

PASSAGE

Friends of the Museums Singapore

March / April 2020



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President's Letter

Dear Friends,

It is hard to believe that the Bicentennial year is over and that we are well into the year 2020.

If like me you are feeling nostalgic, there are many special exhibitions related to the Bicentennial year that are still on show. *From the Coromandel Coast to the Straits – Revisiting Our Tamil Heritage*, the special exhibition at the Indian Heritage Centre, traces the history and contribution of the Tamils in Singapore. We are taken on a journey to explore the ancient trade ties, religious practices and also the political and cultural contacts between the Tamils of the Coromandel Coast and Southeast Asia from the early years of the Common Era to more recent contributions. Rare artefacts from Singapore's National Collection along with other museums and institutions and the clever use of 3D holographic images make this a show worth visiting with the entire family.

Enthusiasts of Singapore's early history will find *An Old New World: From the East Indies to the Founding of Singapore, 1600s–1819* at the National Museum of Singapore and the *Seekor Singa, Seorang Putera, dan Sebingkai Cermin: Reflecting and Refracting Singapura* at the Malay Heritage Centre of special interest. The latter explores Singapore's significance in the maritime world prior to British and Dutch occupation in the Malay Archipelago.

The Singapore Biennale 2019 (SB19) artworks have transformed the exterior and interior spaces of Gillman Barracks, a former army base, into a place for an immersive contemporary art experience. Sit under a pavilion that evokes the Hmong tribe's heritage, listen to bird sounds from the Mandai forested area or watch a video of an elaborate Chinese wedding ceremony, which has all the elements in place except for the bride, who is missing. As a docent for the SB19, I can assure you a guided tour is essential for getting the most out of your visit. To experience the Singapore Biennale, which is on till 22 March, visit Gillman Barracks or head to the National Gallery, the two major sites for SB19. Free shuttle buses are available between the two locations.

The Monday Morning Lectures (MML) returned after the Christmas break with the first lecture delivered by long-time FOM member and docent, Pauline Ong. Check our website at www.fom.sg for future lecture topics. The MML lectures start promptly at 11:00 am. I would highly recommend getting to the venue by 10:30 am to enjoy a cup of tea or coffee hosted by Philippa and her team of volunteers. It will give you a chance to mingle with other members and the activity leaders who are present to get information on upcoming events. You may want to find out about the *Explore Singapore!* outings or the upcoming Study Tours.

FOM Study Tours are unlike any other travel experience you will have. As the name suggests these are *study* tours. The participants are expected to read up on a topic related to the country being visited and share their research with the group. It is an active engagement to gain a deeper understanding of the area and country being visited. Perhaps after going on one of these tours, you may want to lead one yourself. Read more about the recent tours in this special edition focusing mainly on FOM's Study Tours.

At the time of my writing of this letter the coronavirus situation was still evolving. I am sure we will get through this challenge thanks to the understanding and support of our members and volunteers. I tip my hat to our volunteers for their unwavering support of FOM, sometimes even while facing severe personal challenges. FOM volunteers are truly priceless!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Garima".

Garima G Lalwani
FOM President 2020

Some of the FOM activities listed in this issue may be postponed or cancelled. Please check the website for changes.



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Welcome PASSAGE

President's Letter

i

Features

Sketchbook: Turkish Tales <i>by Yusoff Abdul Latiff</i>	2
ArteFact: Snuff Bottles <i>by Patricia Bjaaland Welch</i>	4
Museum Watch: The Erlitou Site and Museum <i>by Patricia Bjaaland Welch</i>	5
The Arts Community in Waterloo Street <i>by Sim Xin Yi</i>	6
A Walk Through Deccan History <i>by Shelly Dee</i>	8
FOM Study Tour: A Journey into Medieval China <i>by Manuela Fremy</i>	10
Bhutan Study Tour 2018 <i>by Carolyn Le Huray</i>	12
FOM's Study Tour to Gujarat, India <i>by Roopa Dewan</i>	14
A Special Exhibition at the Indian Heritage Centre <i>by Durga Arivan</i>	16
Highland Fling at the Goroka Show <i>by Darlene D Kasten</i>	18
Beijing 101 <i>by Amanda Jaffe</i>	20
Wuchang - City of the 1911 Chinese Revolution <i>by Nicholas Soh</i>	22
Singapore Biennale 2019 <i>by Yvonne Sim</i>	24
Island Notes <i>by Darly Furlong</i>	27

FOM Reports

FOM Members Show They Care <i>by Darlene D Kasten</i>	26
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FOM Member Activities

Explore Singapore!	28
Monday Morning Lectures	29
Japanese Docents	30
Textile Enthusiasts Group	30
Coordinators Contact List	31

Museum Information and Exhibitions

Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM)	32
Gillman Barracks (GB)	32
NTU CCA	32
Indian Heritage Centre (IHC)	32
Malay Heritage Centre (MHC)	32
National Museum of Singapore (NMS)	32
NUS Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts	33
Peranakan Museum (TPM)	33
Singapore Art Museum (SAM)	33
STPI Creative Workshop and Gallery	33
Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall (SYSNMH)	33

On the Cover: *Travellers' Tales* by Lavanya Mani, hand-painted and embroidered textiles, 2019, commissioned by the Indian Heritage Centre. In this work Lavanya tells the story of four port towns on the Coromandel Coast. Photo by Gisella Harrold

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.

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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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Turkish Tales

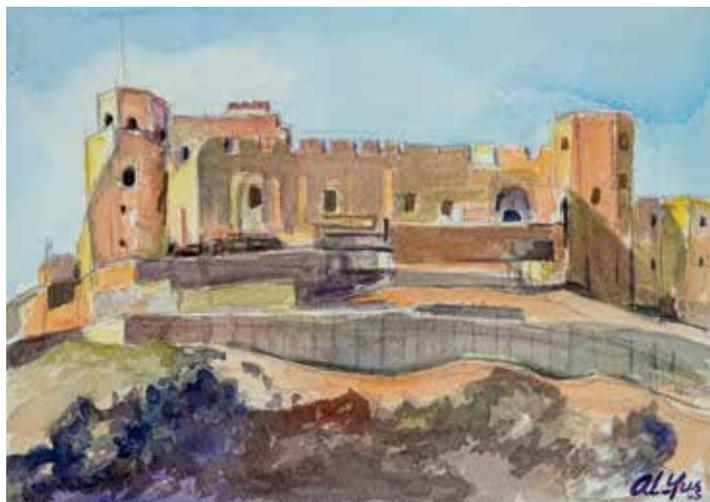
By Yusoff Abdul Latiff



In Istanbul, Turkey, in September or during the long school break, parents dress their adolescent sons in classical attire reminiscent of Ottoman princes and take them on outings to various places of interest such as the Grand Bazaar, the Topkapi Museum and the Blue Mosque. This is the prelude to a rite of passage, the boys' circumcision a day or so later – their transition to manhood. So the boys are given a fitting 'send-off'.

Circumcision is an age-old practice among Muslims, Jews and Orthodox Christians. Arab and Jewish male babies are circumcised no later than eight days after birth. In Turkey and in many other countries, including Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, circumcision is done at puberty. In Malaysia mass circumcision is carried out during the school holidays. Gone are the days when village boys feared the *tok mudim* (the circumcision practitioner) and tried to run away, for those were the days when anaesthetics and laser surgery were unheard of.

A Muslim must not only perform the *wudhuk* (ablution), ritual cleansing of the hands, face, head and legs, before the five daily *solat* (prayers), he must also cleanse his genital area. The removal of the foreskin facilitates this. In fact, in many countries today circumcision is practised for health and hygiene reasons.



The Ajjad Fortress on Bulbul Mountain was an Ottoman citadel overlooking Mecca's *Masjid il Haram* (Grand Mosque). The Ottoman Turks ruled the Arabian Peninsula at the time and in 1780 built the citadel to protect Islam's holiest site, the Kaaba, from invaders and bandits. Located on high land, it had a strategically commanding location, able to detect and ward off attackers long before they arrived at the city's gates. The Muslim world was grateful for this protection.

During my 1997 Hajj, I stood gazing at this structure in awe and amazement, not realising what it was, but knowing that being located so near the Grand Mosque meant it must be important. I wanted to take a photo of it but hesitated, having been forewarned that Saudi policemen in plainclothes might appear from nowhere and confiscate your camera.

Today the authorities don't do anything; pilgrims even take selfies at the Kaaba.

Sadly, in 2002 the Ajjad Fortress was demolished and the hill levelled, amid howls of protest from both local and international Islamic communities. The Saudis were adamant, saying that there was an urgent need to expand facilities for pilgrims. The Turks were furious, accusing the Saudis of obliterating Mecca's Turkish heritage, even offering to dismantle and rebuild it at an alternative site in Mecca. The late King Fahd gave an order for it to be rebuilt, but all there is today is a scale model of it in a Turkish museum. At the site now there are seven luxury hotels, including the Makkah Royal Clock Tower. All these could have been built elsewhere to save this Turkish legacy.



