the Akademi's bird has a curved beak. It's made from the *angsana* tree (*pokok sena*), which explains its colour since the wood of the *sena* tree is naturally orange-gold. The carving is one of only five left in the world: one in the ACM's collection, one in the National Museum of Malaysia, while the fate of the other two pieces is unknown.

A *gagak suro* was an essential part of an elaborate

circumcision ceremony in Kelantan, the last of which took place in 1933. This mythical bird takes its inspiration from the crow (*gagak*), the vehicle of Lord Shani, the Hindu god who wards off evil forces. However, this is a stylised rendition of the Hindu *garuda/jentayu* motif, designed to suit the predominantly Muslim community who frowned upon zoomorphic representations in art. The second part of its name, *suro*,

means Muharram, the first month in the Muslim calendar, acknowledging its Muslim connection. Muharram was once widely believed to be the month of bad luck<sup>2</sup>. The bird in the Akademi's collection, dating back to early 18<sup>th</sup> century Pattani, is unique – attached to its beak is a freely hanging tongue that clacks when moved. The beak and the area around it are delicately adorned with the *bunga kerak nasi* (bread flower) motif. The bird has a three-dimensional tail (*tebuk tembus berukir*), also carved with *bunga kerak nasi* and *daun kerak nasi* (bread-flower leaf). Floral motifs in the artwork, especially those that are spiral, are said to be the trademark of *Langkasuka*, an ancient, second century kingdom thought to have spanned present-day Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah and the southern Thailand districts of Saiburi, Narathiwat and Nakhon Si Thammarat. Paul Wheatley, in his book *The Golden Khersonese*, believed its centre lay in modern-day, Pattani<sup>3</sup>.

Floral motifs are also evident in a colourful tripartite boat accessory, consisting of the *bangau*, *okok* and *caping*, unique to Malaysia's east coast. The *bangau*, an elegant wooden crane-shaped feature, is usually found on the boat's port side and is paired with the *okok*, its smaller counterbalance. They are placed across the bow and attached to the keel with a

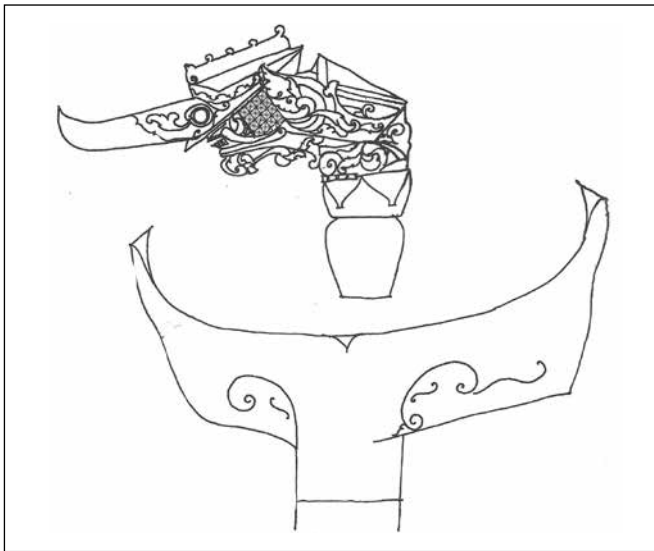


The bangau and okok, photo by the author

1 *Rumah panggung* is Malay for elevated or raised houses, usually built of wood

2 The philosophy in the creation of traditional Malay carving motifs in Peninsula Malaysia, *GEOGRAFIA Online Malaysia Journal of Society and Space* 8 issue 7 (pg 88 - 95)

3 Paul Wheatley (1961). *The Golden Khersonese. Studies in the Historical Geography of the Malay Peninsula before AD 1500*. University of Malaya Press.



A sketch of the hulu coteng, courtesy of Buku Lakaran Kayu Dan Semangat, published by Akademi Nik Rashiddin. Nik Rashiddin usually sketched his pieces before he went on to actually carving them.



On display at the Akademi is this keris hulu tajong, photo by the author

triangular structure called the *caping*. While it appears as if their colours and design may serve an aesthetic function only, these structures have a practical purpose.

The *bangau* holds the sails when the boat is ashore. Its shape is said to pay homage to the industrious bird that gets its sustenance from the sea and is also widely regarded as being able to predict where the sea has abundant fish. The *okok*, on the other side of the boat, secures the anchor when the boat is beached. The *caping*, with its triangular peak placed between the *bangau* and *okok*, serves as a navigational tool much like a rifle's sight. East coast fishermen know how far from home they are just by aligning the *caping* to the horizon. When attaching the *bangau*, *okok* and *caping* to the boat, the more colourful and intricately designed side must face the fisherman as he heads out to sea. This appeases the resident guardian spirit (*semangat*), who is supposed to ensure the fisherman's safety. Belief in these mystical powers is so strong that when the boat is ashore, these parts are kept clean, 'bathed' in flower-infused water and presented with floral garlands to ensure the *semangat's* happiness while on land.

The gallery also has a massive, three-panel bed frame. Its gilded floral motif in red and indigo reminded me of ancient illuminated manuscripts. The panels as well as other supporting structures were made of different woods, namely *nangka*, *angsana*, *merbau* and *jati*. *Merbau* and *jati* (teak) are known to be very dense so only the most skilful of woodcarvers could produce the graceful vegetative motifs we see here. Despite its size, the bed was portable and could be dismantled and reconstructed. I now understood why the woodcarvers of old were so highly regarded that they held top positions in Langkasuka's courts. The bed belonged to the royal family of Pattani and gained notoriety for ejecting any less than royal sleepyheads who tried to sleep in it<sup>4</sup>.

A showcase of Malay woodcarvings wouldn't be complete without the mention of the Malay dagger, the *keris*. This utilitarian yet regal weapon is a must-have for all royalty. Not only does it serve as a symbol of royal status, power and authority, the *keris* is also a good indication of one's martial prowess. One example is the striking *Keris Tajong* of Kelantan

and Pattani. With a pronounced beak-like hilt and a sailboat-looking sheath, its handle (*hulu*) comes in three variations, namely, *hulu coteng*, *hulu bangsa agung* and *hulu tajong*. The *coteng* is a precursor of the other two as it was carved to look exactly like a beaked Hindu god's head. The difference between the *hulu bangsa agung* and *hulu tajong* lies in the length and rounded base. On display in its plexiglass cabinet diagonally across from the bed, this lonesome artefact cuts a princely figure.

