

PASSAGE

Friends of the Museums Singapore

September / October 2019



art
history
culture
people

President's Letter

Dear Friends,

Welcome back to all our members who were travelling over the summer months. I hope you had a rejuvenating time with your friends and families or simply a great vacation. While many docents were travelling, those who were in town took on multiple tours to ensure we met all our guiding commitments. And a special word of thanks to the Malay Heritage Centre and Asian Civilisations Museum docents for training local schoolchildren to give them a taste of what it is like to be a museum guide.

FOM docent training commences on 17 September. Over the past few months our training teams have been working hard to line up interesting lectures, activities and field trips for the upcoming sessions. If you are thinking of training to be a volunteer museum guide or docent, please get in touch with us. Spaces are still available at some of the museums.

Join us on 2 September for our Open Morning at 10:00 am at the Asian Civilisations Museum. FOM's activity group leaders and members will be on hand to share the many interesting programmes they have planned for the coming months. You might find an activity that you want to explore further. FOM Book Groups are planning a book swap so remember to bring along books to exchange. The Open Morning will be followed by a lecture at 11:00 am. The speaker for the day will be Patricia Bjaaland Welch, an expert on Chinese art and symbolism in art. She is the president of the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society and an FOM docent. Her topic will be *The Art of Protest: Old and New Examples from Chinese Art*. The talk will explore how messages of propaganda and dissent hidden in Chinese art for 2,000 years are now being discovered by scholars. The day's events are open to the public, so bring along any friends who are interested.

After the open morning, take time to visit the popular *Guo Pei: Art and Culture* exhibition, which is attracting a wide range of audiences from young children to seniors. Some visitors are fascinated by the designs, others by the connection to Singapore and some by the sheer effort taken to create these outfits. Be sure to take this opportunity to see some of the most interesting dresses up close before the exhibition closes on 15 September.

This September head down to the National Museum of Singapore to catch the special exhibition *An Old New World: From the East Indies to the Founding of Singapore, 1600-1819*. The exhibition explores the 200-year period leading up to Sir Stamford Raffles' establishment of Singapore as an entrepôt and how this shaped Singapore and its future. Many of the artefacts and exhibited materials will be on display for the first time.

We have said *au revoir* to many of our fellow docents, committee members and NHB supporters over the past couple of months. One of the people moving to take up a new role is Angelita Teo, who has served as the Director of the National Museum of Singapore (NMS) for the past six years. She has been appointed the new director of the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, Switzerland; the first Asian to be chosen for this position. Whether it is to take up a new role or move to a new country, I wish them well and hope they stay in touch with FOM wherever they are.

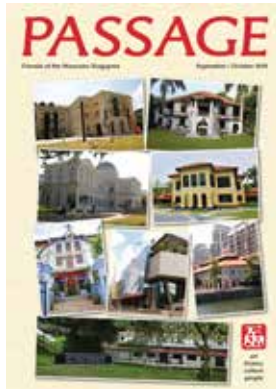
Deepavali, the Festival of Lights, is coming up in October. This is the perfect time to head down to Little India to see the lit-up streets, sample Indian food and visit the Indian Heritage Centre while you are there. In the meantime, do enjoy this annual 'Museums' issue of *PASSAGE*. This year docents tell us about their favourite artefacts from the museums in which they guide.

I wish everyone who is celebrating, a joyful Deepavali!



Garima G Lalwani
FOM President 2019





PASSAGE

A publication of
Friends of the Museums Singapore

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Printed and Designed by

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MICA (P) 108/01/2019

ISSN 1793-8619

UEN: T04SS0218E

Supported by



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Welcome PASSAGE

President's Letter

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On the Cover: A collage of photos of the eight museums featured in this issue of PASSAGE: the Asian Civilisations Museum, Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall, the National Museum of Singapore, the Malay Heritage Centre, NUS Baba House, the Indian Heritage Centre, STPI and Gillman Barracks.

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

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

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

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

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Three Historical Buildings

By Yusoff Abdul Latiff



The second storey corner unit of this apartment building at the junction of Chiku Road and Joo Chiat Place, was for a very long time the residence of the late Zubir Said, the composer of Singapore's national anthem, *Majulah Singapura*. On discovering that he had bought the late composer's home, my old friend, retired District Judge Abdul Rahim Jalil, decided to turn it into a museum dedicated to Zubir Said. To recreate the ambience of the 1950s and 60s he decorated the apartment with the solid teakwood furniture of that era. He even bought a mini grand piano to make it authentic. Zubir Said's daughter, Puan Sri Dr Rohana Zubir, a retired academic residing in Kuala Lumpur, was kind enough to loan him some of the late composer's personal paraphernalia, such as his tobacco pipe, a pair of glasses and musical score sheets. When the National Heritage Board declined their request for a plaque, Encik Rahim took the initiative to place one at the doorway. It reads, "Zubir Said, Singapore's music composer, resided at the above apartment from the 1950s till his death on 16 November 1987. *Majulah Singapura*, Singapore's national anthem, and numerous other songs were composed by him during his residence here". Encik Rahim hosted many visitors interested in the late composer's life. The new owner of the apartment, an American, has promised to retain its look and has even bought some of the furniture. Read more about Zubir Said on page 13.



The Peranakan Museum in the former Tao Nan Primary School building in Armenian Street, showcases historical and cultural artefacts of Peranakan culture. There are two schools of thought concerning the origin of the Peranakans. One is that they are the descendants of Princess Hang Li Po and her entourage. In the 15th century, the Chinese emperor sent her to marry the Sultan of Melaka. The other school says that the Peranakans are the descendants of Chinese men who immigrated to Penang, Melaka and Singapura and married local women. Currently, an exciting DNA study on the Peranakans is being carried out by the Genome Institute to help ascertain their true ancestry.

The Peranakans basically retained their Chinese culture and beliefs, but adopted and incorporated Malay features into their lifestyle, language, cuisine, attire etc. The Baba patois, for example, is creolised Bahasa Melayu with a large sprinkling of Hokkien and other dialect words and phrases. Despite westernisation, Mandarinisation and a de-emphasis on dialects and marriage between Peranakans and non-Peranakans, modern Peranakans are working hard to revive and promote this unique and interesting hybrid culture.



The Singapore Art Museum, established in 1996, is a museum and gallery touted as the hub of contemporary art in Southeast Asia. Its focus is on international contemporary art practices, with the emphasis on Singapore and Southeast Asia. The museum occupies the gazetted conservation premises of the former St Joseph's Institution in Bras Basah Road and the former Catholic High School in Queen Street. The main building of the museum is currently closed for renovations.

Yusoff Abdul Latiff is a retired teacher who now indulges in painting watercolours with a focus on intricate Peranakan houses, colourful landscapes and detailed portraits.

A Bird Like No Other

By Shivani Kanwal Kulpati

During a visit to the East Coast Park, a bird lover can often spot a number of different bird species, but there is one bird that captures most people's imagination. A sighting of this elusive bird leads to a flurry of interest, with watchers eagerly pointing it out to everyone around them, while others quickly capture the moment on their cameras. The bird in question is the hornbill. A majestic bird with wide wings and long tail feathers, it is often seen accompanied by its mate.

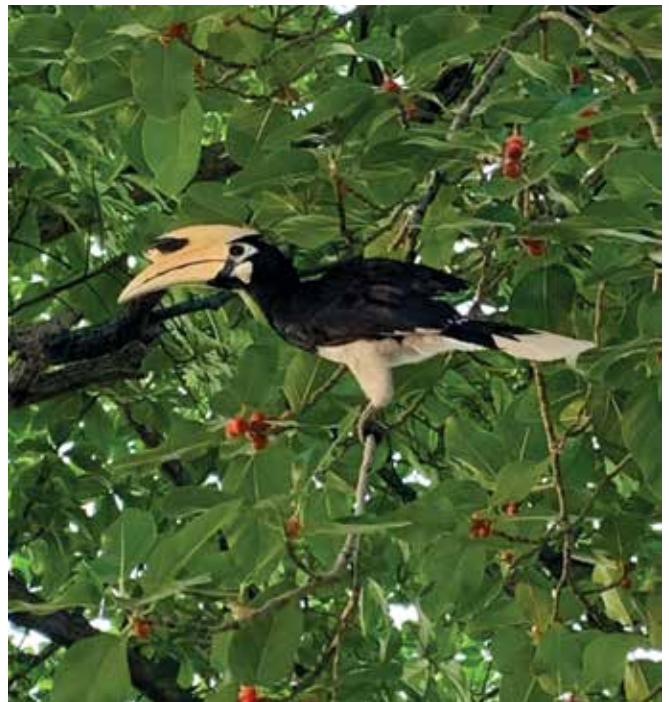
Hornbills belong to a family of birds native to the tropical and subtropical parts of Asia, Africa and Melanesia. Their trademark is the large 'double-storey' bill that consists of a long beak with a casque (projection) on top. This hefty bill is very useful as it helps the birds catch prey (insects and small animals); in nest construction; for fighting their enemies, and also for their vanity.

Of the 54 species of hornbills in the world, eight are found in Southeast Asia, with the Oriental Pied Hornbill being native to Singapore. Once on the verge of extinction here, these birds are increasingly being sighted in the wild in areas such as Pulau Ubin, the Sungei Buloh Wetlands and the East Coast Park. There have been some sightings in urban areas as well.



A hornbill perched near its nest, photo by Monica Gupta

The Oriental Pied Hornbill has black and white plumage with a yellow-white casque. The birds' call makes them easy to locate because it is a harsh cry, akin to a staccato cackling. Measuring up to 60 centimetres in length, the Oriental Pied Hornbill is the smallest of the Asian hornbill species, especially in comparison with its cousin, the Rhinoceros Hornbill, a huge bird measuring up to 90 centimetres in length.



A hornbill feasting on berries, photo by the author

Known as *Kenyalang*, the Rhinoceros Hornbill is a majestic bird that is the emblem of Sarawak, a Malaysian state in Borneo. Culturally, it holds an important place as the most revered bird of the Dayaks who consider it a bird of prophecy. For the Iban Dayaks, this bird symbolizes good omens and was believed to be a messenger between the human world and the heavens.

There is a carved image of this bird in the Ancestors and Rituals gallery at the ACM. According to Dayak legend, the designs that appear on elaborate hornbill carvings are divinely inspired and so is the use of colours such as red, blue, green, yellow and white. Hornbill effigies are the centerpieces of the *gawai kenyalang*, a ceremony that in former times, could only be sponsored by a prominent war leader or his descendants. In the past, this ceremony was associated with trophy-taking or headhunting. Although headhunting is no longer practised, the ceremony is still a major sacred rite and the carving of spectacular hornbill images continues to be an essential part of this event.

Whether seen as a carved image, in a cage or in the wild, the hornbill has a way of drawing attention to itself and an encounter with it is always an unforgettable and mesmerising experience.

For another story on hornbills, please see the Sept/Oct 2013 issue of *PASSAGE*, *Hornbills Make a Comeback*, by Heather Clark

Shivani Kanwal Kulpati loves walking along the East Coast Park and is particularly happy on the days she spots hornbills. A docent at the ACM, she's been guiding since 2013.

My Great-Grandfather's Clan House

By Jennifer Lim

When I arrived in Singapore seven years ago to learn more about my father's past, I never imagined I would uncover a personal connection to a Chinese clan house. I was surprised to discover that my great-grandfather helped fund the establishment of the Lim See Tai Chong Soo Ancestral Temple in 1928. I've been deeply moved by this distinctive building, which has inspired a research project about antique tiles.

A short time after relocating, I was unexpectedly asked to witness the exhumation of my great-grandfather's grave in Bukit Brown Cemetery. When I later shared my experience with a local Facebook group, history enthusiast Ang Yik Han uncovered a link between my family and the hall.

Upon visiting the hall, I was immediately attracted to the decorative tiles, cupolas and neoclassical columns. Designed by Westerhout & Oman, the free-standing building appears to have been purpose-built to serve three functions: a clan house, an ancestral hall and a temple dedicated to the Chinese sea goddess Mazu.