The Hagia Sophia (*Ayasofya* in Turkish), built in 537 CE, was a Greek Orthodox basilica and became an imperial Ottoman mosque in 1453, after the capture of Constantinople. The Hagia Sophia's Byzantine architecture, noted for its massive dome, inspired many other Ottoman mosques, including the Blue Mosque as well as newer and grander ones in Istanbul. Unlike in other Muslim countries, Turkish mosques have a steeple and spire instead of a minaret with a balcony for the muezzin to call the faithful to prayer.

In 1931 Kemal Ataturk turned the basilica into a museum, in line with his plan to create a secular republic on the ruins of the Ottoman empire. However, under the Islamist-leaning government of President Tayyip Erdogan, there is a

movement to turn it into a mosque once again. The Turkish Ministry of Religious Affairs has even appointed an imam. The Greeks protested, but the Turks retorted that the Greeks had not given permission for a mosque to be built in Athens.

Such changes have occurred throughout history with temples and mosques being turned into churches and vice versa. One example is the Mezquita Cathedral (Mosque Cathedral) of Cordoba, Spain. All the grandeur of Islamic Spain's mosque was converted into a cathedral when the Christians drove the Muslims from Spain. When we were there, a security guard warned my hijab-wearing wife not to utter any prayers, as if to remind us that it was no longer a mosque.

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.

Snuff Bottles

By Patricia Bjaaland Welch

Of all the vices foisted upon China by the West, one can include tobacco, introduced by the Portuguese (via Japan and Korea) and the Spanish (via the Philippines). Snuff (ground or pulverised tobacco leaves) followed, possibly introduced to the Beijing court by the Jesuits, where it was recorded as early as 1685.¹ Doctored up with mint, camphor, jasmine and other aromatics, snuff was believed to be medicinal and an aid to digestion. It was also an important status symbol when imported from Spain, France or Scotland², although cheaper domestic variants were also available.



Fruits and vegetables were popular shapes for snuff bottles. Capsicum, like all vegetables with lots of seeds, were popular for their fertility symbolism. ACM Collection

There was never any question of storing one's personal supply in a European snuff box; both their size and shape and the non-airtight nature of their hinged tops made them unsuitable for both the damp Chinese climate and Chinese proclivities.

Chinese medicines that needed to be kept airtight were generally kept in porcelain or glass bottles. Too large to carry on one's person, it was inevitable that smaller airtight containers would emerge that could be carried in a small waist purse or tucked up a Chinese sleeve. Various containers made from porcelain, stone (malachite, jade, lapis lazuli, agate), metal (copper, silver, gold), glass, lacquer, coral and ivory were the most popular. The larger medicine bottles had snug stopper caps and during the Qianlong Emperor's era (1736-1795), a small (very fragile) spoon was fixed to the stoppers of the smaller snuff bottles to facilitate the extrusion of a small pinch of sniffable snuff.

Although snuff bottles were often carved or painted, collectors consider those that reflect the natural beauty of the



A glass bottle where one can see the slender fragile spoon inside. ACM Collection

material they are made from the most attractive. Among the most popular were the cut, polished glass ones, when metal oxides have been added to produce gem-like colours or jade. During the Qianlong period enamelled glass and copper snuff bottles are a notable exception.

Glass or rock crystal bottles with interior paintings are late-comers (early 19th century) and required especially steady-handed artists as they are reverse-painted. The interior is first primed with a milky white layer, then subsequent layers of the design are painted on the inside using small angled brushes – typically flowers, birds, animals, famous beauties and rulers, calligraphy, auspicious symbols or popular motifs (such as the 'Eight Horses of Wang Mu'³). Such bottles were solely decorative; snuff would degrade the artwork.

The earliest known Chinese snuff bottle is dated 1653, but they only gained true popularity during the Emperor Kangxi's reign (r 1662-1722). Large numbers were produced during the reign of the Emperor Qianlong when the best artisans' workshops were located within the Forbidden City (but would-be collectors beware, many carrying Qianlong's mark are actually from the later reign of the Emperor Daoguang, (r 1821-50) when the number of snuff-takers rose dramatically leading to the increased demand for snuff bottles by China's rapidly growing merchant class).

Snuff bottle collectors are found throughout the world and there is a considerable number of snuff bottle associations where aficionados meet on a regular basis. World-class collections are found in Hong Kong, Singapore, London and even Oslo, Norway.

A selection of nine snuff bottles can be seen in the Scholar's Gallery of the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) in a small corner cabinet. They come from the collection of one of the most famous collectors of Chinese antiquities – Edward T Chow (1910-1980) – giving them one of the best provenances possible. His son Franklin gifted them to the ACM in honour of the ACM's founding director, Dr Kenson Kwok.



An especially playful snuff bottle design in the shape of an elephant (xiàng), a pun on another Chinese word (xiāng), which means fragrance. Welch Collection



A glass medicine bottle minus its stopper with the decoration of hulu (double gourd) vegetables and vines, symbolic of the blessing of never-ending descendants. Welch Collection

¹ *Xiang zu bi zhi* (香祖笔记)

² <https://snuffbottlesociety.org/history>

³ A popular legend relating how the Zhou Dynasty emperor Wang Mu travelled to visit the Queen Mother of the West drawn in a chariot pulled by eight horses, each with a special ability.

The Erlitou Site and Museum

Henan Province PRC

By Patricia Bjaaland Welch

If there were an Olympic event for the fastest opening of museums, the gold medal would go to China. One barely writes down the name and location of a new museum in the PRC and locates it on a map, when another announcement supersedes it.

An FOM study tour had the honour last October of being the first group of foreign visitors to explore one of China's newest museums, the Erlitou Site and Museum (near Luoyang, approximately one hour's drive from the famous Longmen Grottoes in Henan Province), which had just opened a few days prior to our arrival.

China's historical chronicles have traditionally located its ancient capitals in Henan Province. Seventy years ago, in the 1950s near Zhengzhou, Chinese archaeologists located a large site that revealed several kilometres of Neolithic and Bronze Age remains. Those finds eventually led to the discovery of Erlitou, a fortified capital city with the remains of a palace that is dated to the first half of the second millennium BCE (1700-1500 BCE) now officially recognised as the 'Erlitou Period', predating the Shang Dynasty (traditionally identified as 1000-1050 BCE).

Amongst the site's most important finds were small bronze vessels dating to circa 1600 BCE. Although small and crude in shape, the four *ju* (cups on tripods) were clearly the forerunners of China's great Bronze Age. Bronze was more than a valuable metal; it symbolized power and authority and was reserved for royalty and state sacrifices.

After visiting the site's official reception hall where we watched a short film on the history of the site and studied a site map, we set off in the direction of the excavation grounds several kilometres in the distance – until we were hailed down by museum guards and hustled into the golf carts that have become ubiquitous at many of China's tourist sites.

We were shocked at first to see the local children jumping up and down and playing hide and seek on the site until some local visitors told us that the mounds we were overlooking were actually covering up the original excavation sites to preserve them. The site was huge and surrounded by local



Erlitou square bronze ding featuring the classic taotie motif



This Erlitou round ding with two handles features a scallop design around the body



The spacious ultra-modern Erlitou Museum in Henan province, PRC

apartment buildings, which are scheduled to be pulled down when the village is relocated to enable archaeologists to continue their work beyond the fields already examined.

Behind us, in the distance, was a strikingly modern building which was the museum proper, surrounded by groves of newly planted trees.

Every respectable Chinese museum has showcases of ancient bronzes, the best-known being the Shanghai Museum, which is even built in the shape of a large bronze *ding*. But never had we seen such a surfeit of bronzes as we saw at Erlitou. The vast galleries were filled with case after case of bronzes that had been used to present offerings of wine, meat and cereals during ritual banquets.

Wall charts showed details of the various shapes, decorations and motifs. Other cases exhibited bronze weaponry, including the ceremonial axes used to decapitate those unfortunate enough to have been selected as human offerings. A glass wall enabled visitors to peer down into a model archaeologist's workshop full of work tables, notebooks, brushes, cameras and other tools to enable the recording, cleaning and preservation of archaeological finds. It fascinated children and adults alike, as they pressed against the glass to get a closer look.

The Erlitou Museum isn't limited to finds at Erlitou but also includes many of the larger, more ornate bronzes from the nearby later Erligang site – some over three feet high – revealing the more extensive range of vessels to accommodate the Shang period's inclusion of alcohol (made from fermented cereals) in their rituals.

The Erlitou and later Erligang sites were the fountainhead from which their culture spread. It "stimulated relationships between very remote regions and caused regional centres to develop outside the royal domain."¹ Meanwhile, other cultures, such as those from the Sichuan Basin (Sanxingdui and Jinsha) show the diversity of China's cultural roots.