Over time, the *keris* became an integral part of Malaysia's Yang di Pertuan Agung's coronation ceremony. Carved from ivory by Nik Rashiddin in 1990<sup>5</sup>, this piece was last worn during the coronation of the Sultan of Kelantan in 2016. In this particular hilt, the designs are synonymous with Malay woodcarvings, the more prominent being the distinct Langkasuka spiral motif that sprouts from the eyes. Other designs include the jasmine (*bunga tanjung*) styled in geometric patterns and forming the hilt's cheek, while covering its sides are traces of 'meandering clouds' (*awan larat*) interspersed with stand-alone jasmine motifs. Note that the side a *keris* faces when worn could indicate the wearer's intent. When at the side, it means the wearer comes in peace, whereas if it's pointing to the front, it's time to fight. In this case, the beak functioned as more than a handle; it was a means to lock the enemy's wrist/neck and also served as a stabbing tool. Hence it was always important that the material chosen for *keris* hilts be hardy enough to withstand various weather conditions, sea water as well as hard knocks.

Two hours went by without any of us noticing. The amount of knowledge shared as well as being able to take our time to appreciate each work of art was unforgettable. For those who would like to have a similar experience, do contact the Akademi for a private tour at a nominal fee of RM20.

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4 Spirit of Wood, *The Art of Malay Woodcarving*, Farish Noor and Eddin Khoo,

5 Spirit of Wood: *The Art of Malay Woodcarving*, Farish Noor and Eddin Khoo, pg 145

# The Bugis Exhibition

## The History of an Ethnic Community Told through Tangible Objects

By Caroline Carfantan

The current exhibition at the Malay Heritage Centre, *Sirri na Pesse*, features the history of the Malay-Bugis community of Singapore. In this exhibition tangible objects such as close-contact daggers (*kerises* and *badiks*), a typewriter, wedding attire and many others unfold the stories of the Bugis diaspora in Singapore. Each one of them acts as an entry point into a community often known only by the name of an MRT station or from tales of proud sea-traders and sometimes even pirates.

The Bugis are an ethnic group from South Sulawesi, an Indonesian island located between Borneo and the Maluku Islands. In the January 1824 census, they accounted for approximately 18% of Singapore's population, which recorded 10,683 residents of which 74 were Europeans, 16 Armenians, 15 Arabs, 4,580 Malays, 3,317 Chinese, 756 natives of India and 1,925 Bugis. From 1891 onwards, all ethnicities of the Malay Archipelago were recorded as Malays, so the current number of Bugis in Singapore can only be guessed.

Bugis have their own language, an Austronesian one, with a script called *lontara*. The name comes from the Malay word for palm, *lontar*, whose long, thin leaves were once used for manuscripts. The script itself is thought to be from ancient India.

The number of Bugis speakers today is believed to be approximately four to five million. One must not forget that the number of individual languages listed for Indonesia is 719. Of these, 707 are living and 12 are extinct. Today, Bugis is written in roman script, and many Bugis are unable to read or write the *lontara* script any longer.

Bugis written accounts can be divided into mythical epics and historical accounts. Most historical documents are genealogies known as *salasilah*, lists of kings, as well as chronicles and brief accounts of particular events or relationships. *Salasilah* are extremely important within Bugis society especially for the nobility. Even today some Bugis, not necessarily of noble descent, record family relationships over multiple generations. This detail is documented in the current exhibition by an old Regal typewriter as well as the self-published memoir of a Bugis family's history.

The recording of their genealogy, which included all relatives, was important for the nobility to ensure the transmission of power. These genealogies could demonstrate descent from high-status ancestors and, not just in a single line of descent, but in a 'funnel' of all direct ancestors channelling their status down to an individual and his

children. They would underline the claims to power since the holders of political office could be succeeded not only by his or her children, but also by other relatives. Therefore, marriages played a key role in the three major tools of Bugis diplomacy, known as *telu cappak* (meaning three tips):

- *Cappak lilah e* or tip of the tongue, managing relationships through negotiations.
- *Cappak urane e* or tip of the male organ, the use of marriage as a political tool to seal the peace or reinforce an alliance between feuding families or trading partners. It is the best way to bind two separate parties and change a relationship from non-kin into 'not other people' (*tennia tau laeng*). A man could marry beneath his rank while a woman could not because it would have had a direct consequence on the rank inherited by the children. Having a wife of his own rank as well as one of a lower rank, would bring about the creation of a net of inter-dependent relationships from each of those marriages. It was in this situation that recorded genealogies were especially important since they could demonstrate descent from high-status ancestors.
- *Cappak kuwali e* or tip of the dagger – when all prior diplomacy has failed and fighting or the military option is seen as the only solution.

The most important Bugis epic is *La Galigo*. It narrates the myth of origin of the Bugis people through the destinies of five generations of hundreds of princely characters of divine descent living in a non-specified period in a number of South Sulawesi kingdoms and islands. The creation myth tells the story of how the earth was populated. The



The bride's necklace, Bugis dokoh



The bride's elaborate headdress, or bando Bugis



Gelang Perkahwinan, wedding bracelets



A snake-shaped armband called a gelang naga



A special artefact in the exhibition, a hand-written Qur'an



One of the rare artefacts in the exhibition, the Hikayat Bugis

main hero, *I La Galigo*, gave his name to the epic, also known as *Sureq Galigo*. The early transcripts are in Bugis *lontar* script which has its origins in an oral tradition that dates back to approximately the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Some scholars consider it the most voluminous literary epic in the world, some even believe it to be longer than the *Mahabharata*. Many manuscripts of this epic exist and can be found in museums and private collections. Unfortunately, only a few translations of parts of the manuscripts exist. Most of them are in Bahasa Indonesia.

While most young Bugis couples do not know the poems of *La Galigo* any more, the clothes worn by the heroes of the epic are still strongly reflected in today's bridal attire.