The extensive use of Majolica tiles, mosaics and mouldings is perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the hall, and I've counted around forty different kinds so far. The striking patterned floor tiles, Chinese gold-lacquer timber plaques and ornate Venetian mirrors create a unique mix of elements, locally known as *rojak*.



Recording details about decorative tiles at hall entrance. Photo by Finbarr Fallon

At the staircase entrance, a checkerboard of light coloured and dark coloured tiles creates a protective dado wall capped with a sea-green ceramic moulding. This opulent wall treatment can be seen on the ground and first floors and reaches an impressive visual pinnacle around the altar of the Jade Emperor.

The loveliest tiles in the hall, however, are to be found underneath the central display of ancestral tablets facing the entrance. A close inspection of the wall under the joss table revealed three unusual tiles, and although tarnished by almost a century of incense smoke, they still exude great beauty. These textured tiles feature designs unlike any I've seen so far in Singapore.



Lim Nee Yam, the author's great-grandfather, to the far left, in front of the entrance to the hall. Photo courtesy of the author

A delightful tiled mosaic of cute deer, a Shinto shrine and a lakeside cottage is located at the back of the hall. I suspect this mosaic was installed later on in the 1960s, and sourced from Hiromasa Emporium, a Japanese tile company famous for bathhouse scenery mosaics. Imaginary animals such as the phoenix and *qilin*, as well as traditional Chinese floral arrangements, can also be seen on tiles nearby.

It's been a life-changing experience getting to know the hall and its active members. I now feel more connected to my Chinese ancestors and the long history of antique tiles in Singapore.



Tiled mosaic with deer and lakeside scenery. Photo by Finbarr Fallon

Look out for my future article on decorative tiles in Bukit Brown Cemetery. If you'd like to know more about the Lim See Tai Chong Soo Ancestral Hall, join the upcoming tours with FOM's Explore Singapore! or the FOM/URA Chinatown Heritage Trails.

Jennifer Lim is an Australian-Singaporean artist, Japanese speaker and former docent at the Peranakan Museum. Discover a beautiful legacy of design and heritage through the Singapore Heritage Tile Project: www.jenniferlimart.com

The Birth of Singapore's Heritage Trail

By Juliana Lim

Today, there is a distinct cluster of museums and galleries in our Civic District and the Bras Basah Bugis Precinct, but how did it all begin?

Seizing the moment

We can trace Singapore's heritage trail's beginning back to July 1986. Upon learning of a Singapore Tourist Promotion Board plan (championed by its director, Pamela Lee) to submit a billion-dollar Tourism Development Product Plan to Cabinet in a month's time, a group of us decided to seize the moment. We submitted a plan highlighting how both arts and tourism could benefit from creating a heritage link, or a heritage trail – a trail of historical buildings that would house both arts and heritage activities.

We argued that a heritage trail would create space for arts and heritage, while making Singapore more interesting for its citizens and visitors alike. The idea was to select buildings that would be suitable for arts and heritage activities and



Historical photo of the Empress Place Building that now houses the ACM

preserve them as an interesting contrast to Singapore's modern skyline.

In our proposal, we defined the heritage trail as the area bounded by the Singapore River on the western side, Queen Elizabeth Walk on the southern, Fort Canning Park in the northern and Bras Basah on the eastern side. In terms of landmarks, the heritage trail would encompass the historical Fort Canning Park, Singapore River, the Padang, Parliament House, schools, churches and the museum buildings.

The first step would need to be the selection, earmarking and development of suitable historical buildings. Second, each area would have to be appropriately landscaped to enhance these buildings, which included sprucing up some of their neighbour(hood)s, while creating pedestrian malls and using shops and period restaurants to create a linked trail. Finally, we proposed placing period street furniture and signs at strategic locations to explain the history of the locales. To our surprise, we won the necessary support.

Identifying future spaces

Although the historical buildings were secured in the late 80s, the projects lay dormant until Shirley Loo-Lim joined the National Museum in 1990/91. At the time I was manning the Corporate Services Portfolio in the then-Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA) and between us and our very supportive Permanent Secretary Goh Lim Leong and Deputy Secretary Lim Siam Kim (who later became the first Chief Executive Officer of the National Heritage Board), we wrote the papers seeking funds for the restoration of the former St Joseph's Institution (SJI), Tao Nan School and the Empress Place Building. Minister George Yeo,



1887 view of Cavenaugh Bridge

who had a keen interest in all the projects, urged us to complete the projects quickly.

How did SJI become today's Singapore Art Museum (SAM)? One day, when Dr George MacDonald (whom Singapore had appointed as a museum development consultant) and I were driving around the Civic District, we passed SJI, which was already empty. Noticing its beautiful arches, I turned to Dr MacDonald and blurted out (imagining lines of sculptures peeping through the arches), "Wouldn't that make a nice art museum?" At that time, the National Art Gallery was housed in 10,000 square feet in the left wing of the National Museum in Stamford Road. SJI was found to have about six times that space, large enough to house both pioneer and contemporary artists and promote the arts. Convincing everyone wasn't easy and when a band of senior architects claimed that SJI was too small to be a modern art gallery, we placated them by securing the Catholic High School premises on Queen Street (now known as SAM at 8Q) as an extension.

We also proposed that the Tao Nan Primary School, which was sponsored by the old Hokkien Huay Kuan (clan association), be converted into a children's museum. At that time, the only museum space for children was a lovely little space called the Young People's Art Gallery in the National Museum¹ run by three education officers from the Ministry of Education, which had various child-craft workshops. But the Children's Museum didn't materialise as the building was later retrofitted by MITA to house the first Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) for the Chinese furniture and ceramic collections relocated from Hong Kong upon its 1997 handover to China. When the ACM moved into the Empress Place Building in 2003, the Tao Nan building became the Peranakan Museum.

We thought City Hall would make a good Constitutional History Museum as it housed the Surrender Chamber, but instead it has been re-purposed into our beautiful new National Art Gallery. (We even considered converting the Singapore Staff and Command College Building on Fort Canning into a MINDEF Defence and Security Museum and a National Political Museum.) We also proposed that the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (CHIJ), where I had attended pre-University classes, be converted into an arts centre. We thought that since the National Arts Council was soon to be formed, we could house the Council together with artists' studios within the school grounds. At the time, the MRT tunnel was being constructed right under it and the steeple was tilting – luckily, the Land Office rescued the stained glass and the pews in the nick of time.

We also restored the stretch of shophouses next to the Substation in Armenian Street to house National Heritage Board staff, including Dr Kenson Kwok, as well as the Friends of the Museums. They had been housed in containers behind the old National Library building. The



The original 1887 Raffles Museum, now the National Museum of Singapore

shophouses had lain dormant for years, their previous occupants having been a reptile product shop and the Sun Yat Sen Library. Arts consultant Marjorie Chu was enlisted to set up a museum gift shop.

We proposed other developments as well, but in the end, the costs of restoration were too high and we had to abandon some plans, including those for artists' studios in the grounds of the former CHIJ complex.

On reflection

We were lucky that so many of our ideas were approved within the ambit of the 1986 Tourism Development Product Plan spearheaded by the Ministry of Trade and Industry's Low Chin Nam and Pamela Lee. After Cabinet approval, I remember rounds of meetings at the STPB offices with Mrs Lee, the Urban Redevelopment Authority's Goh Hup Chor and Koh Wen Jin. There were thick sets of documents listing every building in the Civic District including City Hall, the Supreme Court, the Fullerton building and many others that we tried to find uses for.

In hindsight, I realise that we were very naïve. Today, we would engage consultants at exorbitant fees to undertake feasibility studies. In contrast, we acted on a dream, but our naïveté (ignorance is bliss) emboldened us to plunge into the important decisions being made at that time concerning Singapore's heritage. If we had not been hit by a recession in 1985, I fear these beautiful buildings might have been demolished and the empty plots of lands redeveloped into new, tall edifices with more generous plot ratios, such as the Raffles Institution site. Naïve or not, I'm glad we took the plunge.

Juliana Lim was an influential arts manager who has been instrumental in building today's vibrant arts scene since the late 1970s. She began her arts management journey in 1979, with the People's Association, joining the Ministry of Culture in 1981. As the former general manager of the Singapore Arts Centre Company, she helped develop the Esplanade theatres and remains active in a number of arts committees and societies.

¹ Originally the Raffles Museum, it was renamed the National Museum in 1969.

An Outdoor Museum – the New Armenian Street

By Gisella Harrold

The Peranakan Museum is closed for renovation; however, the new pedestrianised Armenian Street is open and is a treasure trove of sights and information.

In the 1828 Jackson Plan, this area is designated the “Botanical and Experimental Garden”. However, this botanical garden had its origins in a much earlier one, created on Government Hill by Sir Stamford Raffles as early as in 1819. By 1822, this garden had grown into the 19 hectares marked on the Jackson plan, which means it would have stretched from today’s Fort Canning Park to Mount Sophia (behind today’s Plaza Singapura).

Part of the garden was devoted to the preservation of native plants, but the focus was on the cultivation of plants of economic benefit, plants such as gambier, pepper and of course spices such as nutmeg and cloves, as well as tea and coffee. Soon after its establishment, the upkeep of the garden proved too much for the government. It was closed in 1829 and much of the land was used for public projects such as the construction of schools and hospitals and also the building that eventually gave the road its name, today’s oldest Christian Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church of Saint Gregory the Illuminator. In 1859 the Botanical Garden was re-established in its current location.

In the street today is a brand-new sculpture by Artush Papoyan, an Armenian artist. It depicts Singapore’s national



The interior of True Blue Space, a coffee shop within a shop

flower, the Vanda Miss Joaquim orchid. The orchid sculpture reminds us of Miss Joaquim, a skilled horticulturist who ‘created’ the world’s first hybrid orchid. A lesser known fact is that she also won awards for growing lilies and, opposite the patch of beautiful Vanda Miss Joaquim orchids, you can see Seashore Lilies. These beautiful flowers are not only of decorative value, but can be used to treat wounds, although care is needed because the bulb is poisonous.

Many of the flowers grown in this mini-botanical garden are sweet-smelling ones used for the *bunga rampay*, a potpourri used for Peranakan weddings and birthday celebrations. Shredded pandan leaves are combined with flowers from the champaca tree and with roses. These are not the only important flowers for Peranakan ceremonies, the white Frangipani is a symbol of the bride’s virginity, while on the eve of her wedding, Ixora or Jasmine flowers are attached for luck to the bride’s chignon, a popular hair knot



Armenian Street as it looks today



A basket of bunga rampay, potpourri for a wedding

at the nape of the neck. My personal favourite is the blue butterfly pea flower, add a couple of these flowers to a jug of water and it turns the water blue; add some lemon juice and it turns purple. This colouring is used for many Malay and Peranakan dishes such as *nasi kerabu*, herbed rice, or the little *Nonya kueh sarlat* (a cake). It is said to contain antioxidants similar to those of green tea.

If you continue your walk, you will find many herbs, spices and fruit ranging from pandan, lemongrass, kafir leaves, or *daun purut*, peppermint, the local version of oregano, pineapples and chillies. You can find out what a *buah keluak*, looks like. In Malay, the name literally means 'the fruit that nauseates'. This poisonous kernel is an important ingredient in the Peranakan

dish called *ayam buah keluak*, a special chicken curry. The tree grows in mangroves and the toxic seed was used by local tribes to immobilise fish while fishing. To make it edible for humans, the seeds need to be cleaned, boiled and then buried in ash and banana leaves for 40 days.

There are many more plants and their properties to discover, but there are also a couple of noteworthy buildings, which can be easily overlooked. One such building is 36/38 Armenian Street, a beautifully restored Art Deco shophouse built in the 1930s. It housed the popular Mayfair City Hotel, which in the 1950s, was a state-of-the-art hotel with air-

conditioned rooms, apparently very popular with Qantas Airlines crew members. One captain is said to have flown his crew to Singapore from Jakarta where they couldn't find air-conditioned rooms, in order to stay in the new Mayfair Hotel. It closed in 2000 and for a short time was used as accommodation for foreign workers. The building next to it is equally beautiful and once housed a coffee shop famous for its *char kway teow*, a rice noodle dish served at this coffee shop from the 1950s until recently. Today the shop's food stall can be found in Sengkang Hawker Centre.