Today, China has to be acknowledged as having some of the most modern and stunning museums in the world. Whoops! Another just opened, this one (Archaeological Ruins of Liangzhu City) outside of Hangzhou. It will be on this coming October's tour itinerary.



The Erlitou Museum features hundreds of examples of ritual bronze vessels - a researcher's treasure trove



The excavation sites at Erlitou have now been covered with protective mounds of earth; more sites await excavation

Patricia Bjaaland Welch was the tour leader of October 2019's China tour entitled Ancient Capitals. The site was a last-minute addition to the itinerary when the announcement of its opening to the public was spotted in an archaeological e-newsletter.

¹ Corinne Debaine-Francfort, *The Search for Ancient China*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1999, p. 60.

All photographs courtesy of Joyce Le Mesurier

The Arts Community in Waterloo Street

By Sim Xin Yi

A quick stroll down Waterloo Street immediately reveals glimpses of the diverse communities that once lived, worked and worshipped there. Today, Waterloo Street has become an exciting creative neighbourhood – a vibrant arts enclave.

In 1985, the street was given a new lease on life when Singapore's National Arts Council (NAC), designated it an 'arts belt', awarding disused and abandoned buildings to arts groups where artists could develop their practices and expand their capabilities. In turn, these groups redefined the histories of the spaces with their works and activities.

The Pioneers: Early Arts Groups in Singapore

Many of the scheme's first beneficiaries were existing arts companies. Institutions such as Bhaskar's Arts Academy and The Theatre Practice (aka Practice) had existed for over 20 years prior to moving to Waterloo Street. Largely amateur in nature, these troupes rehearsed nomadically in any available space they could afford – school halls, community centres and even members' homes. However, as an increasing number of arts groups began to professionalise in the 1980s, the government recognised the need to create structures to support their artistic growth.



Waterloo Street was known locally as Si Ma Lu or 'the fourth road', far easier for Singapore's early immigrant groups to pronounce and remember. The title of Practice's *Four Horse Road* pays homage to this local name with a playful direct translation



Actors in *May Blossom*, a scene from Practice's upcoming production *Four Horse Road*. This scene was inspired by the real *May Blossom Restaurant*, a Chinese restaurant opened during the Japanese occupation in the former Middle Road Church

The Waterloo Street Arts Belt Project began when the Stamford Arts Centre was established in 1987. Originally built in the 1920s, it was converted into an arts centre that housed many of Singapore's pioneer art institutions, including Bhaskar Arts Academy and Practice. Over the next 10 years, single-tenant spaces were established in some of the street's pre-war shophouses and bungalows. They were subsequently allocated to organisations such as the Action Theatre, the Chinese Calligraphy Society, Dance Ensemble and the Young Musicians' Society. The project finally concluded with Sculpture Square. The Middle Road Church, a tiny Gothic-style building, was reimagined as Singapore's first arts centre dedicated to three-dimensional art.

Overall, the scheme provided much-needed stability during this period of transition. The affordability of the space and the physical resources it provided allowed companies to establish full-time administration, artistic creation, educational activities and the storage infrastructure necessary to support their continued growth.

Moving In: Establishing the Arts Belt

Over the next few decades, the street developed into a thriving arts hub and an important keystone in the arts ecosystem. As the arts companies in Waterloo Street flourished, they went on to become instrumental in defining and developing art in Singapore. During this period, their artistic output included many seminal works that later became part of the Singapore canon, including Practice's co-founder Kuo Pao Kun's works *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral* and *The Spirits Play*.

At the same time, these arts groups began to expand beyond their physical space, to the larger street they called home. They began to create events that engaged the existing community and inculcated a love of and interest in the arts.

Initiatives included The Theatre Practice's street shows and public sing-along sessions, and more recently, Centre 42's *Late Night Texting* – a beloved yearly showcase of new text-based works during the Singapore Night Festival.

Additionally, these privately managed spaces had resonance far beyond the individual tenants, becoming important and affordable resources for other amateur artists and groups. The newly established performance and exhibition spaces created new and accessible platforms for artists beyond those in Waterloo Street.

With the maturation of the first generation of arts practitioners, there also came an increased desire to develop arts advocacy within the community itself. These artists and organisations began focusing on sharing not just their resources, but also their experiences with other emerging artists. Practice's move to the Stamford Arts Centre allowed them to continue developing their pioneering work in arts education by training generations of arts practitioners through long-running workshops, master classes and actors' labs – all held in the space. Today, many arts groups in the street, including Centre 42 and Objectifs, continue to run their own incubation and residency programmes.

The Flip Side: The Challenges of Maturation

At the same time, the shift from amateur to professional came with its own set of challenges. Financial sustainability has always been a key concern for art institutions in Singapore. By moving into a permanent space, these arts groups undertook a large financial risk. While rent itself was subsidised, tenants were expected to cover utility and daily maintenance costs in addition to their own programmes' production costs. The increasing number of arts groups also meant funding became significantly more competitive.

Many of these arts groups had limited arts management experience, an added responsibility and challenge not everyone could overcome. One example was the circumstances that led to Sculpture Square's eventual closure. By the mid-2000s, they were facing significant challenges in securing funding. In response, they reduced exhibition days in favour of revenue-generating opportunities such as space rental and curatorial consultancy projects. However, the next blow came when they lost their status (and funding) as a 'Major Company' under the NAC's Major Company Scheme owing to a perceived lack of artistic direction. While a brief period of revival followed after the appointment of veteran artist Alan Ooei as artistic director, it was too late. In 2014, Sculpture Square decided to forego its physical space and vacated the premises.



The 11 scenes of *Four Horse Road* unfold across three heritage buildings along Waterloo Street. Shown here is the Natina Home, inspired by the real Natina Home For The Aged and Destitute located in Queen Street



A historical photograph depicting the 150-year-old Sri Krishnan Temple along Waterloo Road

The Present: Waterloo Street 30 Years On

The ever-changing landscape of the Waterloo Street Arts Belt reflects the increasing richness of the Singapore arts scene. When matching spaces with interested parties, NAC juggled their own developmental priorities and the community's diverse needs.

The mid-2010s marked a period of many tenant changes. As part of a larger government-wide strategy to preserve and promote traditional art forms, the Stamford Arts Centre was repositioned as a traditional arts centre. Practice, previously based in the centre, was given the opportunity to develop its own art centre capabilities and inherited 54 Waterloo Street – a row of three shophouses. A series of departures in the mid-2010s led to the arrival of new institutions including Objectifs – Centre for Photography and Film and Centre 42. Backed by the NAC, the formation of Centre 42, a theatre development space focused on documentation, was particularly relevant as it responded directly to an emerging need to archive the history of Singapore's art scene.

Conclusion

In the face of constant modernisation, the only thing that remains of Waterloo Street's previous communities is the buildings. When conceptualising the Arts Housing Scheme, the NAC believed that these old buildings would provide creative impetus for artists, while the creative atmosphere would in turn revitalise the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Practice's upcoming production *Four Horse Road 2020* is an extension of both ideas. The promenade theatre experience celebrates the stories of the street's various communities across 150 years. Featuring fictional tales inspired by real events, the production takes place in three heritage buildings on the street itself – Centre 42, Chinese Calligraphy Society and Practice. As a current steward of these spaces, Practice explores its relationship with the street's communities by employing theatre as archaeology – building relationships with not just present, but past communities as well.

The Theatre Practice's *Four Horse Road* runs from 25 March 2020 onwards. Tickets and more information are available at www.practice.org.sg/en/performance/fourhorseroad/

Sim Xin Yi is currently a writer and researcher at The Theatre Practice. She also does communications and programming with Practice Tuckshop, a café and creative space located at 58 Waterloo Street.

Photos on page 6 by Tuckys Photography; all photos courtesy of The Theatre Practice.

A Walk Through Deccan History

By Shelly Dee

The Deccan area of India, located in the southwest, covers eight states and includes two of India's largest cities, Hyderabad and Bangalore. But how many of you have ever ventured beyond these mega-cities into the smaller towns and villages to explore the extensive history of the area? Judging from the experience of the latest FOM trip there, the answer must be "not many", because we had the forts, tombs, temples and palaces from Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim kingdoms to ourselves. Not only were there very few tourists, but the monuments we saw, most from 500 to over 2,000 years old, were overwhelmingly in very good condition with many intricate carvings intact. Our journey through time went back more than 2,000 years.

3rd century BCE

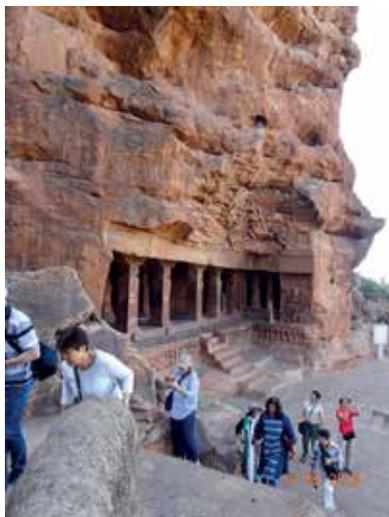
The oldest artefacts we saw were from the recently excavated site of an early Buddhist *mahastupa* (large stupa) called Sannati. It is one of the earliest Buddhist centres in India, yet has not been developed for tourism. Hundreds of stone slabs that depict the life of Buddha in beautiful clarity have been dug up from a field in the middle of farmland. One of the most amazing carvings is the 3rd century BCE original inscription by Emperor Ashoka and also his image, perhaps the only one that's ever been found. It is speculated that he died here and that his tomb could be one of the many mounds in the area, as yet unexcavated.