As in the epic tales, bride and groom wear an *awi*, an ample skirt tied at the waist with a belt. The groom's attire is completed with a shoulder sash and a *sigera*, or headdress made from a long narrow intricately wound band. The bride wears a chasuble-like blouse called *waju* or *baju bodo*, with a scarf over her shoulder. This has decorative golden objects sewn into it. She also wears an intricate headpiece, ornamental pins, necklaces, armbands and bracelets. While the groom (similar to the Malay tradition) has a *keris* called *Tali Bennang* in his woven belt, the Bugis bride carries a *badik* (a smaller dagger with a pistol-shaped handle) in her metallic belt.

Men and women may have different roles and activities in Bugis society, but neither gender is considered dominant over the other. To marry is understood as *siala*, to take one another as in, "I own you and you own me". The difference in roles is the basis for their partnership in caring for each other's concerns. Carrying the *badik* at her wedding is also a visual reminder of the historical examples of female Bugis rulers and warriors. In the accounts of the early European travellers to South Sulawesi, the active public role of women was often noted with surprise.



The groom has a keris in his belt while the bride has a badik in hers

James Brooke – known as the first White Rajah of Sarawak – wrote in his *Narrative of Events in Borneo and Celebes down to the Occupation of Labuan*, "All the offices of state, including even that of *aru matoah* (chief), are open to women; and they actually fill the important posts of government, four out of the six great chiefs of Wajo being at present females. These ladies appear in public like the men; ride, rule, and visit even foreigners, without the knowledge or consent of their husbands."

John Crawford (Singapore's second Resident) gave the following account in his *History of the Indian Archipelago*, "Not many days before I saw her, she (the ruler of Lipukasi in Sulawesi) had presented herself among the warriors of her party drawn out before the enemy, upbraided them for their tardiness in the attack, in lofty terms, and demanded a spear, that she might show them an example. Encouraged by her exhortations, it appears they went forth, and gained an advantage."

Much of the information in this article is based on the research of the French anthropologist Christian Pelras, as well as on interviews with three gentlemen from the Singapore Bugis community whom I would like to thank for their time and generous help, Mr Ibrahim Ariff, Mr Sarafian Salleh and Mr Jamal Mohamad.

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**Caroline Carfantan** is a docent at the Malay Heritage Centre. She is fascinated by the richness of the Malay Archipelago and its more than 360 ethnic groups and cultures.

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The bride and groom's ornately ornamented headdresses

All artefact images courtesy of the Malay Heritage Centre

Wedding photos by Jamal Mohamad

# Taksu and the Power of Balinese Textiles

By Seema Shah

On a recent visit to New York, I chanced upon an exhibition on Balinese textiles at the Bard Graduate Center (BGC). Titled *Fabricating Power with Balinese Textiles*, the exhibit's focus is the making and use of Balinese textiles as ceremonial objects in various life-cycle ceremonies and as symbols of cultural resilience and continuity.

Aptly described as "a Hindu island in a Muslim sea" by American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, the people of Bali practise a unique form of Hinduism, which although rooted in the Shiva-worshipping sects of southern India, has morphed into a composite belief system of ancestor worship, animism and magic. Intricately woven cloths are regularly employed in a wide and complex range of ritual activities. Curator Urmila Mohan seeks to explore these rituals and ceremonies that mark the transitions in a person's life from birth to death, accompanied throughout by spiritually infused textiles.

The pieces on display are unique and exquisite, assembled from collections in the United States and include items brought to the American Museum of Natural History by one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's best-known anthropologists, Margaret Mead. Along with fellow anthropologist Bateson, Mead conducted research in Bali in the 1930s, documenting everyday practices such as child rearing, dances and rituals as well as rites of passage. Although textiles were not their focus, detailed notes describe the use of cloth in ceremonies and the highly ritualised nature of weaving.

This exhibition highlights the significance of Balinese textiles both from a historical as well as contemporary perspective. Organised in three sections: beliefs, offerings and life ceremonies, the exhibition is laid out across three rooms. A backstrap loom is on display and projections illustrating the weaving process greet the visitor. Video clips from various rites of passage bring to life the beliefs associated with the displayed textiles. The visitor is encouraged to ruminate on the role of these cloths as documented in the 1930s, and in their production and relevance today.

To fully comprehend the process of cloth production in Bali, one has to not only appreciate the materials and

techniques, but also look closely at the makers' belief system. Weavers and dyers usually start their work on auspicious days, worship deities and make offerings to invoke the protection of invisible powers. The blessings of lunar goddess Dewi Ratih (Fig 1) are usually invoked to ensure they do not make mistakes. All this translates into the creation of cloths imbued with *taksu* or charismatic power, connecting the weaver to the work and ultimately the user.

The *geringsing* or double *ikat* cloths are believed to be endowed with healing properties and are used even when reduced to a rag. Woven on traditional backstrap looms in a way that they form a continuous circular warp, *gedogan* cloths (Fig 2) are considered *sukla* or pure, and are offered to deities. In order for them to be used for other ritualistic ceremonies such as toothfiling, the warps are cut in the presence of a priest or priestess.

Cloth also acts as a mediator between the invisible (*niskala*) and the visible (*sekala*) worlds. This abstract philosophy of dualism is represented in the black and white, checked *poleng* cloths that we see everywhere in Bali. Whether draped around shrines and guardian figures in temples or donned by security guards officiating at ceremonies, these sacred textiles are believed to be gifted by Siwa to the monkey god Hanoman.

## Life Ceremonies

According to Mead's field notes, "...everything in Bali is an offering: the temples, works of art, theatrical performance – all these are offered to the gods". *Rantasan*, piles of cloth arranged on a wooden tray, are offerings of garments to the deities, especially at ceremonies related to rites of passage. The birth of an individual, the attainment of puberty, marriage and funerals, are accompanied by ceremonies to ensure that he or she transitions easily from one stage to another.

The Balinese believe that in their first three months of life children are like gods, embodying a purified ancestral spirit. The infant is shown great honour and is carried everywhere by family members. At the end of the infant's third month when the child's feet touch the earth for the first time, a *nelubulanin* ceremony is conducted. Images of the cosmic turtle and *nagas* or snakes are drawn on the ground onto which the infant's feet are placed, thereby welcoming the soul into its body. All cloths that the babies are dressed or wrapped in are new or family heirlooms. Mead attended several such ceremonies and collected cloths such as the one seen here (Fig 3).