Formerly the Malaya Publishing House building



A pineapple growing in the garden

Opposite these two building is the Substation, Singapore's first independent arts centre, located here since the 1990s. The building actually dates back to 1926 when it was an electricity substation and important in the distribution of electrical power. Over time it became obsolete, then arts activist and playwright Kuo Pao Kun came up with the idea of converting the empty building into what it is today. The garden space behind the main building is still a favourite place for both young and old to enjoy live music.

A couple of buildings farther down is 51 Armenian Street, another structure with a historical background. It was the home of the United Chinese Library (UCL), inaugurated in 1910 by Dr Sun Yat Sen himself. Its original location was in Boat Quay, but it was moved to Armenian Street in 1911. Sadly, Dr Sun missed its relocation because his ship was delayed.

The promotion of knowledge and culture wasn't the sole reason for the creation of the UCL; it also served to generate support for the revolution against China's Manchu rulers. At its peak the library housed about 50,000 books and more than 200 readers came daily. Night classes were offered here in addition to English and Chinese language classes. In 1985 the UCL moved to its new location in Cantonment Road. Today the former library is home to True Blue Space, a coffee shop within a shop selling all sorts of Peranakan items, including Peranakan fabrics, books and porcelain.

At the corner of Stamford Road is the MPH Building, built in 1908 to house the Methodist Publishing House. As the name suggests, it was originally founded to publish material for the Methodist Mission, but it soon expanded and outgrew its previous location. Surrounded by schools, the MPH building housed a bookshop, which proved to be so profitable that its original printing business was soon abandoned. The Malaya Publishing House later bought the company and Singaporeans started referring to the company by its acronym only. In 2002, the building was sold and its flagship bookstore was closed. Today, this gazetted building is leased to the Singapore Management University.

It is worthwhile taking a stroll through this newly developed area and discovering many more of Singapore's hidden secrets.



Part of Artush Papoyan's orchid sculpture

Gisella Harrold is an active member of FOM and over the years has organised and participated in many activities, including study tours. She is currently the coordinator of FOM-Curio.

All photos by the author

Barbarians at the Gate of Heaven

By Darlene D Kasten



Namban oratory; Japan, Momoyama period (1573–1615); Late 16th century. Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum

The oratory in the Christian Art in Asia gallery is a perfect example of East meets West. In the centre of the personal triptych shrine is an unsigned oil on copper painting of the Holy Family that is so faithful to western artistic style and execution that scholars cannot say with absolute certainty whether it was made in Europe or Japan. But there is no question about the provenance of the frame with double doors that open onto the image, like gates onto heaven. Expertly crafted of lacquered wood with inlaid mother-of-pearl and gold, it is traditional Japanese *urushi* (lacquerware).

The oratory is an example of *namban* art, the name used to describe Japanese art that was influenced by contact with the *namban*, or southern barbarians, the 16th and 17th century traders and missionaries from Europe. In particular, *namban* is associated with the Portuguese.

Christianity first arrived in Japan with Portuguese trade missions that established a port in Nagasaki, Japan in the 16th century. During this period Japan was divided into many competing feudal states. The earliest missionaries were Roman Catholic, the most famous of which was the Jesuit St Francis Xavier (1506-1552). The Jesuits appealed directly to the feudal lords (*daimyo*) for support and were granted permission to establish missions and to proselytise.

Shortly after their arrival, Jesuit missionaries founded dozens of schools and seminaries, including an art seminary (*Seminario dos pintores*) in Nagasaki. Here, Jesuits skilled in painting, engraving and sculpture taught western artistic techniques to young Japanese Christians in order to meet the demand for Christian images in newly built Japanese churches. It is likely our painting was made by one of these artists.

Painted in the style of 16th century Spanish and Flemish sacred Catholic art, the oratory shows Joseph and Mary gazing down on a slumbering baby Jesus. Below, is written the Latin phrase *Ego dormir et cor meum vigilat*. The phrase comes from the Old Testament of the Bible (Song of Solomon 5:2) and translates to "I sleep but my heart is awake." It

expresses the intensity of divine love within the human heart.

Rounding out the family portrait is Jesus' first cousin, a young John the Baptist who holds a banner with the phrase *Et ecce agnus Dei* (John 1:29), "Behold the lamb of God". Jesus as the Lamb of God connects his fate to the sacrificial offering of an unblemished lamb during the Jewish Passover. This specific reference alludes to the words spoken by John some 30 years later when he introduced Jesus to the world to start his public ministry.

Namban lacquerware (*namban shikki*) derived from both native styles and techniques and imported ideas and demands. The Jesuits requested new functional shapes and brought a taste for objects inlaid with mother-of-pearl, a technique that was common practice in India, another Portuguese trade partner. However, the Japanese craftsmen continued to incorporate their own decorative motifs in the surface decoration. Our oratory doors are decorated with birds in autumn maple and spring cherry blossom trees in mother-of-pearl inlay (*raden*) combined with flat sprinkled decoration (*hiramaki-e*) in gold. The outermost geometric border is another design element influenced by the Jesuits, a narrow scroll with symmetrically cut mother-of-pearl arranged in a square latticework pattern.

Japanese artists were gainfully employed in the creation of sacred art, and many conversions took place from the mid-16th to the mid-17th century. But when the tolerant warlords were overthrown, this acceptance of Christianity was replaced by intense persecution and a ban on Christianity that lasted 300 years in Japan.

Darlene D Kasten is a docent at the Asian Civilisations Museum and the Malay Heritage Centre. She recently completed the SOAS University of London summer study course, *A Secret Beauty: Japanese Lacquer*.

Enter the Luminescent World of Miya Endo

Inundated with light, radiating an aura of reverence

By Yvonne Sim



72 Seasons, 2019, pigment and urethane on aluminium, image courtesy of the Sundaram Tagore Gallery and the artist

Contemporary art today imitates contemporary life – mostly multi-sensory, vying for our attention because only the strongest statements or images hit the mark. It can be a bewildering and mind-numbing experience for the uninitiated to step into this domain.

While we struggle to understand the complexities of many artists' abstract concepts, Miya Endo descends upon the art scene like a breath of fresh air and sunshine in a foggy landscape.

Recently, the Sundaram Tagore Gallery at Gillman Barracks presented a solo exhibition of her paintings on metal, works on paper and leaf mandalas in 72 KŌ (seasons) according to an ancient Japanese calendar system. Under this system, 24 sub-seasons are divided into 72 micro seasons per year, with the changing of the light and passage of time.

The centerpiece of the exhibition is an awe-inspiring installation comprising 72 small metal paintings arranged according to the seasons. As you gaze upon the paintings from different angles, each one is transformed by the light falling onto it. You become one with nature, suspended in time and space, soaking in its glory. Miya calls this "a visual unfolding of time". Her work is experiential – you have to see it to experience its sublime beauty.

Miya's background and upbringing had a profound impact on her art. With a Japanese mother and an American father, she is a cross-cultural product of East and West. When growing up she divided her time between the redwood forests of California and a Buddhist temple in Japan where her grandfather was a priest. She also came from a lineage of sword-makers and was drawn to metals as a child. After completing her tertiary education in East Asia Studies and Buddhist iconography and imagery in American ivy-league universities,



Photo of the artist by Yiru Chen, courtesy of the Sundaram Tagore Gallery

she become an apprentice to a master metalsmith in Japan.

Using Japanese techniques and applying heat with chemicals, Miya transforms sheets of metal into a compliant medium for her painting, which reflects the light and breaks into soft gradients of colour. This captures the ephemeral essence of nature's beauty and seals it in a permanent form.

In another series of works, using leaves from the Bodhi tree to create mandalas, Miya delves into the idea of transition. The Buddha meditated under the Bodhi tree and gained enlightenment. Its leaves are bleached and intricately assembled into a geometric circle representing a mandala, fanning out in a gentle gradient according to shades of a chosen colour. This is a different take on the changing seasons and transformation. In Buddhist iconography, a mandala is a symbol of the universe and is traditionally used as a meditation tool.

In her work she hopes to communicate something that is open and welcoming. Her works have multiple layers and they are about the time spent making them, how the light changes as time shifts, and how we look at them through different lenses – but ultimately they are clear and easy to understand because we can all connect with nature. The process itself is a meditation for Miya, a devout Buddhist.

Note: FOM docents not only guide at museums but on Saturday afternoons, also at Gillman Barracks, a vibrant arts cluster with 11 private art galleries and home to the NTU Centre of Contemporary Art – a non-profit national centre which supports research, education and residencies for artists from this region. There is always something new to look forward to, be it a new exhibition every month or the bi-monthly *Art after Dark* Friday theme nights, meeting the artists in person and a host of art-related events.



Pink Mandala, 2018, dyed bodhi (ficus religiosa) skeleton leaves, monofilament, archival ragboard, image courtesy of the Sundaram Tagore Gallery and the artist

Yvonne Sim is a foodie, serial shopper, compulsive traveller and sporadic blogger. She guides at Gillman Barracks, the ACM and SAM (before it was closed).

Durga, Hinduism's Invincible Goddess

By Mathangi Venkatesh

The Early Contact gallery at the Indian Heritage Centre has an interesting collection of ancient bronze and stone sculptures from different parts of South and Southeast Asia. What captured my attention was an unfamiliar four-armed figure, standing tall, with feet slightly apart but firmly planted. She was delicately curved, with a beautifully chiselled face and long ear lobes, wearing a headdress that looked like a mitred cap. The folds of her skirt flowed down between her legs. This was a seventh century statue of the goddess Durga, from the Funan region.

The Durga I was familiar with is usually depicted as a fierce but calm-faced warrior with eight to ten arms, with a different weapon in each hand. She is dressed in a red sari and seated on a lion or tiger. This statue looked nothing like the one I knew. Upon closer inspection, I spotted a buffalo head relief at the statue's base, under her feet. This detail identified her as the goddess Durga in the form of Mahishasura Mardini (the buffalo demon slayer).

Durga is Hinduism's most powerful goddess and has an interesting creation story. Mahishasura, the King of Demons, received a boon from Brahma (the creator) after many years of penance. This boon protected him from any kind of being (god or human). Having gained this power, Mahishasura's reign of terror began. The *Devas* (divine beings) and *rishis* (sages) lived in fear and went to the gods pleading for protection. A great war ensued between the gods and Mahishasura, but the boon he'd been given made him invincible.

Using their collective energy, the gods created a woman and bestowed on her all their combined powers and their best weapons. They named her Durga the Invincible One. After a long and vicious battle, Durga vanquished Mahishasura, ending his reign of terror and restoring cosmic balance in the universe. This earned her the name Mahishasura Mardini and to this day, her victory is celebrated as a Durga *pooja* all over India, especially in north-eastern India.



The goddess Durga in the form of Mahishasura Mardini

How did Durga acquire this particular form? Where is Funan and how did this story travel there? Funan was one of the earliest Southeast Asian empires (from 245 to the sixth century CE) in the Mekong Delta region and covered large areas of present-day Cambodia and southern Vietnam. Strategically located on the trade route between India and China, it became a melting pot of cultures. Traders travelling between the subcontinent and this region exchanged ideas, religions, languages and artistic traditions.

This empire was rich in gold and jewels, had an established writing system and a legal code. The people here practised a religion that was a blend of Hinduism and local beliefs and customs. It was also a matriarchal society and the worship of goddesses was common practice. Perhaps that was why the story of Durga fascinated them. While adopting the new ideas that were coming their way, the people in these regions adapted them to their own beliefs and practices. This statue of Durga is proof of this phenomenon.

The story is from Hindu mythology, but Durga is depicted in a form that is characteristic of the aesthetics of the Funan

period. She is wearing a simple wrap skirt called a *samtan* (wrapped around the hip) and has a *kiritimukata* (headgear) with no other adornments.