King Ashoka at the Sannati mahastupa

540 to 757 CE

Badami, the capital city of the early Chalukyas who ruled much of the Deccan, was rich in 6th to 9th century CE rock-cut and free-standing Hindu temples. The four cave temples, the earliest of the monuments, are located on a vertical sandstone cliff and were hewn from the outside in, and from top to bottom, in the 6th century. The walls and ceilings are literally covered with depictions of Shiva and Vishnu with their families and in their various incarnations.



Badami Rock-Cut Caves



Earliest temples at Pattadakal

At Pattadakal, outside Badami, one of the surprisingly few UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the Deccan, the Chalukyas mastered Hindu temple architecture because it was here that they crowned their kings. In the 7th and 8th centuries, architects experimented with temple styles from both north (Nagara style) and south (Dravida style) India. The biggest and perhaps most beautiful, the Virupaksha temple, was built by a queen in honour of her husband's war victory and is full of Shiva carvings as well as tales from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

1200 CE

As we moved forward in time, we visited several temples constructed during the Hoysala reign. The ornate, star-shaped Chennakeshava Temple is considered the epitome of Hoysala architecture. Its exterior is covered with very deep, very intricate carvings, all in good condition. They are from Hindu legends, the *Ramayana*, and from the everyday life of those times.



Chennakeshava Temple, Belur

Later, we saw more carvings at an unusual Vishnu shrine, the Veera Narayana Temple, built in 1200. This temple has the most beautifully carved eight-foot-tall statues in three shrines: a Narayana with four hands, a Krishna playing the flute and a *Yoganarasimha* (man-lion incarnation).



Ganesha monolith at Hampi

14th-16th century CE

Hampi, the ruined city of the Deccan's powerful Vijayanagar Empire, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is said to have been the second largest medieval era city in the world, after Beijing. By 1565, Hampi had been destroyed by Muslim armies and was never rebuilt. More than 1,600 ruins are spread over 16 square miles.

We visited many of its shrines and temples, including the sacred water tanks attached to the temples. The stables that housed the royal elephants are justly famous, with domes and 12-sided vaults. Our group was captivated by the two monolithic Ganesha statues with Parvati, his mother, carved onto his back with her arms around her son, a rare and moving display of motherly love. There were also several *Ramayana* sites where Prince Rama met Sugriva in the mythical Kishkindha kingdom.

Carvings of Hanuman were everywhere, along with real monkeys stealing water bottles from visitors and pilgrims at the Virupaksha temple complex. Pilgrims from all over India come here to worship Virupaksha and his two consorts, the goddesses Pampa and Bhuvaneshvari. In the afternoon, we visited the finely carved Vitthala Temple, getting there in coracles, small round boats.

1527-1686

The Deccan sultanates occupied several cities during this period; we visited Vijayapura, Bidar, Hyderabad and Gulbarga to view the remains of the old forts, tombs and mosques. Bidar was the most beautiful of the forts. Although there was an original fort, the Bahmani Sultanate rebuilt it from 1429-1432 using Turkish and Persian architects. By 1686, it had been incorporated into the Mughal Empire. Quite a few frescoed galleries remain in this very large complex, as well as a beautiful fountain entranceway. Ahmad I Shah Wali



FOM group at Gol Gumbaz, Bijapur



Chowmahalla Palace, Hyderabad

Bahman's tomb had splendid paintings in hues of vermilion, cobalt blue, turquoise and black coverings its walls and dome. Ahmad Shah was the only Bahmani sultan given the title *Wali*, Friend of God. His grave, covered in a cloth canopy, is worshipped today by both Muslims and Hindus.

In Bijapur, Gol Gumbaz has India's largest dome and the second largest in the world. The tomb of Mohammad Adil Shah, ruler of Bijapur for 30 years until 1657, is considered the single most distinctive Islamic building in the Deccan and is called the Taj Mahal of the South. The stark immensity of its interior space inspired awe and the contemplation of infinity among our group members. Nearby is the tomb and mosque complex of Ibrahim Rauza. The stone calligraphic carvings covering the mosque's entire external surface amazed us with their artistry. Calligraphy is found even on the stone *jali* (latticed) screens, which help light the interior.

1724-1959

The period of the Nizams of Hyderabad introduced fabulous riches to the area and palaces were constructed to display this wealth. The last nizam is said to have been the richest man in the world during his rule.

We were lucky to be given a tour of Falaknuma Palace, now a Taj hotel. The last nizam used the place as a guest palace where luminaries such as King George V, Queen Mary, Edward VIII and Tsar Nicholas stayed. We had dinner at the palace, together with a gigantic wedding party. The palace library has a replica of Windsor Castle's roof and houses more than 5,000 books. The dining room table can seat 101 guests and the bar houses a pool table identical to one at Buckingham Palace.

Thanks to Abha Kaul's excellent planning and leadership of this fascinating study tour, we left this trip more aware of the importance of the southern Deccan in Indian history. Its diverse and mingling populations produced a unique culture that created the world-class art we were privileged to see. The ongoing conservation efforts we witnessed were also impressive. The conservation efforts at the stunning Qutb Shahi Tombs, located near Hyderabad's Golconda Fort, are being carried out to exacting standards to replicate the original materials and style. The conservators even plan to build a kiln on site to duplicate the original Persian/Uzbek tiles in one of the complex's tombs.

Our message to all art lovers – go now to enjoy these treasures without the crowds.

Shelly Dee has been a member of FOM for 19 years. She currently lives in Dallas, Texas, where she is on the Board of the Dallas Museum of Art.

All photos courtesy of Abha Kaul

FOM Study Tour

A Journey into Medieval China

By Manuela Fremy

Whenever a new study tour led by Patricia Welch is announced, it is fully subscribed within a few days. Our lucky group soon realised the prerequisites entailed by a 'study' tour. Going back to the early Chinese dynasties, we each had to study a different topic to understand the key formative centuries in China, topics that ranged from bronze-making to poetry, while not forgetting the long list of emperors of the Tang dynasty. Everyone presented their research findings at flavourful dinner gatherings in the six months before our departure.

But where exactly were we going? I would have had a hard time pinpointing it on a map so to describe it broadly, we were going to the central plains of China somewhere between the Yangtze and the Yellow rivers, where two of China's historical capitals lie, Luoyang and Chang'an (now Xi'an).

Our first stop was the most famous archaeological site in China, the mausoleum of its first emperor, Qin Shi Huang, who at the beginning of his reign in the 3rd century BCE, ordered the making of an earthenware army to defend him in the afterlife.



Beilin Museum stone stele with seated Maitreya

Archaeology territory

To see the 7,000 terracotta warriors on that day, we had to 'conquer' an army of 30,000 tourists (in high season, the numbers reach 145,000). It was an initiation into Chinese crowds for those of us not acquainted with the Middle Kingdom. The impressive scale and display of those warriors were worth the fight. They all bore lively individual expressions, each created from clay, all thanks to the 600,000 forced labourers who crafted them. Since 1974, a permanent team of 40 archaeologists has worked to restore and also uncover more warriors in the pits.



The pits where the horses were buried

Our second site, a few hours away from Xi'an, was also a work in progress. The tomb of the Duke Jin of Qi consists of several pits. The most impressive and chilling one is the length of the Eiffel Tower and the depth of an eight-storey building. It showed survey holes. Under those, we were told that more than 100 horses had been buried alive with chariots neatly aligned in rows. There may be up to 600 more buried horses – the largest number found to date in China.



The FOM tour group at the Longmen Grottoes, photo by Rosalie Kwok

Our third tomb, that of Emperor Gaozong and his wife Wu Zetian, and the fourth, Emperor Jingdi's with 50,000 miniature terracotta figurines, would confirm the Chinese emperors' obsession with immortality. By the Tang dynasty, miniature figurines had replaced live animals.

For Patricia Welch, who travels regularly to China, the pace of change is (still) mesmerising. It is said that one museum opens every week in China. Her astonishment at the unrecognisable sites she had visited a few years earlier now all paved with wide alleys, new buildings and gardens, sheds light on China's enthusiasm for its culture. We were lucky to visit the Erlitou Museum, which had opened four days prior to our arrival (you can read more about this museum on page five of this issue).