Fig 2. The Gedogan is set up to form a continuous loop on the loom and is removed intact once woven



Fig 1. The goddess of the moon, Dewi Ratih, from the Hindu epic Mahabharata, believed to have given the knowledge of weaving to humanity



Puberty ceremonies often end with a tooth filing, symbolizing an individual's transition from youth to adulthood, represented by the filing of the sharp upper canines and incisors. I especially enjoyed watching the video clip showing a young Balinese woman undergoing this ritual, with the sacred cloth *cepuk* acting as a protective cover. The *cepuk* (Fig 4) is also believed to open a devotional connection to the ancestral spirits. Its pattern is created through the resist-dye technique known as *ikat*. All *cepuk* have the same basic structure: a border on all four sides framing a centre field that is made up of a repeating pattern. This textile features a pattern called *bintang kurung*, or caged star, in which the ritual participant is



Fig 3. Auspicious wrapper for a nelubulanin (baby's three-month ceremony).



Fig 4. A contemporary *cepuk* draped as protection over an initiate during a toothfiling ceremony

symbolized by the pattern within the diamond motifs. The diamond-shaped pattern acts as a *kurung*, or cage, which protects the initiate during toothfiling. Its specific pattern, however, depends upon the wearer's status. Deities or trance mediums are clad in *cepuks* similar to the highly prized Indian double *ikat patola*. Similarly, tradition dictates that a high-caste individual wear these during ceremonies, while simply patterned *cepuks* adorn lower caste members. Such cloths, accompanied by the ritualistic drawing of magical *aksara* or letters on the initiate's teeth by the priest, protect him or her through this transition into adulthood.

Balinese cosmology dictates spatial orientation and moves people toward the land and away from the sea. It's only during cremation rituals that processions go to the sea, where the soul of the deceased is released. The belief is that the human body is made up of the five elements and

the cremation process ensures the deceased individual's return to these elements or *pancamaabhuta*. Cremation shrouds or *kajangs* such as the one seen here (Fig 5) are multilayered and adorned with ritual objects. The *kajang* on display was a rare find; they are usually burned at the funeral. The woven cotton cloth has sacred and religious images (*sodasaksara*) as well as writings drawn in accordance with the kin group to which the deceased belonged. The figure drawn on the cloth portrays the astral body of the deceased person, mediating between the perishable human body and the non-perishable soul. The turtle and two snakes symbolize the earth. The power of these letters and their associated sounds are released



Fig 5. The *kajang* is part of a multilayered shroud that covers the body of the deceased



Fig 6. Female and male *ukur kepeng* (funerary figures)

through the burning of the shroud, thereby carrying the spirit to the heavens. The *ukur kepeng* or astral body (Fig 6) is made of Chinese coins and pinned onto the shroud by close family members.

Margaret Mead anticipated that European influence and modernisation would eventually signal the demise of traditional art forms. Traditional cloths (Fig 7) are fast disappearing in Bali as chemical dyes replace vegetable dyes and weaving on backstrap looms becomes a rarity. The island's older artisanal textiles are in the hands of global art dealers and museums and despite attempts by fair trade groups such as *Threads of Life* to revive traditional weaving and dyeing methods, most cloth production in Bali is geared towards meeting the demands of tourists. This elegant and unique exhibition is an opportunity to understand the spiritual beliefs of the island people that goes beyond touristy picture-postcard images.

The exhibition is ongoing until 8 July 2018 at the BCG, New York.

For further information on Balinese textiles see Mohan, Urmila. 2018 *Fabricating Power with Balinese Textiles*.



Fig 7. *Langse* is a traditional cloth used to dress Hindu shrines. Usually made of palm leaves, this rare example is woven

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**Seema Shah** is a textile enthusiast and collects traditional Indian cloths that are repositories of cultural beliefs. She is currently living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

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All photos courtesy of the Bard Graduate Center

# The Kendi: The Long Journey of a Little Water Vessel

By Margaret White

*Kendis* are almost universal and among the most intriguing vessels to have survived to this day in parts of India, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Middle East. It has been suggested that Arab traders brought them from the Middle East to India and to Southeast Asia in the first century CE. These *kendis* appear to be a variation of the *kundika*, an ancient holy vessel holding water from India's sacred rivers. (Rooney, 2003:5-16) notes that the *kundika* appears in early sculpture and painting as an attribute, often held in the hands of the Hindu gods Brahma and Shiva, Maitreya, the future Buddha and the compassionate Avalokiteshvara. They are primarily used as water pots.

The term *kendi* is a Malay word believed to be derived from the name *kunda*, although the actual origin of the *kendi* remains a mystery. Throughout the Malay Archipelago, some of the local designations for *kendi* are: *gendi* in Java, *gandi* in Macassar, *kondi* in Aceh, *kandi* among the Toba Bataks and *kundi* in Bali (Eng – Lee:1).

According to (Rinaldi, 1989:174) the shape of the *kendi* varied considerably over the centuries, but all have a more or less rounded body, a straight neck and a spout set at an angle on the shoulder with no handle. The *kendi* seems to have been designed specifically to be held at a certain height so water could be poured into the mouth. The bottle is filled from the neck, held by the neck and water drunk from the spout. The advantage of the utilitarian *kendi* was that it could be carried from place to place when water was not freely available and shared without the risk of contamination as lips do not touch the vessel.



Blue and white Vietnamese kendi with large mammillary format, 16<sup>th</sup> century



Buddha figure at Borobudur with a vessel that may represent a transitional type of ware between the *kundika* and the *kendi*

Many materials were used to produce *kendis*, including earthenware, stoneware, porcelain, brass, pewter, copper and silver alloy, gold and bronze. Even in vessels employing the same material, notable differentiation in size, shape and decoration can be observed. For example, spouts may be straight,

bulbous or flanged, long and thin or zoomorphic. The bulbous or mammiform-spouted *kendi* emblematic of fertility, was probably the most common shape produced in many countries, including Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. *Kendis* with thin, curved spouts appeared in China as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century, but by the 17<sup>th</sup> had lengthened considerably to resemble the spouts on Middle Eastern ewers (Rinaldi:177).