This statue is just one example of the rich tapestry of links between South and Southeast Asia. The two regions started their interactions through trade, but over time they became woven together through the sharing of culture, religion, art and language. The many stories presented at the Indian Heritage Centre highlight the close links between the two regions and during your next visit be sure to explore and learn more about these interactions and how they helped shape the history of this region that we call home.

Mathangi Venkatesh is a newly minted docent at the IHC. She enjoyed her training and is now enjoying guiding.

Photo by the author

The Quiet Man Who Made Lasting Music

By Tang Siew Ngoh

This was no ordinary man or immigrant. Ahead of his time, he “held up the sky in the land he lived in” (from *Sayang di Sayang*) before he became a Singapore citizen. Born in Minangkabau in Sumatra, he died in 1987 aged 80, but his legacy and pioneering spirit persist till today.

Besides receiving numerous awards, this man has been honoured in other ways. He appears in *Stories of*

the Singapore Spirit (2011), had his caricature embedded in a Google Doodle (2014) on the 107th anniversary of his birth, and lives on in the Esplanade’s TributeSG digital archive of artists (2015). A play (2015) is named after the song he composed

in 1961 for the first celebration of Children’s Day, *Semoga Bahagia*, (May You Achieve Happiness).

It is also the Singapore Youth Festival’s theme song and is listed among songs that lower primary school pupils should learn to sing to appreciate local community and folk songs. More significantly, among some 1,500 compositions that he produced during the golden era of Malay movies, there is one special song that cemented his status in Singapore’s history. Who was this celebrated figure and what is the song? From the foregoing clues and images, you can easily guess that he was none other than Zubir Said, the composer of Singapore’s national anthem, *Majulah Singapura*.

The bust and piano in the photograph are displayed in the Malay Heritage Centre (MHC). The bronze bust of Zubir Said or Pak Zubir, as he liked to be known, was sculpted in 1960 by Chua Mia Tee (one of Singapore’s foremost artists) and installed in the MHC in 2004. The century-



Courtesy of brandrequests@google.com



Courtesy of Dr Geraldine Song



Ministry of Information and the Arts collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

old Strohmenger piano on which he composed *Majulah Singapura*, belonged to him.

In fact, Zubir Said is to Singapore what Rabindranath Tagore is to India and Bangladesh. Their compositions were not created to be the national anthems of these three countries. The phrase “Majulah Singapura” first appeared in 1948; it was the motto inscribed in a coat-of-arms approved for the Singapore Municipal Commission (renamed the Singapore City Council). It was translated from the English “May Singapore Flourish” and was so popular that a Singapore City Councillor suggested that “Majulah Singapura” should replace greetings such as ‘Hello’ or ‘Good morning’.

As recommended by Mayor Ong Eng Guan, in July 1958 the secretary of the Singapore City Council invited Pak Zubir to write a song to the theme of “Majulah Singapura” (which was then translated as ‘Onward Singapore’). It was to be the grand finale of the concert that on 6 September 1958 marked the re-opening of the refurbished Victoria Theatre.

It is said that a friend’s description of Singapore as a place of “glittering lights, *kopi susu* and butter” first drew Pak Zubir to Singapore in 1928. However, it was the glittering light display of “Majulah Singapura” across the Victoria Theatre’s façade in 1958 which moved him so deeply that he composed the song within two weeks. Following its inaugural performance at the Victoria Theatre, the song was chosen to mark Singapore becoming a self-governing state in 1959. Pak Zubir had managed to shorten the melody and use simpler words more readily understood by all the races in Singapore and thereby express the spirit, unity and progress of its people.

The revised *Majulah Singapura* was presented as Singapore’s national anthem on 3 December 1959, during the inauguration of Inche Yusof bin Ishak as the Yang di-Pertuan Negara, (Head of State). “The boy who wanted to play music, was finally a man in his father’s eyes” (from *Sayang di Sayang*) describes the father-son relationship when Pak Zubir’s 101-year-old father witnessed this momentous event. “Majulah Singapura” not only united the people of Singapore but also became the bridge for a father-son reconciliation. Lasting music of various genres has given Pak Zubir a reputation greater than the one he might have achieved had he succeeded his father as the village chieftain.

His daughter, Dr Rohana Zubir, feels that ‘Zubir Said Drive’ (the address of the School of the Arts) was very aptly named in 2009 because Pak Zubir had a surfeit of drive. May this inspire the school’s students to have Zubir Said’s passion and spirit.

Tang Siew Ngoh guides at five museums, including the Indian Heritage Centre, the Malay Heritage Centre and the Peranakan Museum.

Abraham Ortelius' Map of Southeast Asia

By Kwan Min Yee

One of the earliest cartographic references to Southeast Asia can be found in a Renaissance map in the National Museum of Singapore's History Gallery. This map of the 'East Indies and Surrounding Islands', (*Indiae Orientalis, Insularumque Adiacentium Typus*) was created in 1570 by a Flemish geographer and cartographer named Abraham Ortelius (1527-1598), one of the 53 maps published in his atlas, *Theatre of the World, (Theatrum Orbis Terrarum)*. Today, the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* is widely acknowledged as the world's first modern atlas.

While the *Indiae Orientalis* features navigational information such as latitude lines, the Tropic of Cancer, the Equator and the four cardinal directions, the map was never intended to serve as a navigational guide or for the planning of trade routes. Instead, it was published as a decorative map to appeal to a wide audience for general reference and was often used for display, as a symbol of status and intellectual curiosity.

As a consequence, the map is elaborately decorated with meticulous attention to detail. Bright colours demarcate the boundaries of different regions and countries, with the names and locations of land masses and cities painstakingly labelled. Reliefs such as mountain ranges, rivers and lakes are shown pictorially. Off the coast of America, two large sea monsters menace a disabled ship; in the distance, two sirens brush their hair and preen themselves with seashell mirrors held in their hands. Scholars believe that illustrations of sea creatures in maps such as this were included to symbolize the dangers and perils of voyages into uncharted seas.

Peering at the *Indiae Orientalis* feels as though one is looking through the lens of time at a bygone era. The map tells the story of a period when the region was dominated by the Portuguese, as suggested by its coat of arms emblazoned in the map's top left-hand corner. We see familiar countries and cities, although not completely accurately depicted. The islands of the Philippines are incomplete, Sumatra and Java are heavily distorted and Taiwan (*Fermosa*), mapped for the very first time, is located among Japan's *Lequio* islands.

One of the reasons for these discrepancies is the fact that 16th century Southeast Asian maps were often produced based on the accounts of explorers and included cartographic speculation. Ortelius himself created the *Indiae Orientalis* using information gleaned from different Portuguese, Spanish and Italian sources available at that time. The location of Australia, labelled *BEACH, pars continentis Australis*, on the map's southern border, is said to have been based on the travels of Marco Polo.

More interestingly, the text on the scroll banner reveals that the focus of the *Indiae Orientalis* was the present-day Spice Islands, described as the "famous Moluccas islands ...



The *Indiae Orientalis, Insularumque Adiacentium Typus* map

exporting all over the world a great abundance of fragrant spices". It speaks of the region's significance to the European powers, who were then vying for sea routes in hopes of securing monopolies over the lucrative trade in pepper, cloves and nutmeg.

At the same time, the *Indiae Orientalis* reveals that the Malay Archipelago had been part of an age-old maritime trading system between India and China. Within the archipelago, settlements along the Melaka Straits were hubs where ships transitted to restock their supplies and distribute their goods.

One of those settlements, inconspicuously identified as *Cincapura*, can be recognised as present-day Singapore, but seems to refer to a settlement at the southern tip of the Asian mainland, and not an island.

In spite of its inconsistencies, the *Indiae Orientalis* is one of the most fascinating artefacts in the museum. In it, if we care to look, are stories of exploration, political rivalry and trade and we rediscover the story of Singapore's historical connections with the region and its role in the crossroads of East-West maritime trade.

If the *Indiae Orientalis* piques your interest, be sure to check out the special exhibition, *An Old New World*, opening 21 September at the National Museum of Singapore.

Kwan Min Yee is a first-year docent at the National Museum of Singapore and currently serves as the training co-head at the museum.

Photo by the author

Peranakan Cultural Eclecticism

By Donald-Eric Lim



The two-tone marble bust by Giuseppe Bessi entitled *Primo Amore*

When I was asked to write this article on my favourite artefact in the NUS Baba House, one object immediately came to mind. Of the almost 2,000 artefacts in this heritage house, my favourite is, without a doubt, the marble bust titled *Primo Amore*, by Professor Guiseppe Bessi.

Bessi (1857 – 1922) was an Italian sculptor famed for his lifelike busts and sculptures. He studied at the *Accademia di Belle Arti* in Florence and in 1879, founded his own workshop in Volterra in Italy's Tuscany region. Volterra is famed for its alabaster and Bessi used this as well as marble and onyx as mediums for many of his works, which can be found in the collections of museums such as the Hermitage in St Petersburg.

Well-known for combining Neoclassicism and Art Nouveau forms in his works, which often depicted ladies with pensive expressions, *Primo Amore* being one such example, Bessi would also engrave a woman's name on the plinths of such busts. However, for this particular work, he chose the Italian words *Primo Amore* meaning 'First Love'. Carved from marble of two different colours, the bust depicts a young woman wearing a scarf over her hair, her head tilted slightly towards her right, with a single braid tumbling down her right shoulder. She is dressed in a tunic with a floral pattern at the top of the bodice. The dark, mottled marble of her creased tunic, contrasting with the smooth pale marble of her face, gives her a slight translucency that is comparable to living skin. She appears to be in a reflective mood, perhaps Bessi intended for it to seem as if she were thinking of her lover, the eponymous title of this work.

The bust was donated to the NUS Baba House by Ms Agnes Tan and curiously, is prominently displayed on a brown and gold teak sideboard in the house's Ancestral Hall. It reminds me of the marble busts and sculptures I saw many years ago in villa interiors while on holiday in Italy with my parents. Those artworks looked appropriate displayed within the interior of a Baroque or Rococo-style hall. However, *Primo Amore* with its clear European style, appears out of place amongst the carved lintel and corbels featuring Chinese motifs – the late Qing Dynasty marble and mother-of-pearl inlaid blackwood furniture; the Nyonya-ware and the

ancestral portraits. I am drawn to *Primo Amore* for this precise reason. Its stark 'European-ness' in an otherwise deeply Chinese setting, embodies the cultural eclecticism of the Peranakan Chinese around the early 20th century.

Often referred to as the "King's Chinese" because of their allegiance to the British crown, Peranakan Chinese readily embraced Western culture and an English education as they regarded those as a springboard to economic and social advancement. Prominent Peranakan Chinese were thus able to secure administrative and civil service appointments in the colonial government. They also adopted the accoutrements of a colonial-inspired lifestyle; these would have included 'modern' equipment such as gramophones and radios, decorative objects such as crystal vases, porcelain figurines and naturally, busts such as *Primo Amore*. Each of these items signalled an inclination towards the propriety of Western culture and accordingly, a desire for an elevated status in society.

Altogether the co-mingling of furniture, tchotchkes, and other functional items of vastly different provenances create what has been described as a "fashionably cluttered ambience", typical of a wealthy Peranakan Chinese family in the 1920s. It is uncommon to come across contemporary dwellings that display such opulent and intricately designed furnishings. The interiors of the NUS Baba House are unique in showcasing objects displayed in their original context, rather than relegating them to glass showcases. As a docent, I have often heard visitors comment how this lends a very authentic lived-in ambience to the house. *Primo Amore* is but one of the many singular and rare objects that can be seen in the house – join us for one of our Heritage Tours or self-guided visits to experience the NUS Baba House for yourself.

Donald-Eric Lim has been involved with NUS Baba House since 2006 and has been described, among various other monikers, as a ceramic artist.