China's relics uncovered

Our journey continued with the discovery of the rich foreign cultural and religious influences in medieval China. The Longmen Grottoes' impressive carved Buddhas and the great mosque of Xi'an illustrate how religions co-existed in harmony with the values of Confucianism and later Daoism. We also visited Famensi Temple, said to hold the Buddha's finger bone, which makes historians wonder about the mobility and astonishing fecundity of relics. It is believed to have been presented by the Emperor Ashoka of India around 300 BCE.



The entrance to Xi'an's Great Mosque



Xi'an city's night lights



Xi'an street art being admired by the group

As we all pondered the highlights of our trip, there seemed to be a consensus regarding the murals discovered in the Tang dynasty tombs, amongst the most precious relics of Xi'an's Shaanxi Museum. They are testimony to a highly cultured and influential society. At the Tang court, hunting and playing polo were favoured pastimes, alongside dancing and playing music. Women would grow bonsais, sleep on tatamis, dress up fashionably to look like the barbarians of Central Asia (the Hu) and were all polyglots. Wine would be drunk from translucent stem glasses, precious goods from the Middle East traded through the Silk Roads. This time, when China reached out to the world and embraced different cultures and religions, is unique in China's history. China was united and powerful, so it is no wonder this period is revered today as the heyday of Chinese history.

Thanks to our native-born interpreter Laura, we were able to follow Professor Wang's tour. He is a scholar who has worked for many years on the Tang murals and paints reproductions, which we were all eager to purchase, especially after he mentioned that he had used thousand-year-old earth to age the paintings. This was one of the rare 'souvenir breaks' since our schedule was packed with visits. Other unique souvenirs are rubbings, copies of ancient engraved steles with inscriptions using paper and ink. They are artworks in themselves. The Stele Forest (Beilin) museum in Xi'an houses the equivalent of the Rosetta Stone, the famous Nestorian stele, with inscriptions in Chinese and Syriac (an Aramaic dialect) that records the arrival in China of a luminous new religion from Daqin (Syria) – Christianity. In this museum, Patricia introduced us to the art of recognising the different Buddhas of the Northern and Eastern Wei dynasty steles.

Buddhism reached China via the Silk Road and the tradition adopted here was Mahayana Buddhism. It



A happy street vendor in Xi'an

introduced a pure land, a paradise where individuals could transition until they reached enlightenment. It was believed that Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future, would come 1,000 years after the historical Buddha to lead the faithful to the Pure Land, an idea that suited a society in search of the elixir of immortality.

Memories of this trip would not be complete without a review of the culinary experiences that we enjoyed. Some of our most convivial moments were spent in the bus where an incredible variety of nuts circulated – a squirrel's paradise – as well as Indian delights, Chinese lotus crackers, local dried red dates and walnuts. These were in high demand after Patricia's quizzes to check that we knew why the terracotta warriors were so well-preserved (fire) or the date of construction of the first mosque in Xi'an (742 CE). Local meals were an adventure. Learning the art of turning the glass lazy susan (clockwise only) and avoiding half of the glasses on the table falling over, required dexterity. A fierce debate on the texture of *jiaozi* (dumplings), which in Singapore are crispy on the outside and soft on the inside, was finally resolved at a local restaurant where *jiaozi* were boiled and thus served soft on both the inside and outside.

For any foreigner travelling to China, the sheer size of sites and the number of people are mind-blowing. This massive scale also characterised medieval China, when its population reached 50 million during the Han dynasty, explaining how hundreds of thousands of labourers were available to build those incredible tombs. For 10 days, we immersed ourselves in this era, with the verses of the great Tang poets Li Bai and Du Fu accompanying our journey and revealing a new path of hidden treasures.

*The river's blue, the bird a perfect white,
The mountain green with flowers about to blaze.
I've watched the spring pass away again,
When will I be able to return?*

Note: A special thanks to our amazing Chinese interpreters (Laura and Weining), serial photographers (Rosalie, Joyce and Kim), wine specialist (Eric), book worms and fact checkers (Isabella, Alex and Tai Ann), chatty bus companions (Shernaz, Manisha, Juliana and Evelyne), joke-teller (Shiv), very equipped travellers (Roopa and Alex), and of course to our wonderful leader Patricia.

Manuela Fremy is a docent at the Asian Civilisations Museum.

Unless otherwise noted, all photos by Joyce Le Mesurier



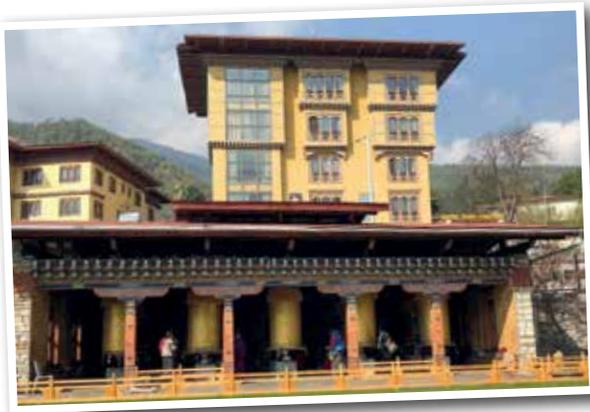
Bhutan Stu

By Carolyn



Bhutan is one of those rare countries where the local culture seeps into your being immediately upon arrival. The spectacular landing between the mountains in Paro has you walking across the tarmac to a traditional timber-crafted arrival hall that looks as if it has been there for centuries, but really it has been only several decades.

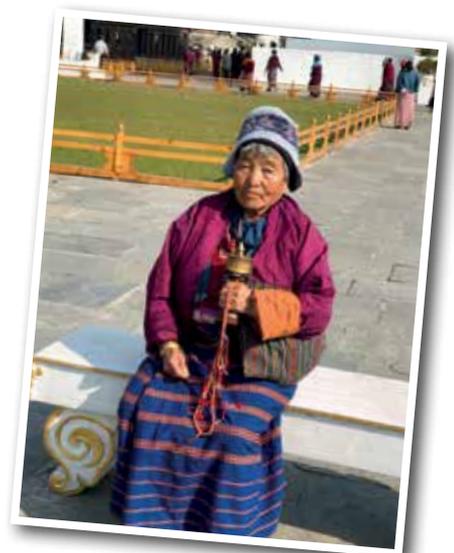
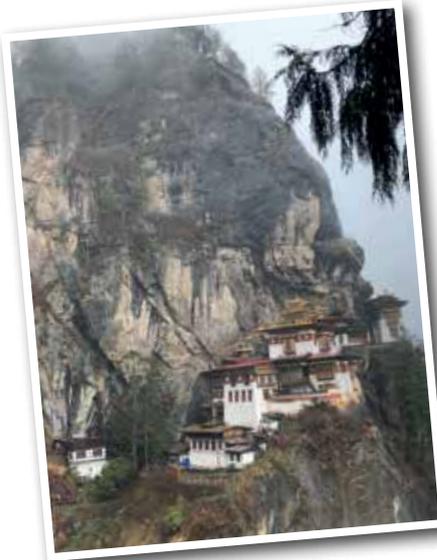
Tradition is what this country is all about. Love for the king and the royal family is evident since just about every restaurant, hotel and public place you enter has the king's photo on the wall. During the tour our group noted only one place that did not have such a display. Our group's love for the king came within hours of arrival with a personal greeting and chat with him at the festival we attended. What a charming man he is. The humble way he addressed numerous members of the crowd, locals and tourists alike was striking. All the local people politely waited their turn, bowing and paying homage in their finest traditional clothing.

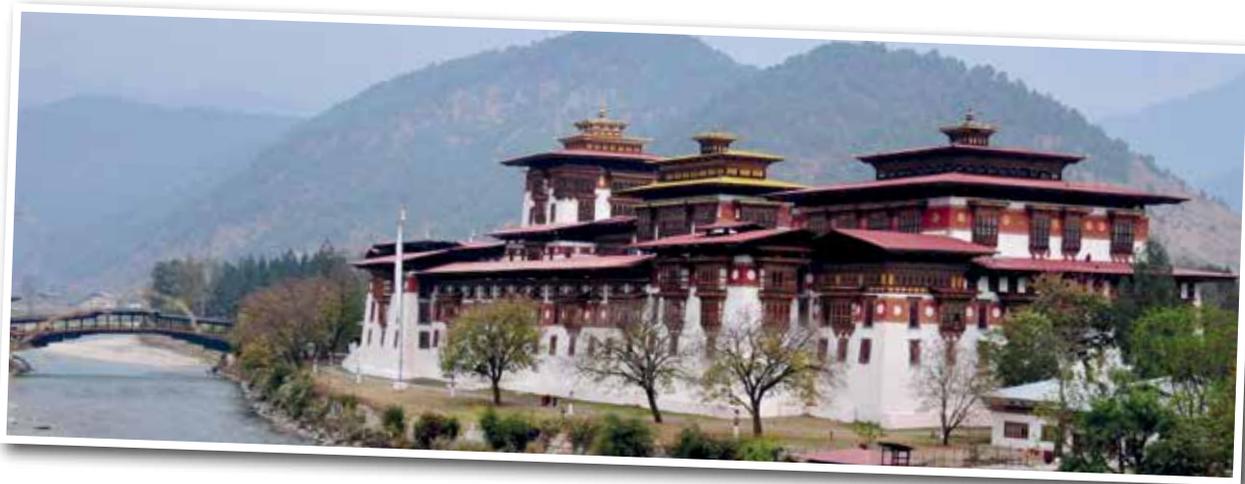


For me, the beauty of the country is the combination of the natural mountainous landscape, the traditional architecture and the people, adorned in traditional woven clothing. These factors, coupled with the welcoming and helpful nature of the people, are clearly the reasons tourists are putting Bhutan on their must-see bucket list.