Celadon kendi the form of a Hamsa, the mythical Thai bird. Sawankhalok, around the 16<sup>th</sup> century

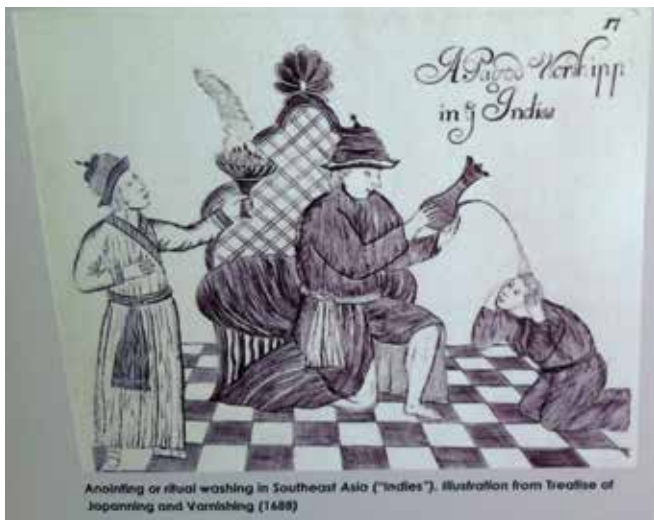
Zoomorphic shapes included elephants, toads and more rarely, bulls and cows.



Chinese blue and white kendi for the export market, 18<sup>th</sup> century

*Kendis* formed part of the enormous trade in ceramics that flowed through the Asian region from China, Japan, Thailand and Vietnam between the Song and Yuan periods (10<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries) to the late Qing (early 20<sup>th</sup>). The Chinese, noting a Southeast Asian preference for *kendis*, produced them exclusively for this market. They were glazed and more durable than the porous, locally produced earthenware variety as well as being attractively patterned. Between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, Guangdong and Fujian provinces exported vast quantities of glazed stoneware, including *kendis*, to the ports of the *Nanhai*.

When a gap occurred in ceramic production in China (1280-1368), Thailand and Vietnam quickly attempted to fill demand. More recently, evidence of *kendi* production and where they were traded has been discovered in the cargo of shipwrecks off Southeast Asian coasts as well as on land



Anointing or ritual washing in Southeast Asia (Indies). Illustration from Treatise of Japanning and Varnishing (1688)

sites. In southern Thailand, many varieties of elaborately shaped *kendis* were produced. For example, *kendis* from the Thai Sawankhalok kilns (1350-1512) exhibit mammiform spouts, slightly splayed feet, underglazed black decorations and vegetal motifs. Others from Sukhothai (14<sup>th</sup> century) have square carved foot rings and a thick slip under a clear glaze. In Vietnam, (14<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> century), the majority of Vietnamese *kendis* were porcellanous stoneware, decorated in underglaze blue with flat, unglazed bases and mammiform spouts. Most resemble Chinese *kendis* in form and repertoire of decoration. After the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese *kendis* resemble Vietnamese shapes and decorative patterns, indicating further cultural interchange.

Around 1650, with the decline of the Ming dynasty and the transition to the Qing dynasty, Japanese potters began exporting Hizen ware (including Arita, Yoshida and Imari) to Southeast Asia in both Dutch and Chinese ships. *Kendis* also found their way to the Middle East and Europe. In Europe, *kendis* were known as *gorgolets* (from the Portuguese word *gorgoleta*) derived from the gurgling sound they made when water was poured through the narrow spout. European silver mounts were sometimes ingeniously added to a *kendi* to convert it to a ewer. Around this time, the Arabs and Persians used large numbers of imported *kendis* as *nargileh* or water pipes. Glazes varied from green, black and white to blue and white underglaze to polychrome enamels. Perhaps the most common decorative style known at this time was referred to as *Kraak* ware. It was the most popular export type of porcelain made for the West in the kilns of Jingdezhen. Blue and white *Kraak* ware was decorated in panelled cartouches (Kerr, 2011:22).

However, after China re-established its dominance of the overseas porcelain market in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, production continued into the 19<sup>th</sup> ceasing before the end of the Qing period. The competition could not match the technical superiority or the more efficient production methods of the Chinese. *Kendis* from this period were characterised by exaggerated appendages on the neck, such as the lip turned back like a collar, animal-shaped bodies and an 'onion-shaped' spout. *Famille rose* enamelled decoration was in demand in the Middle East and was sometimes customised with Islamic inscriptions.

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*Kendis* also functioned as ritual and life-cycle objects in many Southeast Asian locations, from Indonesia eastwards to the Philippines. Several examples illustrate their continued use. One is the Thai custom of pouring of water from a *kendi* over the hands of the recipient of a gift. In Singapore today, the Gujerati Indians still use brass *kendis* (*lota*) on special occasions when a hostess passes around a *kendi* for washing the right hand before and after a meal. In Malayalee families, people entering a house wash their feet with water from a *kendi*. In Java, the bride washes the groom's feet with water from a *kendi* during their wedding ceremony. One Javanese belief relates to the ability of a *kendi* to determine the gender of an unborn child – the *kendi* being likened to a womb. A mother-to-be was washed seven times with water from a holy spring and the emptied *kendi* was then smashed on the floor. If the spout remained unbroken, the baby would be a boy.

In Indonesia and the Philippines these vessels have been revered and preserved as tribal heirlooms; either as display objects, as grave goods or even as holders of money or flowers. One of the qualities most valued in archipelagic Indonesia was the degree of resonance possessed by particular ceramic *kendis*. The clear, ringing sound was linked to the power to summon the spirits.

The religious role of the *kendi* in Southeast Asia is less clearly defined than that of the *kundika*. Porcelain *kendis* of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries may be inscribed with stylised quotations from the *Qur'an*, and though they were probably commissioned by the sultans in Aceh for ceremonial purposes; how they were used is not clear. Today, the use of holy water is still a major trait of Balinese Hindus as well as Buddhists throughout Asia and it is likely the *kendi* shape is one type of object used for such functions. (Miksic, 2009:97).

Currently, archaeologists continue to discover new sites, both on land and in maritime zones, while also reinvestigating ancient Southeast Asian sites in an attempt to further unravel the origins of the *kendi* to provide a more rounded picture of its history.



Terracotta kendi with added silver spout. Java probably Majapahit

---

**Margaret White** has a long-term interest in the complexity of cultural interactions upon trade ceramics and has been the convenor of the Ceramic Study Group of The Asian Arts Society of Australia (TAASA) for the past 5 years.