Photo taken by Olivia Kwok for NUS Baba House

Double Trouble at STPI

By Sue Sismondo

STPI docents have an unusual guiding challenge: exhibitions that change every six weeks, year after year. This cascade of exhibitions feature the work produced at STPI by the Artists in Residence. Once-a-year special exhibitions, such as the current Takashi Murakami one, are in the gallery a bit longer, eight to 10 weeks. It's a continual learning opportunity.

Happily, the main workshop provides a less changeable anchor for the tour. It is here where the multi-step and exacting process of producing prints can be understood, and where visitors can better appreciate the skill of artists and printers. This workshop is STPI's unique distinction.

The eight presses in the workshop originally belonged to Kenneth Tyler, the pioneering American printer who was one of the moving forces behind the renaissance of fine art printmaking in America in the latter half of the 20th century. It was in Tyler's workshops that some of the iconic works of that period were produced by artists such as Frank Stella, Robert Rauschenberg, Helen Frankenthaler and David Hockney.



Two views of Double Trouble, photos by the author

Each workshop press thus has an amazing history (if they could talk...). Most were customised by Tyler to facilitate the special requirements of the artists whose work he produced. For instance, in the workshop's centre stands a tall, dual-process press used for lithography or intaglio printing. Tyler built the press specially to produce large works by James Rosenquist who early in his career, worked as a billboard painter, which forever influenced the size of his work. Because the press was initially quirky and troublesome, Rosenquist dubbed it "Double Trouble". It was on Double Trouble that his iconic series *Welcome to the Water Planet* (1988-89) was printed, along with *House of Fire* and *Time Dust* (1992). These huge paper works also required customised printing plates – at least one foot longer than the standard – and Tyler built a special frame to produce the sheets of



Do Ho Suh's large Karma Juggler print, 2010, image courtesy of STPI

paper required. Versions of some of these stunning prints are part of Singapore's National Collection and were last on exhibition at STPI in 2009.

Double Trouble was also the choice of press for the largest etching yet produced at STPI: Do Ho Suh's *Karma Juggler* (2010), which measures 277 X 155 centimetres. Producing large-sized prints is a challenge as preparation becomes ten times more difficult, according to Oh Thiam Guan, STPI assistant project leader and senior printer-at-large. "The process becomes an entirely different beast," he says. And printing is just the final step, preceded by the elaborate and challenging process of preparing the plates. When the print is as large as *Karma Juggler*, the routine steps in the process of preparing the plate for printing often need customised solutions requiring time-consuming trial and error experimentation by the workshop staff.

A meticulous attention to detail was also required to create the multitude of perfect circles for *Karma Juggler* and to prepare the printing plate: "Just polishing the plate took the workshop staff a week," says Guan. "The artist wanted no other mark discernible on the final print other than his drawing – a nearly impossible task when printing from a copper etching plate." Also, the print is one-colour, but had to be printed using two plates because of its size and the restrictions of the photo-etching process. This painstaking detail work by the workshop staff in collaboration with the artist, produced an effortless result, which is printmaking at its most accomplished.

And is the press still troublesome, I wondered? "The press does its job," says Guan. Turns out it's the prep work that is the real double trouble.

Sue Sismondo, a docent at STPI since 2004, enjoys interpreting the technical aspects of printmaking for visitors. The Double Trouble press is a favourite landmark.

The Backstory of a Spent Artillery Shell

By Millie Phuah

This spent artillery shell sits in the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall as a poignant reminder of Chinese civilisation at a crossroads. It's a remnant of the 1911 Wuchang Uprising, which led to the end of Imperial China. The shell was a gift to Lim Peng Siang in Singapore from a Shanghai banker, as a souvenir of the uprising (also known as the Xinhai Revolution). The inscription reads "1st January 1912, first year of the Republic of China". But I'm not entirely sure if Lim was delighted by the gift.

The backstory

1911 had been a very hectic year for Lim, a Hokkien tycoon born in Amoy (now Xiamen). He was running the Ho Hong Company, an early Singapore conglomerate with diverse interests. At the same time, he was working to set up a bank that would serve the growing needs of the local community – the Chinese Commercial Bank, established in 1912. As a prominent community leader, Lim was active in the General Chinese Trade Affairs Association, the predecessor of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce (SCCC) before 1917. In fact he was its president in 1913. That would make Lim Peng Siang a staunch reformist supporter and not a supporter of revolutionary leader Dr Sun Yat Sen.

The only form of political involvement available to the Chinese in Singapore was the politics of a China in transition, but it also divided them. Before 1911, the pro-monarchy reformist faction led by Kang Yu Wei competed with the pro-revolutionaries led by Dr Sun for the hearts, minds and wallets of the affluent overseas Chinese to further their political activities in China.

The more prominent and wealthy were found within the ranks of the SCCC, which came under the influence of reformist Kang. Many were also scions of the Straits-born Chinese community (not synonymous with Peranakan Chinese), who also gathered under the umbrella of the Straits Chinese British Association. These elites were understandably more conservative. In contrast, supporters of the revolution and members of Sun's *Tongmenghui* (Chinese Revolutionary Alliance) tended to be the working classes and new immigrants, albeit with wealthy leaders such as Teo Eng Hock, Tan Chor Lam and Lim Nee Soon, who were after all, crucial to providing the finances for the revolution. Singapore was at one time the *Tongmenghui's* Southeast Asian or Nanyang headquarters.

Moving Forward: Aftermath of 1911 in Singapore

There was general jubilation and queue-cutting in the streets of Chinatown. The successful revolution was a major boost to the morale of the Chinese, whatever their political ideals. Dr Sun's last visit to Singapore on 15 December 1911, while on his way back to China after Wuchang, was a high point. He encouraged the Chinese to continue supporting the revitalisation of China, social change and economic development.

The pro-reform and pro-revolution groups jostled to redefine their purpose. The fault-lines lived on in the



The spent artillery shell, photo by the author

economic sphere as they competed in raising funds for the new China. Teo Eng Hock and other *Tongmenghui* members set up a rival organisation to the SCCC, called the Chinese Merchants General Chamber of Commerce.

Politically, there were differences of opinion with regard to the first president of the new China, Yuan Shikai (Dr Sun was the provisional president). The SCCC supported Yuan. By December that year, the previously quasi-secret *Tongmenghui* itself was reinvented as a bona fide political party, the Singapore Lodge of the Peking Kuomintang (KMT).

The SCCC responded by setting up a Singapore branch of the Republican Party, which opposed the KMT in the first National Assembly elections in China. The post-1911 political arena was complex, as was its virtual proxy in Singapore. The warlord era and the civil war between the KMT and the Communists post World War Two led to the eventual victory of Mao's Communist Party and the exile of KMT's Chiang Kai Shek to Taiwan.

In Singapore, there was a gradual disillusionment with Chinese politics. It was perhaps a lost cause after all. Local politics took over the hearts and minds of the Chinese post-war when it became clear Singapore was going to be home.

Millie Phuah is a docent at the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall. She has discovered that her great-grandfather worked for Lim Peng Siang and was a founding member of the Singapore branch of the Republican Party.

Through the Looking Glass: Underwater Museums

By Georgia Socha

Underwater Cultural Heritage represents all traces of human existence that can be found underwater, stretching from ancient trading vessels to modern war graves; from prehistoric settlements submerged by a rise in sea levels to Roman bath houses sunk by volcanic activity. Because of this, the seabed is often referred to as the greatest museum on earth. With the invention of the self-contained underwater breathing apparatus (SCUBA) in 1943, underwater museums opened to the public for the first time, and revolutionised the capacity and capability of all underwater practices.

The issue with the open museums, however, is that there are few cohesive laws between states to effectively monitor them. As with land archaeology, underwater archaeology faces critical issues with treasure hunting and blurred boundaries between archaeologists and treasure hunters.

In the case of underwater archaeology, some of these issues are amplified. Firstly, the ocean remains a notoriously difficult environment to convey to the public. Secondly, it is an environment in which regulating policy and law can be extremely difficult to develop, agree on and enforce. These factors make preserving our underwater cultural heritage arguably one of the most urgent cases for alternative museum structures – as well as one of the most difficult to achieve.

The UNESCO 2001 *Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage* sets out basic principles and practical rules for activities related to underwater cultural heritage. The main principles include the obligation to preserve, with *in situ* preservation as the first option; no commercial exploitation; and to promote training and information sharing. With this in mind and to tackle the issues presented above, methods of preservation and public engagement have been a major focus in recent years. New advances in 3D modelling have allowed us to go on virtual reality SCUBA dives in the deep sea. New technologies in salvage have allowed us to raise whole ships in custom-built enclosures so archaeologists may excavate with an audience. It is clear that the traditional museum structure must evolve to effectively preserve and share information – particularly in increasingly complex environments such as these.

The Black Sea Maritime Archaeology Project

The Black Sea Maritime Archaeology Project (Black Sea MAP, 2015 onwards) is one of the largest multidisciplinary maritime archaeology projects ever attempted. The aim of the project is to understand how sea level rise affected people over time by reconstructing prehistoric and historic landscapes. Two remotely operated vehicles (ROVs) were used: one equipped with high resolution cameras for photogrammetry, the other with geophysical survey tools to investigate the seabed (Figs 1 and 2). So far, the team has surveyed an area of 2,000 square kilometres, at depths of up to 2,200 metres, recovered 92 geological core samples



Fig 1. Havila Subsea deploying the SROV Surveyor Interceptor (Joakim Holmlund, MMT, BS MAP)

and discovered over 60 shipwrecks from the empires of the Greeks, the Romans and the Ottomans including the oldest intact shipwreck discovered to date (Fig 3).

Deep water archaeology is a challenging topic on many levels, primarily because the technologies have only recently been available to even attempt it. Raising wrecks has been, and still is, largely impossible at such depths because the process would be far too destructive. Moreover, survey techniques are dramatically limited by SCUBA diving depth limits – which stand at only 40 metres for recreational divers. This novel use of photogrammetry to construct 3D models of deep-sea shipwrecks has allowed archaeologists to survey and analyse wrecks at any depth, from anywhere in the world, within a few hours of discovery (Fig 4). Archaeological survey techniques are non-invasive, and the wrecks can be monitored over time to assess preservation.

These advances have even wider implications for exciting new methods of public education and engagement. The models were adapted for use in Virtual Reality (VR) goggles at science and music festivals, museums, schools and events



Fig 2. ROV Pilots (MMT) deploying ROV in the Black Sea (Georgia Socha, BS MAP)



Fig 3. Greek merchant vessel, C.400 B.C. (BS MAP - Rodrigo Pacheco-Ruiz)



Fig 4. A photogrammetric model of a Roman wreck lying in 2,000 metres of water (BS MAP)

to bring deep-sea diving to children, students and people with no previous connection to the sea. 3D printers were brought on a public engagement roadshow to print tangible shipwreck models in real time (Fig 5). The process was effectively a moveable museum with no artefacts (Fig 6).

The Guangdong Maritime Silk Road Museum

An interesting contrast to the non-invasive techniques of the Black Sea MAP is the case of the Guangdong Maritime Silk Road Museum (Nanhai No 1 Museum) in Yangjiang, Guangdong Province, China. Nanhai No 1 is an exceptionally preserved wooden merchant ship of the Southern Song Dynasty and is an important addition to the history of the Maritime Silk Roads of ancient China. The wreck was raised in 2007, 20 years after its discovery, along with 60-80,000 artefacts.



Fig 5. 3D Models on display to the public (Danielle Newman, BSMAP)

To raise the wreck, the 'Whole Piece Salvage Scheme' designed a bottomless steel container to be placed over the wreck and into the seabed. A floor was inserted, and the wreck was lifted whole. This is not the first whole salvage of a shipwreck; we see similar examples with the *Vasa* in Sweden and the *Mary Rose* in Britain. The uniqueness of this event lies with the museum in which it was held. When recovered, the wreck was placed into an aquarium simulating the environment in which it was found. In this case, the wreck has been dried out to undergo excavation. However, there are other cases such as the *Amsterdam* (1749) and the *London* (1665) for which it was proposed that they be excavated within an aquarium, under the public gaze.