As part of our tour we visited many temples extravagantly decorated with various Buddhas and the stories of the Buddha. One could get 'temped out' if it were not for the glorious landscape that surrounds them.

The bonus for us visiting Bhutan as part of an FOM study





dy Tour 2019

Le Huray

tour was no doubt our fantastic local guide Kuenzang as well as the plethora of local experts joining us to discuss various aspects of the country. The home meal accompanied by wine, with host intent on plying us all with the local brew, was a standout for the opportunity we had to feel really local. Françoise Pommaret's discussion of local culture was also an eye-opener for us all.

For those wondering if Bhutanese food is worth the trip, the answer is a resounding yes. The surprise factor was that although this small country only recently opened up to tourism, there is a scattering of quality ethnic-based restaurants on offer.

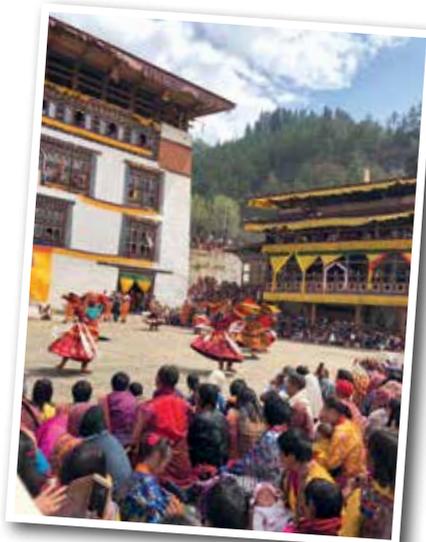
The highlight for me, despite being unprepared for the snow and freezing weather, was the trek up to Taktsang Monastery. I wish I could say that the hot stone bath was relaxing, but that was not to be until after enough cold water had been added for me to be able to comfortably step in.

No doubt I will go back to Bhutan with my family to enjoy the countryside and walking opportunities.

Carolyn Le Huray is from Melbourne, Australia and arrived in Singapore as a trailing spouse with teenage sons. She put her career in Corporate Taxation on hold, but has not stopped learning. She joined FOM Asian study group, the Bhutan study tour as well as a professional development course with the Australian Institute of Company Directors.



Photos courtesy of Khatiza van Savage



FOM's Study Tour to Gujarat, India

By Roopa Dewan

On 12 January 2019, an FOM group led by Rashmi Panchal left for Ahmedabad on a 'Kites and Kutch' study tour. A week later, sitting under the stars at Mandvi, we recalled the highlights – not only the kite festival and the remarkable Rann of Kutch, but also the rich diversity of architecture, textiles and landscapes. Built on the banks of the Sabarmati River, Ahmedabad is home to India's textile industry and is Mahatma Gandhi's birthplace. Seventy years later, his message of *ahimsa* (non-violence), remains significant. His home, Sabarmati Ashram, was the hub of the non-violent movement that overthrew a colonial power. We loved the quote, "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any." This quote defines my experience of this trip.



The group on the way to Bhuj, photo by Girish Gupta

Architecture

Arriving at The House of MG, defined by an old-world charm, we saw the glory of Ahmedabad. Across from it was the Saeed Sidi Mosque, a city icon built in the Indo-Islamic style, with beautiful *jalīs* or screens depicting the tree of life and palm trees in exquisite yellow sandstone filigree.

Ahmedabad was built on the principles of *Vastu Shastra*, an ancient prescriptive text on habitat planning similar to *Feng Shui*. The old walled city was divided into *pols*, a self-contained cluster based on caste, religion or occupation. Within each *pol* was a notice board, a place of worship, a well, a tank and a bird feeder or *chabutaro*. Life revolved around the *chowk* or central courtyard. Women were washing clothes, cooking or socialising in the lanes. The houses were built of brick and wood. Some *havelīs* (mansions) had wooden façades rich with floral designs and intricately carved balconies. The architectural highlights included the Swami Narayana Temple, a Jain Temple and the Jumma Masjid.

We drove to Ashavali, Ahmedabad's original name, where the last generation of the talented Patel/Khatri family craftsmen weave the prized Ashavali sarees. Gujarat has been a renowned brocade weaving centre since the 13th century. Today, pit looms from the 16th century are used to weave brocade into distinctly embellished *pallus* (borders) and borders that look embossed. Silver or copper thread replaces



Group member Indrani at the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad

gold to weave parrots, peacocks and paisleys into the sarees. Islamic and Hindu patterns blend.

This fusion of Islamic and Hindu architecture was also evident in the *Adalaj Vav* (step well). Octagonal and five storeys deep, with beautiful carvings of Hindu gods and goddesses, it was built by Rana Vir Singh in 1499 as a water source, a spiritual refuge and a resting place for travellers. Its dramatic history is filled with love, betrayal and war.

In Siddhpur, we walked through the Vohravads, owned by wealthy Dawoodi Bohra Muslims, traders in hardware, glass and textiles. Victorian mansions in neat rows, in pastel shades with ornate balconies, had monograms in coats of arms behind glass. Today, it is a ghost town facing slow decay.

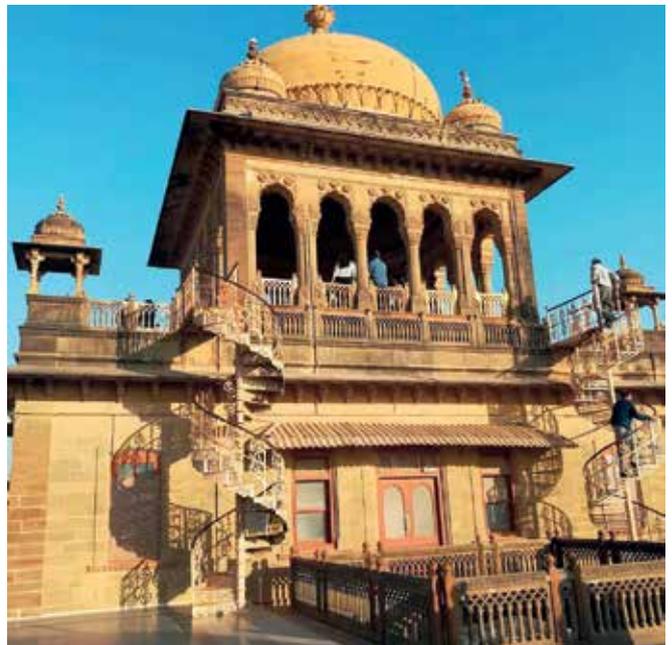
Then on to Patan, famed for Rani ki Vav, the queen of step wells. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, this marvel of red sandstone stores water sourced from underground reservoirs and streams. Built as a memorial to the king on the banks of the Saraswati River, it is an inverted temple with steps that go down seven storeys. Delicately carved statues adorn the walls, niches and pillars. Its sandstone panels provided inspiration for the intricate process of double ikat design, which we saw at the Patola Museum. The threads for both warp and weft are first tied, then dyed and woven into motifs of elephants and peacocks. There are some prized pieces at the ACM.



At Rani ki Vav, Patan, photo by Girish Gupta



Sufiyani Khatri demonstrating Ajrakh printing



Vijay Vilas Palace, Mandvi

The Sun Temple in Modhera was built in 1026 to honour the sun god Surya, whose magnificent statues adorn the temple's four façades. It is a stone rendering of the solar calendar with the entrance facing east. The main complex is divided into three, a hall with 12 niches representing the 12 months and 52 pillars for the weeks of the year. Lotus flowers, symbols of the sun, are carved into the plinth, along with the human life. Eight deities symbolize the eight directions and the elements of nature: Fire, Water, Earth, Air, Space, Ice, Light and Darkness. The main sanctum is believed to have housed a golden statue, positioned so as to glow during the equinoxes.

In Bhuj, we visited the Gothic-style Prag Mahal and the Aina Mahal or Hall of Mirrors. Dutch guards with bugles guard the entrance of the sandstone and marble building. Climbing the bell tower, we saw the queen's palace (*Rani Mahal*) next door. The disintegrating 300-year-old structure was magnificent even in its decrepitude. The Vijay Vilas Palace, built in 1920 for the king's son, is now used for shooting Bollywood movies.