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Images from the collection of John Yu

# The Aesthetics of Violence:

## Dinh Q Lê Re-examines Monuments and Memorials

By Durriya Dohadwala

The Propeller Group's work, *AK47 vs M16*, in the recently concluded exhibition *Cinerama* at the Singapore Art Museum, highlighted how the portrayal of violence in films has been glorified to the extent that we forget the terror that it inflicts on its victims. Similarly, the perception of countries such as Vietnam and Cambodia is now so closely connected with violence that a trip to Phnom Penh or Ho Chi Minh City is incomplete without seeing the "killing fields", genocide museums or the Cu Chi tunnels; all dreadful reminders of atrocities committed in the late 1970s during the Vietnam war.

It is this loss of the individual's dignity that Dinh Q Lê's solo exhibition, *Monuments and Memorials*, seeks to address in his art. Using photography and the Vietnamese tradition of grass weaving, he shatters the image and then reassembles the fragments inviting us to look with new eyes.

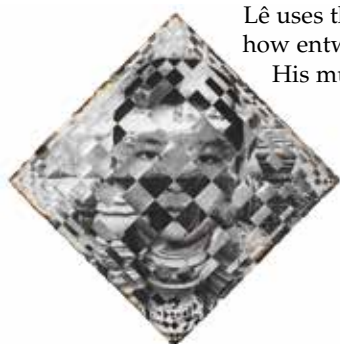
Lê was born in Hà Tiên, a Vietnamese town very close to the Cambodian border. His family left Vietnam in 1978 and settled in the United States where he studied Fine Arts and Photography. Between 1993 and 1994, he revisited his hometown and the cities of Siem Reap and Phnom Penh, which were across the border. What struck him most was the disparity between the two cities: the splendour of the monuments at Angkor Wat in Siem Reap versus the horror of the



Splendor & Darkness (STPI) #33, 2017. Cyanotype on Saunders 638g Paper; burnt



Splendor & Darkness (STPI) #22, 2017. Foiling and screen print on Stonehenge paper; cut, woven and burnt.



Splendor & Darkness (STPI) #11, 2017. Foiling and screen print on Stonehenge paper; cut, woven and burnt. Two separate images are printed, stripped, and then woven together using the traditional Vietnamese grass mat weaving technique, but following an irregular pattern that the artist has developed.

Lê uses the art of weaving to demonstrate how entwined such dichotomies are. His murals, reminiscent of the large



Dinh Q Lê with STPI's workshop staff in the Artist Studio at STPI

tapestries found in European castles, conceal portraits of Pol Pot's victims among images of the temples at Angkor. Using various printing techniques such as silver foil, screen-print, cyanotype and laser-cut paper, his works both conceal and reveal. From afar, they draw you in, hinting at something that lies within. You glimpse a pair of eyes, then a nose, then a silhouette of a young girl. It is almost as if the artworks are filled with the presence of those who perished at Tuol Sleng.

But Lê's works are different from the images we usually see in the media. He invests dignity to the memory, acknowledging and honouring them at the same time. When asked what he wants the visitor to take away from the exhibition, Lê says he prefers that the viewer form his own interpretation and reflect on how memory and the act of remembering are shaped by politics, culture and society.

*Monuments and Memorials* runs till 12 May at the STPI Creative Workshop and Gallery. Information on the guided tours can be found at the back of the magazine in the museum information pages.



Splendor & Darkness (STPI) #29, 2017. Cyanotype on Stonehenge paper; cut, woven and burnt. These images were printed using cyanotype, a print technique that involves the reaction of UV light on a chemically coated surface, rendering the UV-exposed surfaces to turn a distinct blue. Again stripped and then woven together, the lower edges of the artwork were deliberately left 'unfinished' to signify the ongoing work that needs to be done in remembering and reconciling this difficult history

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**Durriya Dohadwala** writes about contemporary Asian art. She is also a docent at the Singapore Art Museum and at the STPI Creative Workshop and Gallery.

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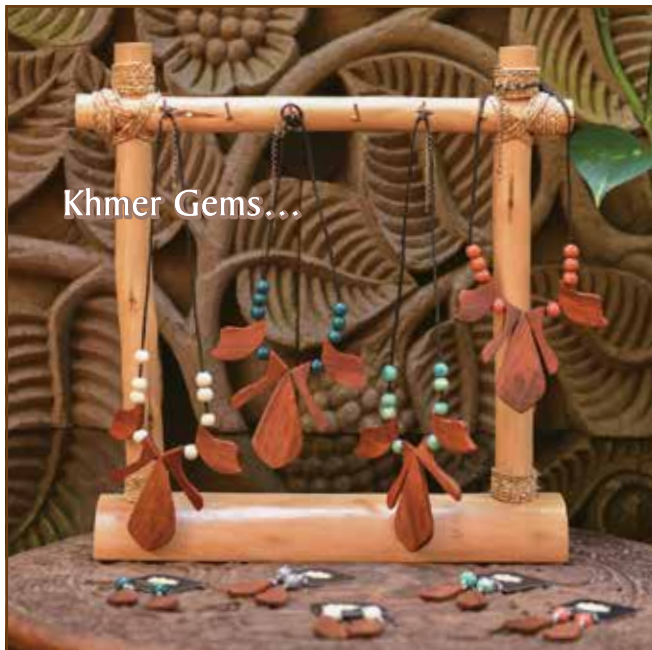
All photos by Toni Cuhadi. © Dinh Q Lê/STPI. Photos courtesy of STPI

# Singapore Art gallery guide

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Photo © Felix Hug (Eyes on Asia)



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# Japanese Docents



The other day I had the privilege of guiding a tour for Japanese primary school students. I had the impression that children today are not well-equipped to speak up and give their own opinions on foreign cultures. When I was nine years old, I visited a famous museum in Japan with my family and saw many old vases, which had been collected by the emperor of China. I didn't understand how precious they were back then, but I still remember the rich experience I had at the museum. It definitely deepened my understanding of Chinese culture.