There is often a missing narrative between archaeological excavations and the museum display cabinet. In this example, we see the problem solved by putting archaeologist and artefact on display together. To take this further, visible relationships between archaeologists and museums conquer a number of the issues associated with the misinterpretations between archaeologists and treasure hunters. Morals, ethics and excavation techniques are under constant criticism and

are used as a public spectacle. As such, the link from sea to museum is painted within the mind of the observer; leaving less room for blurred ethical boundaries.

Museum Structures

By comparing the Black Sea MAP's 3D models with the Nanhai No 1 Aquarium we can see two ends of the alternative museum spectrum. Alongside the guidelines of the UNESCO 2001 Convention and the morals, ethics and methodologies of the underwater archaeological discipline, this spectrum is placed within a clear set of boundaries for excavation, preservation and information sharing. Considering this, new advances in technology, research and of course, politics, allow us to make informed decisions on how to stretch these boundaries, and thus the museum is challenged to evolve further.



Fig 6. A rendered model derived from the photogrammetric recording of a medieval wreck in 1100m of water (BS MAP - Rodrigo Pacheco-Ruiz)

Here lies the key: technological advances and the traditional museum structure must evolve together. The examples discussed show that if used correctly, coherence between researchers, museums, policy makers and the public can advance the discipline and tackle the critical issues of preservation and engagement. Whether considering underwater or terrestrial cultural heritage, the museum – and how we shape the modern enhancements and alternatives to its traditional boundaries – lies at the centre of this debate.

Georgia Socha is an interdisciplinary marine scientist interested in the sustainable protection of our oceans. She is currently completing her PhD with the University of Southampton specialising in how to protect complex underwater environments with both natural and cultural significance.

Murals as an Outdoor Museum

By Angie Ng

Mural art is an essential form of storytelling that uses the fabric of a city as its canvas. This allows the context of the art to be as meaningful as its content. At their best, murals offer creative expression that crosses class and social barriers. They add colour and character to a neighbourhood. Murals dotted throughout a city can often act as outdoor museums, open 24 hours free-of-charge to everyone. Studies show they can counteract the negative mental effects of an inner-city concrete jungle and even enhance public safety by creating the feeling that a place is cared for – the corollary to the ‘broken windows’ theory.



One of Yip Yew Chong's murals, photo by the author

Some of the earliest examples of mural art are the cave paintings found in Lascaux, France. These were created by Palaeolithic humans some 15,000 to 17,000 years ago, using mineral pigments that depict bison, horses, hand stencils and abstract signs. The full meaning is now lost to time, but we can speculate about possibilities; they may have been art for art's sake. However, it is more likely that their purpose



Azlan Ramlan's mural, photo by the author

went beyond beauty and were instead records or rituals. Fast-forward several millennia to the ancient Egyptians who decorated tomb walls with depictions of war and celebration. The ancient Greeks and Romans also painted epic murals to commemorate battles and histories to preserve their culture, status and identity. Part of their effectiveness was that

messages could reach even the illiterate. In contemporary times, the Banksy murals subvert tropes and cause controversy wherever they show up. They point out ironies, call out hypocrisies, and start conversations about the events of our time.

Graffiti and Singapore have had a tenuous relationship, but in recent years, the city's streets have seen an increase in mural art with its value gaining more and more traction and attention. Its recognition as a collective repository for a society's memories has boosted the profile of some very interesting street artists in Singapore. The themes and visual styles span a whole spectrum, from current to historical and from realistic to stylised. Take the street murals of Yip Yew Chong, for instance. His life-sized heritage scenes of bygone times are dotted all over the city. In particular, the locations of his murals often relate to the scenes in his paintings. For example: *Bird Singing Corner* in Tiong Bahru and *Thian Hock Keng Mural* on the rear wall of the Thian Hock Keng Temple in Telok Ayer Street relate directly to their immediate surroundings. His slightly cartoonish and romanticised versions of the past seem to blend sights, smells, tastes and sounds. They tell snippets of Singapore's history and are also very Instagram-friendly.

Then you have the artist Azlan Ramlan, also known as Ceno2. He creates larger-than-life dynamic portraits in context. His subjects usually have a cheeky grin, knowing expression, or are caught in a moment of hilarity. Whether in Boat Quay, Haji Lane, or Tampines Hub, his giant portraits bring you face-to-face with the humanity of the location. Contrast this with the work of Zul Othman, known as Zero. His works express the human experience through images, like his *Working*



Zul Othman's Working Class Hero of Rajinikanth in Hindoo Road, photo by Gisella Harrold

Class Hero mural of Rajinikanth in Hindoo Road, a nod to all the migrant construction workers who have built much of Singapore. With a fellow street artist who goes by the name of Antz, he formed the RSCLS collective, a network of street artists across Asia for more ambitious projects that cross borders. Look out for all the beautiful street murals in Singapore the next time you're out and about.

Angie Ng has called Singapore home for nine years while practising architecture and now guides the Chinatown Heritage Trail and also co-founded Art of a Sudden, urban sketching workshops.

A Dream Factory and Singapore's First Feature Film

By Jocelyn Lau

In July 1926, Liu Beijin (1902–1959), a wealthy and enterprising young Chinese entrepreneur based in Muar, Johor, established a small film production studio in Singapore. The eponymous Nanyang Liu Beijin Independent Film Production Company was the country's very first filmmaking business.



Actors at the Victoria Theatre holding copies of the *Xin Ke* programme, by Dan Wong

For the administrative work, Liu set up an office at 12 Pekin Street in Chinatown, on the third floor of a shophouse. In addition, he rented a bungalow at 58 Meyer Road in Katong, in the island's eastern suburbs, to serve as his film studio. Liu wanted to produce Chinese films with a *Nanyang* (Southeast Asian) flavour, using talented actors from Singapore and Malaya.



Liu Beijin (standing) and a friend posing with Liu's latest car. Photo taken in or near Muar, circa 1932. Photo courtesy of the Liu Kang family collection

He had two main purposes: the first was to inform his fellow Chinese in mainland China about life and customs in *Nanyang*, where hundreds of thousands of immigrants were making a living. The second and more ambitious, was to use film as a medium to inform people in Singapore and Malaya of the ill effects of pastimes that were prevalent at the time – in particular opium smoking, gambling and prostitution. The film would also incorporate many social activities and the practices of those days, including those of the rich socialising in private clubs and girls being married off long before they were 20 years old.

On 4 March 1927, after four months of intensive filmmaking, Liu's company released the silent feature *Xin Ke* (The New Immigrant, directed by Guo Chaowen), at the

Victoria Theatre, amid much excitement and anticipation in the countries' literary and artistic circles. Telling the story of a fresh Chinese immigrant's experiences in Singapore and Malaya, the movie was to have been nine reels in length, with a dramatic conclusion – the abduction of the bride and fatal end for the villain. Sadly, success would elude Liu because the film authorities censored the final three reels of the film, leaving the story without an ending.

After this failed public screening, Liu moved his film studio to another seaside bungalow, this time in the western outskirts of Singapore at 333 Pasir Panjang Road. He had planned to produce a second feature, *A Difficult Time* (also directed by Guo Chaowen), and shooting was underway when Liu was forced to permanently close the company in May 1927. He cited family reasons.



Liu's studio headquarters at 58 Meyer Road, by Dan Wong

What is the story of *Xin Ke* about?

A new immigrant, Shen Huaqiang, arrives in Malaya for the first time and is greeted by his wealthy Peranakan relatives. He is lucky, as many of his counterparts from China are impoverished, uneducated coolies who upon their arrival in Nanyang, find themselves trapped into indentured labour. By contrast, Shen's relative, Zhang Tianxi, helps him settle down, and locate a job in Singapore, where through hard work Shen rises through the ranks. Shen also becomes close friends with Zhang's daughter, Huizhen, who attends school in Singapore. However, he's not without a rival – his colleague, a Peranakan clerk named Gan Fusheng is jealous and will stop at nothing to win the affection of the girl he desires. The story *Xin Ke* is set in the turbulent period of mid to late 1920s Singapore, which even as the colonial and Peranakan elites prospered, was rife with gangster activities and nationalistic programmes by Kuomintang supporters based in the country.

This article was written with the help of film researchers Toh Hun Ping and Yvonne Ng Uhde who, along with Jan Uhde, was one of the authors of the book *Xin Ke: The Story of Singapore and Malaya's First Feature Film*.

Jocelyn Lau is an editor, writer and publisher. She edited *Xin Ke* together with film researcher Toh Hun Ping and translation editor Lucien Low.

Get Curio(us)

By Darlene D Kasten

The lazy summer holidays are over. It's time to get curious! FOM Curio has something for everyone this autumn. Hungry? Sample the best local cuisine with one of our Foodie Groups on the first Tuesday and Thursday of every month or in the evening with Foodies After Dark (FaD). Care to try your hand in the kitchen yourself? We've got sessions on Jordanian cooking and *dim sum* making. Want to get those creative juices flowing? Try travel sketching. In need of some culture? Take in the sounds of Mozart with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra or immerse yourself in a night at the theatre with the Singapore Repertory Theatre (SRT). Feeling festive? There's family-friendly theatre to look forward to this Christmas season.



Last year's Curio event at the Vagabond Hotel, *Wine, Women and Song: Shanghai in the Jazz Age*, was so much fun, it deserves a repeat!



As our name implies, we seek the rare, the unusual and the intriguing in Singapore. Here is a sample of the unique opportunities we have uncovered for the remainder of 2019.

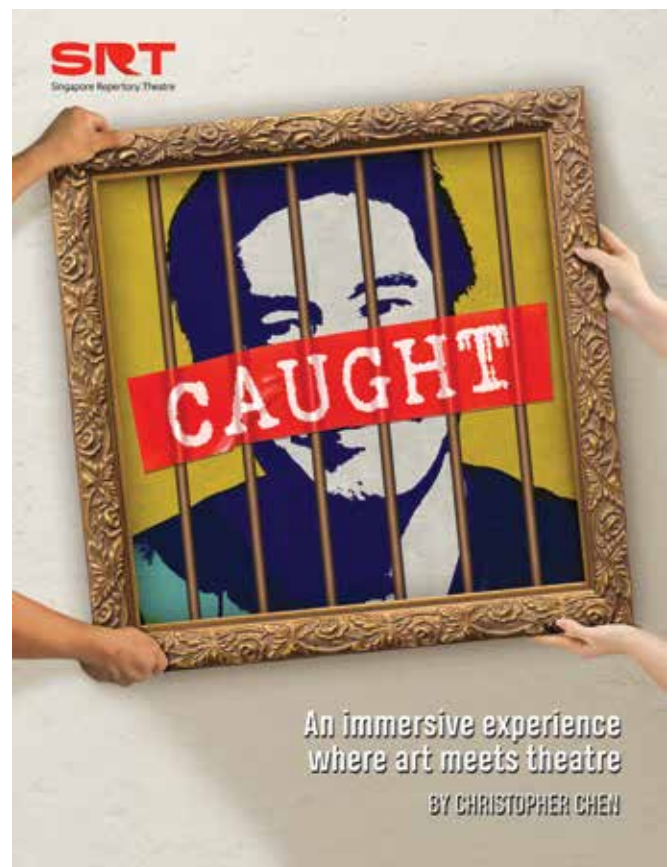
A very special FaD at OSO.

We will start our evening with a guided tour of the environmentally friendly Oasia Hotel, a lush landmark in

Singapore's Central Business District. Designed by noted architecture firm WOHA, the 27-storey 314-room Oasia Hotel Downtown is a true respite in the city featuring its visually spectacular living, breathing vertical garden. If we're lucky, maybe we can take in the sunset before we continue living *la dolce vita* at another Singapore landmark located in the Oasia Hotel. OSO Ristorante has been on the scene serving some of the best Italian food in Singapore since 2005.



Travel Sketching with Angie Ng. You know those selfies and wefies are just not enough. You want to capture your travel memories *en plein air*. Well then, meet Angie Ng. Angie is a very talented FOM member/URA guide who has a passion for sketching that can even be used on FOM's Study Tours. Repeat after me, "Take only travel sketches; leave only footprints."