Textiles

We visited Sunil Manubhai Chitkara, a sixth-generation artist from the nomadic Vagheri community. Traditionally barred from entering temples, the Vagheris created their own. Painting images of mother goddesses on cloth called *Mata ni pachedi*, they hung them as backdrops for makeshift shrines. Using bamboo chisels, they drew free-hand images using vegetable dyes. *Mata ni pachedi* gave them social elevation and status. Similarly, Ansari Shahid Hussain, from a family of *mochis* or cobblers, demonstrated *zardosi* (gold thread embroidery), using a hooked needle, gold wires, sequins, beads and silk thread.

In Ajrakhpur, Sufian Ismail Khatri', a ninth-generation Ajrakh printer, demonstrated the various stages of printing both sides of the cloth with perfect registration, filling it with colours derived from pomegranate, turmeric, alizarin, indigo and madder to achieve the unique earthy tones. Each cloth goes through 17 treatments and dyes before completion.

Mandvi is home to crafts such as pottery, weaving and *bandhini*, the ancient art of tie and dye, honed over generations. The Khatri family demonstrated how the men prepare designs on the cloth and with nimble fingers, the women tie minute knots. The knotted fabric is then dyed.

In Nirona Village, Rogan art has been preserved for four centuries and is being maintained by eighth-generation Abdul Gafur Khatri and his family. The medium is a special castor oil-based gum from resin mixed with colour pigments. A thick metal needle lifts the gummy paste off the palm and deposits the fine lines of the design onto the fabric.

Our last day was spent at the LLDC (Living Learning Design Centre) of the Shrujan Museum. Chandaben Shroff wanted to run a free kitchen during a period of drought, but the women rejected charity, so she started *shrujan*, (creativity in Sanskrit) to provide a livelihood. Traditionally a craft to embellish personal clothing and adornments for animals, this skill is passed on to each community's daughters. Today, this museum researches, documents and preserves the hand-embroidered crafts of Kutch.

Landscape

The Rann of Kutch is one of the world's largest salt marshes. Called Kutch, meaning intermittently wet and dry, the Great Rann or desert, covers about 7,500 square kilometres. Bone-dry all winter, it is flooded in the summer. Its stark landscape is encrusted with salt, but reveals small *bets* or islands, formed as ancient sea water receded. These *bets* support endangered animals such as the Asiatic wild ass, an elegant blackbuck, the nilgai antelope and the Indian gazelle.

We arrived just as the sun was setting, a surreal experience – vast salt pans reflected the sky's luminosity, imbibing the colours of the sunset. Nothing but a vast whiteness. The hand-embroidered adornments of the camels provided a striking contrast. An early morning safari treated us to the animals as well as to thousands of pink flamingos, cranes, storks, stilts and pelicans. This salt marsh is a birder's paradise. We left vowing to return – to honour a reverence for nature in this unique landscape and the untouched traditions of handicrafts handed down through the generations. Here is a place worth visiting again and again.

Roopa Dewan loves to travel and learn about history, culture, folklore and traditional crafts.

Unless otherwise noted, photos by Rashmi Panchal

A Special Exhibition at the Indian Heritage Centre

By Durga Arivan

This bicentennial year marks two centuries since the first recorded arrival in May 1819 of a Tamil in Singapore, Naraina Pillai, a native of the Coromandel Coast. It is now an acknowledged fact that the Tamil community has been present in Singapore for 200 years, but what is not so well known is that Tamil connections with Singapore and Southeast Asia can be traced back to more than 600 years before Raffles' arrival.

From the Coromandel Coast to the Straits: Revisiting Tamil Heritage, curated by Ms Nalina Gopal, is the Indian Heritage Centre's (IHC) fourth special exhibition, exploring a lesser-known narrative by enumerating the odyssey of pre-modern Tamil diasporas in Southeast Asia while also offering a glimpse of some 19th century pioneers and a few of Singapore's oldest Tamil families. Here are three reasons why you shouldn't miss this special exhibition:

1. Discover how Cholamandalam became Coromandel:

The Coromandel was a region famed around the world from ancient times for its textiles and goods. Coromandel is the European derivative of the term Cholamandalam, literally meaning the realm of the Cholas, referring to the territories under Chola dynasty rule in southeast India, including parts of present-day Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. The oldest European mention of Coromandel appears in the *Roteiro de Vasco da Gama*, given as Chomandarla, which by the 16th century was anglicised to Coromandel.

In the late prehistoric period, Tamils acted as intermediaries in a trade network that included the Roman empire and the Mediterranean in the west to the other side of the Bay of Bengal. The most significant empires in Tamil lands were the Cholas, Cheras, Pandyas and Pallavas, as well as the Vijayanagar rulers through their Nayaka governors, all of whom relied on the long line of Tamil ports. Archaeological evidence includes the 2nd to 3rd century Romano-inspired, Indian rouletted ware generally used to hold food or burial provisions. It was made in the Tamil port Arikamedu and found at a site known as Buni in West Java, which later came under the territory of Tarumanagara, a West Javan polity (4th – 7th century CE). The name Tarumanagara could have been derived from Tamil, meaning the polity of law and order.

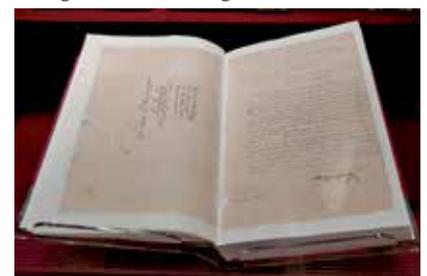
Tamil seafarers had continuous links with the Malay world through trade, power, diplomacy, strife and matrimonial ties. In 1025 CE, Rajendra Chola I attacked and defeated the king of Kadaram (Kedah), earning him the title *Kadaram Kondan*. For the next century, the Chola practice of appointing a crown prince to rule the Tamil-dominated area in the Straits continued, giving Tamil merchant guilds



Madras Embarking by JB East, Charles Hunt and Rudolph Ackermann, 1856, Madras, Hand-coloured aquatint. Collection of the National Museum of Singapore, photo courtesy of the IHC

undisturbed access to Chinese markets. The Sangam anthologies, ancient Tamil literature (namely *Pattinappalai* dating to the 2nd century CE) describe the import of foreign merchandise from Kedah to a Chola port in South India. Along with textiles, cotton, gems and pearls that went east and minerals, forest produce and spices that came to India, trade stimulated the exchange of ideas, religions and the arts.

By the 17th century, established mercantile communities were concentrated around the Coromandel Coast's ports. For instance, Tamil Muslim mercantile communities (such as Lebbai, Rawther, Marakayyar and Kayalar) who traded with Ceylon (Sri Lanka), the Straits and other parts of Southeast Asia were known overseas as Chulia. This trade gradually declined by the 19th century.



A petition submitted by Naraina Pillai, October 1822, Singapore, on loan from the National Archives of Singapore, photo by the author

2. Unveil unknown mysteries with more than 230 artefacts

The exhibition comprises more than 230 objects from local and international museum collections, including rare artefacts from Singapore's National Collection and precious family heirlooms from community lenders and donors.

Noteworthy artefacts include a majestic Shiva Nataraja, an artwork that reached its peak during the prosperous Chola period and today stands as a reminder of living



Heart in Hand - a marriage of identities, Anurendra Jegadeva, hand-painted on wood, 2019. Commissioned by the Indian Heritage Centre. Photo by the author

Tamil tradition. The four-armed figure shows Lord Shiva Nataraja engaged in the ecstatic dance known as *Ananda-tandava*. *Tandava* is the dance that Shiva performs to dissolve, but destruction being the forerunner of creation, Shiva performs it with delight and hence the *Ananda-Tandava*. The iconography combines Shiva's role as creator, preserver and also destroyer of the universe and conveys the Indian concept of the never-ending cycle of time.

In addition to such enticing trade goods as colourful cotton textiles and luxury goods, there is a mysterious bell once used by the Maoris as a *kōhua* (iron pot) for boiling potatoes. In 1841, William Colenso discovered this bell near Whangarei in New Zealand's Northland region. More curious is the bell's Tamil inscription, *Mohideen Bux udiya kappal udiya mani*, meaning the bell belonging to Mohideen Bux's ship. *Mohideen Bux* was a common name for ships owned by Muslim maritime communities operating out of ports along the Coromandel Coast. Today the mysterious object is nicknamed the Tamil bell and is on loan to the IHC from the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Interestingly, a seaside town in New Zealand's North Island is named Coromandel Harbour after the *HMS Coromandel*, a ship of the British Royal Navy that stopped at the town in 1820 to purchase kauri spars (long poles used for ships' masts and booms).

The second half of the exhibition emphasises diverse Tamil communities and their settlement in Singapore. Little is known about the early Tamil communities in 19th century Singapore and the pivotal role they played in colonial society and the making of the nation. Singapore's Tamils are a complex, living, thriving community and like others, have been facing issues in navigating Tamil identity in multicultural Singapore.