Comparing myself back then with the students who've attended my tours, despite the abundant information they are receiving from their smart phones and the internet, I've realised children today lack wider experiences compared to my generation. I feel that personal experiences have an integral role to play in understanding foreign cultures. It is something that cannot be learned just by reading articles and doing research online. One needs to be part of the



culture through one's senses, through viewing actual objects, smelling the air, hearing the sounds all around you, etc.

All this direct contact with a culture using one's five senses is necessary in order to develop an opinion towards another culture. I believe that museums are ideal places for having such experiences. This comes from my actual experience when I was a child who went to many museums and who later became a museum guide.

**Rino Okada, Japanese docent**



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## Island Notes

# St. Patrick's Day in Singapore

By Darly John



Time to whip out the shamrocks and Guinness... it's St Patrick's Day, commemorating the death of St Patrick, patron saint who brought Christianity to Ireland. Celebrated on 17 March, the Irish diaspora come together to organise parades, balls, *cèilidh* (a gathering involving folk music and dancing) etc. In Singapore, the St Patrick's Society holds an annual ball for which members dress formally in gowns or suits to celebrate this important Irish festival. Additionally, the parade makes its way from the Asian Civilisations Museum to Circular Road with different Irish societies, associations, school bands and dancers marching or playing their instruments, adding to the revelry and enthusiasm of the occasion.



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# Monday Morning Lectures May-June 2018

The lectures will be held in the URA Function Room, 45 Maxwell Road (S 069118) and will begin promptly at 11:00 am. Refreshments will not be available. Latecomers are asked to enter via the rear door.

## 7 May: Buddhism: The Early Years

Speaker: Tara Dhar

Have you ever wondered about the split between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, the rise of Vajrayana, the spread of Buddhism to large parts of Asia, about its main teachings, or where it is to be found today, including in Singapore? Join Tara to learn more about this, the formation of the canon and the life story of the Buddha.



Singapore play an active role in shaping the route in its late precolonial stage? Professor John Miksic of the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, will talk about his theories on this subject, about which he wrote in his book *Singapore and the Silk Road of the Sea*, published by NUS Press in 2013, and which was recently awarded the inaugural prize for best book on Singapore history.

## 14 May: NO LECTURE

## 21 May: Central or Marginal? Precolonial Singapore's Place on the Maritime Silk Route.

Speaker: John Miksic

When Singapore was born, the Maritime Silk Route had already been in existence for over a thousand years. Given that long history, what did Singapore add to this network? Was Singapore just a late-comer, or did



## 28 May: NO LECTURE (Vesak Day)

## 4 June: Living with the Abbaya – Three Years in Yemen

Speaker: Esme Parish

From Paris to Sanaa was an unusual move, a move that brought many different challenges, but also many rewards. This is one woman's personal journey: from being kidnapped to chewing *khat* to helping get rape victims out of remand centres.



## Explore Singapore!

To join an ES! event, please go to the FOM website to register on line or register at the ES! table at any Monday Morning Lecture.

## The Dragon Kiln – Visit and Hands-On Workshop

Thursday 10 May

10:00 am – 12:30 pm

Fee: \$50



In the 1950s, Singapore had as many as 30 large kilns that stretched from 40 to 100 metres, dragon-like in their length and breathing fire, they were known as dragon kilns. Today only two such kilns remain, but are in danger of extinction. Join ES! for a visit to one of the kilns and enjoy a hands-on workshop to make a clay artwork of your own.

## The Shuang Lin Monastery – History and Religion

Thursday 17 May

10:00 am – 12:30 pm

Fee: \$25



Tucked away in Toa Payoh is Singapore's oldest Buddhist monument, the Lian Shan Shuang Lin (Lotus Hill Twin Grove Monastery), built in 1898 on donated land and with support from Chinese communities in Singapore, Malaya and Indonesia. They also sourced for the best craftsmen from various regions, so the monastery has a mix of architectural styles and was gazetted as a National Monument in 1980. Our historian guide will talk about its history, architecture and the basics of Buddhism.

## St John's and Lazarus Islands Tour – History and Nature

Thursday 24 May

8:00 am – 1:00 pm

Fee: \$50 (including boat ride)



Marcus Ng

Discover life above and below water at St John's and Lazarus Islands, as well as what remains of Singapore's former quarantine and detention centres for new immigrants and political prisoners. Today, these islands are havens for nature. There will be a chance to explore St John's intertidal zone and see creatures such as sea stars and fiddler crabs up close.

## Breaking Fast – A Ramadan Experience

Date to be confirmed: 5, 6 or 7 June

5:30 pm – 7:30 pm

Fee: \$30



Explore Singapore! takes you to the heart of the Ramadan celebration in Singapore's Kampong Gelam. Join Khir Johari, Malay culture enthusiast, to find out how Ramadan is observed, the various traditions, related to this Islamic holy month and their significance. We conclude by breaking fast with Muslim friends and the congregation at the Sultan Mosque.



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## Study Group

Want to learn more about Asia in a friendly, relaxed way? Join our group. A study group consists of 10 to 16 members who meet weekly to improve their knowledge of a specific theme. Each week, we have two 40-minute presentations; each one researched and given by a member of the study group. Members choose their own topic within the theme.

The FOM Study Group provides a wonderful opportunity to meet and enjoy the diverse nationalities of FOM members. We usually have the meetings in our homes, taking turns to host. On occasion, we also enjoy a pot-luck lunch after the presentations.

Do not worry if your first language is not English; we are patient and appreciate the viewpoints of members from all over the world. We can also support you if you are new to making presentations and need some help with PowerPoint or Google slides.

The current study group started in April and will continue through May. We are learning about *The Arts in Asia since 1950: Visual Art, Performing Art, Film & Architecture*. This group was fully subscribed with 16 people. We have not yet picked the theme for the next study group that starts in September. More information will be available in the July/August issue of *PASSAGE* and on the FOM website.

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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, 12:30 pm, 2:00 pm and 3:30 pm, Fri 7:00 pm

(English)

Mon to Fri 10:30 am and every second Saturday 1:30 pm (Japanese)

First Wed of the month 11:30am (Korean)

Second Thursday of the month 11:30 (Spanish)

Third Thursday of the month 11:30 (French)

### Understanding Asia through Singapore

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

### Angkor: Exploring Cambodia's Sacred City (through 22 July)

FOM guided tours Mon to Fri 11:30 am & 2:30 pm

The civilisation of Angkor left an artistic legacy that lives on most spectacularly in its architecture and sculpture. In this exhibition, visitors will see rare Khmer sculptures, along with French drawings, photographs, and memorabilia that tell the story of the French encounter with Angkor and its sensational emergence onto the international stage.