Caught with the Singapore Repertory Theatre. Immersive theatre is a unique artistic experience, especially when it includes participation by the artist himself. Imprisoned in a detention centre for his ground-breaking immersive work, dissident artist Lin Bo will be present in Singapore this September for the final stop of his touring exhibition. Come and experience his story, the truth and the reality for yourself. Founded in 1993, the SRT is one of the leading English language theatre producers and presenters in Asia.



Jordanian Cooking Class with Hana Madanat. Our inaugural class in June was oversubscribed so for a second time this year, Hana has agreed to share her knowledge, passion and cooking skills for Jordanian, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cuisine. Born in Jordan, Hana Madanat learned to cook early in life by helping her mother in the kitchen. Later, while traveling the world, Hana honed her skills in order to replicate the taste of home. Today she has a successful catering business in Singapore but will once again share more heirloom recipes with us.

Dim Sum Making with Yum Cha. Closer to home, we will learn to make dumplings from the best. If you haven't had the dumplings at Yum Cha in Chinatown, you haven't 'done Singapore'. Yum Cha first opened its doors in Chinatown in the year 2000 and now you will be able to sample and perfect this auspicious skill for yourself before the next Chinese New Year celebrations. Can you say, *gong xi fa cai*?



A Spoonful of Sherman. What could be more Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious than a spoonful of sugar? How about *A Spoonful of Sherman* to celebrate nearly 100 years of song-written history by the Sherman family? Other classics include *Let's Go Fly a Kite* and *It's a Small World*. You won't be able to stop yourself from singing along at the Singapore premiere of this sing-along musical with local artists including Hossan Leong, Mina Ellen Kaye and many more.



Violin Concerto with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra. The highly regarded Japanese violinist Akiko Suwanai is not only one of the top violinists today, but also plays one of the finest violins in existence, the 1714 Dolphin Stradivarius previously owned by no less than the legend among violin legends, Jascha Heifetz. Hear this inimitable pairing in Mozart's lyrical Violin Concerto No 3, alongside Romantic classics by Mendelssohn and Brahms, directed by eminent maestro Mario Venzago. This event includes a private interlude during intermission with refreshments.

Peter Pan in Serangoon Gardens with Wild Rice. A local twist on the traditional British Christmas pantomime, the J M Barrie classic is reimagined in the Red Dot as part of Wild Rice's Grand Opening Season. And it's suitable for the whole family. With all the pressures of school and growing up in Singapore, Wendy and her brothers would rather be anywhere else than their stuffy bedroom in Serangoon Gardens. Enter Peter Pan, who promises to take them on the adventure of a lifetime!



We have lots more in store. For more details, dates and pricing, and to sign up for any or all of our upcoming Curio events, please visit us at www.fom.sg/memberevents.

Darlene D Kasten is an FOM docent at the Asia Civilisations Museum, Malay Heritage Centre, and is currently training with STPI. She is a co-coordinator of Curio, along with Gisella Harrold, Shy Kalra and Claudia Cost. They hope to see you at a Curio event soon.

Singapore's National Libraries: A One-Stop Online Search Resource

The People's Library for the Knowledge Age

By Patricia Bjaaland Welch

If you haven't discovered what a wonderful online resource Singapore's national libraries are, fix that shortfall now. Whether you are a docent researching an artefact, a parent in search of that 'just right' title for your child, or a private investor seeking business news or company information, the National Library can help.

To access this mother lode of resources, you first need to register online at nlb.gov.sg. To open an account, all you need is IC or FIN number. Once on the home page, use the Quick Links menu (top left of the home page) to find the best resources for your search.

If you're totally at a loss as to where to begin, try the Reference Point, a remote advisory service open to all, which can point you in the general direction to get you started. Their expertise includes not only queries on Singapore history and heritage, but also specific subject matter relating to the arts, business, science and technology, social sciences and humanities. A recent query to them brought me a long email response with links to newspaper articles, books, articles in magazines and journals, photographs, and archival material I had missed during my own search. These leads enabled me to find some very relevant information I doubt I would otherwise have found.

Learn a new skill online. For years, I took 'How To' courses on Lynda.com, an online educational website. It was Lynda.com that gave me the skills to be FOM's webmaster for four years. I also learned how to use such advanced programmes and apps as Photoshop and Capto, as well as how to record my own podcasts and edit films online. Courses range from Accounting to Wordpress. Lynda.com's lessons are amongst the best you can find and they're free via the Singapore National Library.

You'll also find dozens of useful databases listed alphabetically. EBSCO Host lists academic journals that cover audiobooks, art and architecture databases, e-books, encyclopaedias, medical and nursing information, and more.

A feature entitled PressReader provides many of the major Southeast Asian and Asian newspapers online: *The Jakarta Post*, *The Bangkok Post*, *China Daily*, plus free complimentary access for two days to a large variety of publications including *Running*, *Travel*, *The Washington Post*, *Yoga*, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, *Esquire*, *Business Traveller*... (I regularly access 23 Norwegian publications via PressReader to keep in touch with home news.)

Looking for information on Singapore? Log into SingaporeInfopedia, an electronic encyclopaedia on Singapore's history, culture, people and events. Want to know when our museums were founded, or information on the Chinese Garden, Gardens by the Bay, Chinese death rituals, or the Chinese Post office riots of 1876? This is where you start. Complementing SingaporeInfopedia is the Web Archive Singapore, a collection of websites that showcase facets of Singapore life that you can access through the



The NLB's general lending library is located in Basement 1 while the upper levels house specialist collections. Be prepared to meet fellow FOM members, especially our docents, on level 8 where the art, culture and history books are located. There is a good selection of Chinese art books on level 8. Other special services that can be found within the building are printer cartridge recycling collection boxes (at levels B1 and 1) and an open shelf where members of the public are encouraged to donate and circulate used books (level B1). Moving and clearing out your bookshelves? There are always students waiting to check out recent donations to these shelves!

library portal. Looking for websites on Singapore's national parades? They're all here. It offers a long list of categories you can browse through from Arts to Street and Places, to Nature and Environment, to Personalities and Organisations.

PictureSG is a database of digital images that have been tagged (including by readers like you) to make searching and browsing photos of Singapore more search-friendly. Search by categories (art, events, personalities ++) or by featured collections.

My personal favourite resources are past issues of the National Library Board's quarterly magazine *BiblioAsia* and the academic database JSTOR. All of *BiblioAsia*'s past issues can be downloaded from www.nlb.gov.sg/biblioasia/. This periodical, which promotes the collections and programmes of the National Library to encourage research and learning in the history, arts and culture of Singapore and Southeast Asia, provides a goldmine of informative articles – prime research ground for FOM docents. ACM docents will find JSTOR especially helpful when researching historical topics or artefacts. (Search under the Quick Links menu, /By A-Z/J/ JSTOR for online access to archived contents of hundreds of important scholarly journals. Here you can search (for example) *makara* to find 1,691 journal articles related to the topic in a variety of languages from the world's top scholars.

Patricia Welch is an avid and thankful user of the National Library of Singapore and hopes to see more FOMers in the stacks.

Explore Singapore!

Explore Singapore Quiz Winner: Goh Choon Chiang, Membership #7221



Heritage Conservation Centre

Thursday 5 September
10:00 am – 12 noon
Fee: \$25

For years, most of Singapore's collection of historical artefacts and artworks were stored in the National Museum building in Stamford Road. As the collection grew, so did the need for a new storage facility. Work began in 1995

and in 2000, the Heritage Conservation Centre (HCC) was opened. Today, the HCC's four floors house some 100,000 items in secure, climate-controlled rooms. We will tour the pest-management facility and also learn about the storage techniques for different categories of artefacts. We will also visit the conservators in their laboratories to learn about their work with the artefacts.



Mural Art of Kampong Gelam

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

Kampong Gelam is a former royal citadel and port town and a 'must' visit destination in Singapore. Today, with more than 15 murals adorning its walls and back alleys, it has also become ground zero for Instagram-worthy, vibrant murals and street art. Heritage-themed murals stand side-by-side with abstract ones inspired by psychedelic illustrations and pop art. So put on those walking shoes and follow our guide around this outdoor art gallery.



The Hidden Gem of Singapore Lim See Tai Chong Soo Kiu Liong Tong

Thursday 3 October
10:00 am – 12 noon
Fee: \$25

Come with Explore Singapore! to visit a unique Chinese ancestral hall that features imported decorative tiles, original frosted glass windows and elegant neoclassical columns. Australian-Singaporean

artist Jennifer Lim (see page 5) will share some insights into her great grandfather's clan house and how her personal connection to it has inspired a passion for vintage tiles. Join a fun exploration of the many secrets hidden inside this fascinating building.



Little India Deepavali Walk

Thursday 10 October
10:00 am – 1:30 pm approx.
Fee: \$40 (including lunch)

Take a walk with ES! through the streets of Little India and see how the community prepares for the colourful Deepavali festival. FOM docent Abha Kaul will share with us the meaning of Deepavali, explaining the rich customs and traditions associated with this festival, one of Hinduism's most important ones. Why is it called the festival of lights? What are the stories surrounding the festival? Not only is this a very colourful time but also one associated with wonderful food, especially sweets. Enjoy a light lunch to conclude the programme.



Artisanal Chinese Tea Blending Shop

Thursday 31 October
10:00 am – 12:30 pm
Fee: \$40

We will take you to a hundred-year-old shop where Chinese tea has been blended by hand since 1925. Hear the stories and historical events behind the branding of each tea blend. We will see how the teas are blended using old-fashioned equipment, then wrapped by hand in paper specially printed for each customer. Today, they also count top hotels and large corporate firms amongst their customers. After our visit, we will have lunch at a traditional *bak kut teh* (meat bone tea) restaurant, one of the tea shop's earliest customers.

Note: This programme is not suitable for Muslims and vegetarians unless you are prepared to skip the lunch.

Monday Morning Lectures

The lectures are held either in the Ngee Ann auditorium (in the basement) or in the River Room (level 2) at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM), 1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555 and begin promptly at 11:00 am. Refreshments are provided. Latecomers are asked to enter via the rear door.



2 September: The Art of Protest and Propaganda: Old and New Examples from Chinese Art

Speaker: Patricia Bjaaland Welch

Venue: The Ngee Ann Auditorium (basement)

Chinese artists throughout history have used metaphors and wordplay to express unspoken messages – traditionally innocently benevolent. But not always.



9 September: Robert Clive and the Unexpected Empire

Speaker: Aditi Krishnakumar

Venue: The Ngee Ann Auditorium (basement)

This is the story of the founding of the British Empire, tracing events in the 1700s that led a group of merchants and traders (among them Robert Clive) to become the rulers of India and the Colonies. The circumstances

surrounding the 'black hole' of Calcutta will be explained. The Battle of Plassey will also be described and shown using original, on-site pictures of the battlefield.



16 September: How Hawker Culture in Singapore Started

Speaker: John Kwok

Venue: The Ngee Ann Auditorium (basement)

When Singapore nominated Hawker

Culture to be inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, it raised debates, criticism and discussion, and even doubt that this is representative of Singapore's intangible cultural heritage. This talk will look at the history of hawker culture in Singapore and help to better understand why it deserves its place in Singapore.

There will be NO LECTURE on Monday, 23 September because of the Formula 1 event.

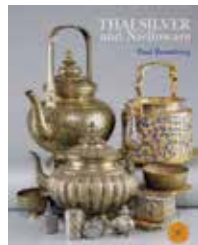


30 September: The Bugis – Rediscovering a Lost Identity

Speaker: Sarafian Salleh

Venue: The River Room (level 2)

The Bugis were a community of seafarers who lived and traded in Singapore before the arrival of Raffles. Their sailing tradition is called *Passompe*. Many settled in Kampong Gelam and along the Rochor River, which wealthy Bugis merchants classified as a Bugis economic zone. Largely assimilated into the Malay community today, their unique culture still charms the hearts of Singapore's communities.