## 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)

### Tarek Atoui: The Ground: From the Land to the Sea (through 24 June)

This is sound artist and composer Tarek Atoui's first large-scale exhibition in Southeast Asia. Conceived as a musical composition that unfolds in space through its unique sound library and instruments, it is the first piece Atoui has created through associations between objects, instruments and recordings, some borrowed from pre-existing projects, others newly collected and produced. In Singapore, this ensemble will be enriched with new additions, such as a set of porcelain discs on which traditional Arab rhythms are engraved,

## DISINI

(through September)

A brand new site-specific festival of programmes, outdoor sculptures and murals by home-grown, regional and international artists at Gillman Barracks, celebrates the precinct's rich heritage as a former military barracks and its current role as Asia's leading contemporary arts cluster. Highlights include captivating outdoor artworks located across various spaces, a multi-functional artist-designed pavilion where a series of exciting and stimulating programmes will take place, and curatorial-led showcases to capture your attention.

## Indian Heritage Centre

5 Campbell Lane, Singapore 209924

[www.indianheritage.org.sg](http://www.indianheritage.org.sg)

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

Tues to Thurs 10:00 am to 7:00 pm, Fri &

Sat 10:00 am to 8:00 pm

Sundays & public holidays 10:00 am to 4:00 pm



### FOM guided tours: Tues-Fri

11:00 am for the permanent galleries

3:00 pm on Wed and Fri 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.

### Symbols and Scripts: The Language of Craft (through June)

FOM Guided Tours: Wed and Friday 3:00 pm

The exhibition showcases craft traditions from the Indian subcontinent in the context of Singapore's Indian communities. Traditionally, craftsmen have used signs, symbols, patterns and scripts in the decoration of handmade objects in the Indian Subcontinent for thousands of years. This exhibition presents iconic examples of craft traditions and examines the role of the crafts as trade objects in the trading networks of South and Southeast Asia.

## 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.

### Sirri na Pesse: Navigating Bugis Identities in Singapore (through 24 June)

*Sirri na Pesse*, which loosely translates as 'Honour and Pride' in the Bugis language, features the history and development of the Malay-Bugis community in Singapore, many of whom can trace their roots through seminal historical developments in the Malay world from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. *Sirri na Pesse* is the fourth instalment in the Se-Nusantara (Of the Same Archipelago) series of exhibitions that rediscover the rich multi-ethnic heritage and culture of the Malay community in Singapore.

## 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.

# 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.**

### Rediscovering Forgotten Thai Masters of Photography (through July)

An artist research project by Thai photographer Manit Sriwanichpoom, the exhibition features bodies of works by seven Thai photographers from the 50s to the 70s, for purposes of editorials, studio portraits and documentaries, as well as for illustrating koans.

### Crossings | A Solo Exhibition by Wei Leng Tay (through November)

A four-part iteration, Wei Leng Tay's research and photographic project spans histories of migrant individuals from different generations and backgrounds in Pakistan, Hong Kong and Singapore. These installations are multi-lingual and polyvocal fragments, capturing the vagaries in ideas of agency, nation and relationships implicit in moving between places of home.

### NUS Baba House

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

**English heritage tours: Tues - Fri, 10:00 am; Mandarin Heritage Tour: First Monday of each month, 10:00 am**

**Self-Guided Visits: Every Sat, 1:30 pm, 2:15 pm, 3:15 pm & 4:00 pm**

**To register, please visit [babahouse.nus.edu.sg/visit/plan-your-visit](http://babahouse.nus.edu.sg/visit/plan-your-visit) For enquiries, please email [babahouse@nus.edu.sg](mailto: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.

## 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.

### Amek Gambar: Peranakans and Photography (opens 5 May)

This will be the Peranakan Museum's first historical photography exhibition, tracing the history and evolution of photography in the region, with a focus on how the Peranakan community captured and projected themselves to the world through the multi-faceted medium of photographs.

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

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

### Imaginarium: Into the Space of Time

**(6 May to 26 August)**

Through immersive and interactive artworks by artists from the region and around the world, the 2018 edition of *Imaginarium* invites you to engage your senses and expand your horizons in this journey through time. Join us as we discover what the fourth dimension means to different people and cultures and explores the myths and theories that shape our memories and futures and ponder relationships between time and space.

## STPI

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



**Opening hours:**

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

**Closed Sundays & Public Holidays**

**FOM guided tours: 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.**

### Dinh Q Lê: Monuments & Memorials

**(through 12 May)**

Internationally acclaimed artist Dinh Q Lê was born in Vietnam and immigrated to the US at the age of ten to escape the Khmer Rouge. He is known for his large-scale photo-montages, where he weaves photographic strips into a tapestry of images that revolve around the theme of the Vietnam War. The resulting image is a rich, multi-faceted viewpoint of history and a reflection of our fragmented personal and collective memory.

## 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)**

### Beauty of Betta

**(16 June to 23 September)**

*Betta splendens*, more colloquially known as bettas or fighting fish, are popular as aquarium fish for their breath-taking beauty, despite their famously aggressive nature. During the colonial period, these tropical fish were considered exotic and Singapore, being an entrepot, imported and re-exported Bettas to countries all over the globe.

A collaboration between Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall and internationally renowned photographer Visarute Angkatavanich from Bangkok, Thailand, this exhibition showcases a selection of Visarute's stunning photographic works that perfectly capture the exuberant beauty of *Betta splendens*.

2018

17 MAY

BECOME A VOLUNTEER

# MUSEUM GUIDE



10am - 12noon  
**GALLERY THEATRE**  
**NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE**  
93 Stamford Road, Singapore 178897

**SHARE YOUR PASSION FOR CULTURE,**  
**EXPLORE THE WORLDS OF ART,**  
**KEEP ALIVE THE HISTORY.**

Join us to find out more about the 2018/19 Friends of the Museums docent training courses. For courses starting this September you can choose among training at the Asian Civilisations Museum, the National Museum of Singapore and the Indian Heritage Centre.