7 October: Thai Silver and Nielloware

Speaker: Paul Bromberg

Venue: The River Room (level 2)

Thai silver and nielloware display craftsmanship and designs that rival better-known genres of silver from Asia.

However, to date little research has been undertaken into this fascinating subject. Bromberg will examine the history and scope of Thai silver and nielloware production dating from the early 19th century to the present, as well as the various forms and designs utilised.



14 October: The Magic of Thai Amulets

Speaker: Ruth Gerson

Venue: The Ngee Ann Auditorium (basement)

Amulets are charms that are worn or carried for protection against evil, as well as for acquiring power, wealth, luck and love. They consist of stones, metals, wood, seeds and plants, and magical words. Thai amulets perpetuate old beliefs in magic and superstitions, some originated from religion while others have developed from folk practices.



21 October: The Original Crazy Rich Asians

Speaker: Shawn Seah

Venue: The Ngee Ann Auditorium (basement)

Shawn will introduce us to two pioneers whose names are immortalised in the street names, Eu Chin Street and Liang Seah Street. Seah Liang Seah (1850-1925) was a successful businessman and community leader. His father was Teochew community leader Seah Eu Chin (1805-1883) the King of Gambier and Pepper, and founder of the welfare organisation, the Ngee Ann Kongsi. Shawn will share his personal experiences and his family's history.

There will be NO LECTURE on Monday 28 October owing to the Deepavali public holiday. Happy Deepavali to all who celebrate!



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FOM Honoured by the NHB as a Supporter of Heritage

By Darlene D Kasten

Friends of the Museums Singapore was recognised as a Supporter of Heritage at the Patron of Heritage Awards (POHA) 2018. The annual awards ceremony was held on 18 June at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) with over 200 partners, supporters, patrons and friends of heritage in attendance. FOM president Garima Lalwani accepted the award on the organisation's behalf.

POHA was inaugurated by the National Heritage Board (NHB) in 2006 to show appreciation to organisations and individual contributors who have given generously to heritage efforts in Singapore. The award was specially commissioned by the NHB for this year's event. Entitled *Pillars*, the monolithic shape is a metaphor for the essential support provided by the community, while the material choice of blue and white porcelain was inspired by the ACM's programming theme, *Season of Chinese Art*. From June 2019 to mid-2020, the museum will present the best of Chinese art through master works of art, heritage, culture and fashion from China and Singapore, bringing ancient Chinese traditions to a contemporary, international audience.

Prior to the awards presentation, welcoming remarks were given by Ms Chang Hwee Nee, CEO of the NHB, and Guest of Honour Ms Grace Fu, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth. Guests were then treated to a sumptuous reception held on the River Terrace complete with a



FOM President Garima Lalwani (centre) shares the POHA award with her fellow FOM docents. Photo courtesy of the NHB

performance by Shanghai Jazz. To close the evening, all were given the opportunity for private FOM docent-led tours of the ACM's *Season of Chinese Art* inaugural special exhibition, *Guo Pei: Chinese Art and Couture*. Congratulations to all the 2018 partners, friends and supporters of heritage who were recognised by the NHB for their patronage.

Study Group

Want to learn more about Asia in a friendly, relaxed way? Join our study group, which 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 is a wonderful opportunity to meet and enjoy the diverse nationalities of FOM members. We usually meet 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.

Our next Study Group starts with an introductory session on Wednesday 18 September. Our theme is:

Myths, Legends & Folktales of Asia

Myths supply answers to questions that ordinary logic cannot address. Legends reflect the values and views of a culture. Folktales offer an easily understood framework for living. All these stories present universal themes and have inspired art (and discussion) for centuries. Join us as we study myths, legends and folktales to gain a better understanding of Asian culture. For more information and to join the Autumn Study Group, please visit the FOM website.

A few possible topics: (A longer list is available online and please feel free to develop your own.)

The Chinese Zodiac

Modern Mythology - the myths behind many of the Pokemon characters

The Ramayana - the epic story of Rama

True Singapore Ghost Stories by Russell Lee

Tigers in Asian mythology

MH370 - a study of conspiracy theories

Australian Aboriginal religion and mythology

Comparison of Indonesian Creation Myths





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Island Notes

Natural Heritage

By Darly Furlong



Recently, I went on a quest to learn more about Singapore's natural heritage – its heritage trees. Have you seen any tall, majestic trees with plaques attached to them? They might be heritage trees. Thankfully, rules exist to protect these beautiful giants from indiscriminate felling. A total of 259 such trees have been registered and are now valued for their size, rarity and age (some are over a hundred years old).

I have a favourite – the grand old female Buni tree in the Botanic Gardens – its trunk so wide, with ferns and green moss crawling up its limbs, its branches forming a huge umbrella and the cacophony of birds chirping around it, is like balm to the soul. Do you have a favourite heritage tree?



Darly Furlong is a passionate volunteer for museum-based learning for children at the Community Justice Centre. She is interested in the myths and legends of ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman civilisations, while learning to understand ancient Greek and Latin languages features prominently on her bucket list.



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Japanese Docents

Japanese docents (JDs) started with only two Japanese ladies in 1981 and has now grown to a group of 66 docents. One of the unique characteristics of the JDs is that we are all considered to be active docents. This mainly results from our scheduling system: when a scheduler assigns guide duties for every month and controls the amount of guiding for all JDs throughout the year. She also makes sure that all of us carry out a certain amount of guiding to stay active docents.

Here is another example of how JDs stay active, literally. During the revamp of the Singapore Art Museum (SAM), the JDs came up with the idea of guiding art-related works at SAM. Our art tour officially started this March and covers the public artworks inside and outside the building, Gallery 10, the Goh Seng Choo Gallery and the Story of the Forest. Each docent has their own guiding route and each tour is brimming with originality and surprises. As we take visitors to explore the museum, visitors get a glimpse into another side of the museum, which brings them into a world full of modern artworks. Visitors also enjoy learning the history of Singapore through art and after joining the art tour, they have completely different impressions of the National Museum.

A new group of committee members started in July and we enjoy the opportunity to learn new things, get to know each other better and work for the further development of the group. I personally feel that the most important key for



how JDs stay active is each docent's passion and dedication to guiding as FOM members, which is, I believe, something all the FOM docents have in common.

Yuka Tan, JD coordinator 1

Study Tours

Do take a look at the FOM website page to see FOM's current selection of Study Tours and join us if possible. Here is the list of tours currently offered:

Xi'an, China with Patricia Bjaaland Welch - October, 2019 (fully subscribed)

Israel and Jordan with Sarah Lev - December, 2019 (fully subscribed)

Kites and Kutch, Gujarat, India with Rashmi Panchal - January, 2020 (fully subscribed)

Coromandel Coast, Tamil Nadu, India with Abha Kaul - February, 2020 (open for registration now)

Guizhou Minority Tour, China with Rosalie Kwok - April, 2020 (open for registration now)

More details and registration instructions for the above can be found on the website.

New tours for 2020 will be announced shortly.



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Museum Information and Exhibitions

Asian Civilisations Museum

1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555
Tel: 6332 7798
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, 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.

Guo Pei: Chinese Art and Couture (through 15 September)

ACM presents the living legacy of Chinese design and tradition by juxtaposing 29 embroidered masterworks by Guo Pei, China's foremost couturière, with 20 artefacts from the museum's collection. The exhibition bridges ideas of cross-cultural identity, shared history and dignified beauty behind art and fashion.

Special FOM guided tours for Guo Pei: Chinese Art and Couture

Mon to Fri 11:30 am, 1:30 and 3:00 pm; Sat and Sun 11:30 am and 1:30 pm (English)
Wed 4:00 pm (Mandarin)
Every 2nd and 4th Tuesday 10:30 am (Korean)

Gillman Barracks

9 Lock Road, Singapore 108937
www.gillmanbarracks.com

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

Opening hours: 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

NTU CCA

Siah Armajani: Spaces for the Public. Spaces for Democracy. (through 3 November)

Considered a leading figure in public art, Iranian-born artist Siah Armajani merges architecture and conceptual art in his sculptures, drawings, and public installations. Informed by democratic ideologies and inspired by American vernacular architecture, his works include gathering spaces for communality, emphasising the "nobility of usefulness." His highly acclaimed public art and architectural projects have included bridges, gardens, and outdoor structures that have been commissioned and presented worldwide.

Indian Heritage Centre

5 Campbell Lane, Singapore 209924
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 12:00 pm for the permanent galleries
2:00 pm on Wed and Fri for the special exhibitions

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 Singapore's only purpose-built museum.



Malay Heritage Centre

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

Opening hours:

Tues to Sun 10:00 am – 6:00 pm (last admission 5:30 pm), closed on Mondays
FOM guided tours: Tues to Fri 11:00 am; Sat: 2:00 pm (Subject to availability. Please call ahead to confirm the availability of a docent).

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

National Museum of Singapore

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

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.

An Old New World: From the East Indies to the Founding of Singapore, 1600-1819

(21 September 2019 - 29 Mar 2020)

Explore the 200 years leading up to the establishment in 1819 of an entrepôt in Singapore, beginning with the bustling world of trade in the East Indies that attracted the Dutch and British East India companies from the early 17th century. The European entry into the region, for better or worse, was only part of its longer history. This exhibition is a telling of that story and a reflection of the broader forces at play that culminated in the events of 1819.

NUS Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts

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

Free admission

Opening hours:

Tues to Sat 10:00 am – 6:00 pm, Closed on Sundays and Public Holidays,
Monday: Visits by appointment for schools/faculties only.

"... You Have To Lose Your Way To Find Yourself In The Right Place" (through 15 December)

This exhibition presents the works of Singapore-based French artist, Gilles Massot. It includes a selection of photographs, videos, sketches and writings from the 1980s to the present and explores the artist's evolving negotiations with place and the shaping of self-identity through his work as a photo-journalist travelling across Asia, his involvement in a changing contemporary art scene, and his expatriate status.

NUS Baba House

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

English heritage tours: Tues - Fri, 10:00 am; Mandarin Heritage Tour: First Monday of each month, 10am;
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
For enquiries, please email babahouse@nus.edu.sg

Now conceived as a heritage house facilitating research, appreciation and reflection of Straits Chinese history and culture, the NUS Baba House was built around 1895 and was once the ancestral home of a Peranakan Chinese family. During the one-hour tour, guests will be introduced to the history and architectural features of the house, and experience visiting a



Museum Information and Exhibitions

Straits Chinese family home in a 1920s setting, furnished with heirlooms from its previous owners and other donors.

The Peranakan Museum

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

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



Singapore Art Museum

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

The Singapore Art Museum focuses on international contemporary art practices specialising in Singapore and Southeast Asia. The main building of the Singapore Art Museum (located along 71 Bras Basah Road) is currently closed to prepare it for its next phase of development.



STPI Creative Workshop and Gallery

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

Opening hours:

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

am – 6:00 pm, Sun: 10:00 am – 5:00 pm

Closed Public Holidays

FOM guided tours: Thurs 11:30 am, Sat & Sun 2:00 pm

Please refer to STPI's website at www.stpi.com.sg for STPI's public programmes and Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, French and special evening tours.



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

Takashi Murakami: From Superflat to Bubblewrap (through 14 September)

This summer, STPI is pleased to present a major showcase of acclaimed Japanese artist Takashi Murakami's exhibition in Singapore. *From Superflat to Bubblewrap* is a milestone exhibition that explores the dynamic practice of Murakami, one of the most notable artists emerging from post-war Japan and a palpable force in the world of contemporary art today.

Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall

12 Tai Gin Road, Singapore 327874
Tel: 6256 7377
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)

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



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

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The School offers MA in Museum Studies and Curatorial Practices that prepares graduates for professional positions in the diverse museum landscape and expanding spaces of the curatorial, which require knowledge, experience and creativity. The MA places emphasis on theoretical and practical challenges of contemporary and historic art and culture, with a focus on South East Asia.

Applications open till 1 March 2020 for August 2020 intake

Visit blogs.ntu.edu.sg/mscp & www.adm.ntu.edu.sg/MA for more information.



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