One of the first and early Tamil pioneers, Naraina Pillai, is well known to the community as a leader, entrepreneur and founder of



Siva Nataraja, 12th century CE, Chola period, Tamil Nadu. Bronze on loan from the National Museum, New Delhi (India). Photo courtesy of the IHC

Singapore's oldest Hindu temple (Sri Mariamman) in 1827. A natural question for such a luminary is, "What did he look like?" No one really knows as there is no known historical image of him. One account says he was, "short and fat, and had a round face, which was usually beaming with pleasure, while his white teeth showed in a cheerful smile". The exhibition has something else – the man's signature, in Tamil and English, on two petitions addressed to Raffles asking for permission to erect a shop at the site where his business burned down.

In coordination with the Singapore Biennale, there are three commissioned artworks by artists who reconnected with their Tamil identities through textiles, paintings and sculpture. These are *Traveller's Tales* by Lavanya Mani (on this issue's cover), *Heart in Hand* by Anurendra Jegadeva and *Masala* by Kumari Nahappan. Visitors can also watch a short documentary called *Odyssey of Tamils*, by the award-winning director K Rajagopal. It features beautiful black-and-white cinematography, tracking the past and present perspectives of Tamils in the region.



Piring or dish, Romano-Indian rouletted ware, 2nd-3rd century, made in Arikamedu, found in Buni Site, Krowang, Northwest Java. On loan from the National Museum of Indonesia. Photo courtesy of the IHC

3. A First -- 3D holograms!

Prepare for a surprise. The exhibition includes ingenious multimedia elements such as a virtual 3D scan of the *Larger Leiden Grant*, a copperplate edict issued by the Chola king Rajaraja Chola, in 1006 CE.

Another 3D hologram views a familiar object from a fresh perspective – the Singapore Stone. The treasure that sits in the National Museum of Singapore is one of three parts collected after the original boulder was blown up in 1843. While the whereabouts of the other two parts are unknown, for the first time, via the means of 3D holograms, all three fragments have been created from rubbings of the stone published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* in 1848. Recent interpretations of the inscriptions on the stone, which had been largely undeciphered, suggest an early Tamil presence in the Straits of Singapore. Dr Iain Sinclair has identified the phrase *kesariva* in the inscriptions, which he suggests could be part of the word *parakesarivarmān* – a title used by several kings during the Chola dynasty. The finding could not only testify to an early Tamil presence in Singapore, but also the possibility of shifting the Tamil presence in Singapore as far back as 1,000 years.

If three reasons aren't enough to ensure you don't miss this special exhibition that showcases the diverse roles that Tamils in Singapore have played, here's a fourth – free guided tours led by FOM docents. Join our tours at the IHC Special Exhibitions Gallery every Wednesday and Friday at 11:00 am.

Durga Arivan is an FOM docent at the IHC, ACM and NMS. She is also the special exhibitions coordinator at the IHC.

Highland Fling at the Goroka Show

By Darlene D Kasten

A cacophony of sounds. A riot of colours. An explosion of activity. This is not hyperbole. This is the Goroka Show, the largest and most famous tribal gathering and cultural event in Papua New Guinea (PNG). At its core, it began as a tribal gathering held annually around the country's Independence Day (16 September) in the town of Goroka, the capital of the Eastern Highlands Province. In recent years it has become a major attraction for both national and international tourists and remains the largest cultural event in PNG despite similar shows now being organised elsewhere around the country.

The Goroka Show was first staged in 1957 at the Independence Park opposite the Goroka Main Market. The show was introduced and organised by the Australian *kiaps*, the former governing officials who proudly took the opportunity to display the culture of their district through language, celebration and makeshift round houses reflecting tribal tradition. The *kiaps* brought in sing-sing performing groups from their area and as there are some 29 languages and societies in the highlands alone, out of an estimated 840 languages in the entire nation, it showcased the area's unique music, dance and culture.



Asaro Mud Men, Huli Wigmen, Chimbu Skeleton tribe



Polga lifestyle sing-sing group, photo by Marilyn of Taylor Made Imagery

Each sing-sing group has a distinct song and dance performance and costumes emblematic of their tribe. Many wear aprons or skirts of cordyline leaves, grass or bark cloth and giant headdresses decorated with natural materials such as boar's teeth, snakeskin, beads, tufts of animal fur, beetle wings, kina and cowry shells, cassowary quills and a rainbow of birds-of-paradise feathers. Among the dozens of varieties of birds-of-paradise native to the region is the Raggiana bird-of-paradise. This is the national bird, the national emblem, and is included on the national flag. These costumes are family heirlooms and are priceless. Each

group paints their faces in unique designs of red, black, white and yellow.

While all the tribal costumes are unique, several stand out. To paint their faces, the Huli Wigmen use a special ambua clay, which they consider sacred, and pierce their nose septums with long quills. But it is their woven-hair wigs used as elaborate headdresses and decorated with bundles of multi-coloured feathers that are simply amazing. Some take ten years to make.

Likewise, the Asaro Mud Men paint their bodies completely white, wear a skimpy skirt of leaves and elongated bamboo fingers, and are most recognisable for their ghoulish clay masks adorned with pigs' teeth and shells which completely cover their heads like a helmet. The Chimbu Skeleton Tribe dress up in traditional body paint and carry long spears. They paint themselves as skeletons to intimidate their enemies into believing that they are not human and have some source of supernatural power and believe me, it is effective.



Nupaha tribe

In the first year of the Goroka Show, a competition was instituted to see which was the best organised and administered district. The Nupaha tribe wearing their signature height-defying red, white and black bark headdresses, won that competition, which they have since successfully defended many times.

Today there are more than 100 tribes who participate and the venue has been moved to the National Sports Institute



Yagas sing-sing group



Tribal food offerings to the dignitaries and sponsors

Field Grounds. At times there can be up to 40,000 warriors all in rhythm to the beat of kundu drums. While the competition aspect was eliminated in 2010, the show stays close to its roots as a cultural celebration where customs and rituals are shared.

Goroka itself has evolved from a small outpost in the 1950s to a major commercial centre that 25,000 people now call home. It sits at 1,600 metres above sea level, with a climate described as perpetual spring. Traditional dress is seldom worn outside of shows and festivals these days, although the Highlanders still live in villages of neat clusters of round, low-walled huts built amongst the rolling kunai grass-covered hills.

The show is three days long. Friday highlights local agriculture and children's tribal dress. Saturday and Sunday are all about the tribes. Most of the tribes participate on both days, but there are a few tribes that may only participate on one day. The tribes sing and dance for hours. The music is predominantly vocal and includes songs of hunting, war, totemistic ritual, cannibalism and myths. The vocalisation of songs usually sung by groups in unison is rich and vibrant. Dancers sway in a trancelike rhythm or frantically gyrate accompanied by percussion instruments such as the garamut slit drum, kundu hourglass-drum, launut friction drum, shell rattles, lengths of bamboo-blown to give a single pitch, and bamboo flutes.



Warrior Bat Men, Omai Sava tribe

The fairgrounds are divided into the VIP area, two public areas, and a vendor area. The VIP area in the centre of the fairgrounds is the main show area. VIP ticket holders can enter early and it remains exclusive until 2:00 pm on Friday and Saturday and about noon on Sunday. The tribes arrive as early as 5:00 am and enter the grounds through a wide centre gate where they parade across the field to take their place in flanks in front of the VIP stage where the dignitaries sit.

Try not to miss the presentation of the traditional *mumu* pit-roasted pigs, fresh fruit and vegetables in the VIP area on

Saturday morning. The participating tribes offer thanks to the dignitaries who preside over the show by laying several large arrangements of food offerings on the ground at the foot of their covered viewing stands.

The public areas surround the VIP area on two sides. They contain vendor booths with food and drink and education on matters such as physical abuse, conservation, jobs etc. Games, gymnastic displays, modern dance and musical competitions are there to entertain the locals. If you wish, you can even go into a curtained-off area to see the Bena perform Neheya, the sacred cane-swallowing ritual during which a U-shaped bamboo cane is swallowed to induce vomiting for the purpose of purification. Not for the faint of heart to watch.

Most interesting was a large L-shaped hut that showcases agricultural products. Papuans are considered the world's first agriculturalists going back some 40,000 years. They cultivated breadfruit, sago, coconuts, yams and sugarcane, which originated in New Guinea. Before WWII, German missionaries arrived and began experimental plantings around Goroka. They introduced coffee, and today PNG coffee is highly regarded for its excellent quality and fruity flavours.

Best to arrive on a Thursday. For one thing, the lines are long at the few licensed venues selling alcohol since Goroka is completely dry for all three days of the show. And it is exciting to see the truckloads of participants and spectators parading into town honking their horns and singing. Only 350 VIP tickets are sold, mostly to tourists. Take advantage of the early morning access to get your money's worth. It is not very crowded and not as hot as the afternoon. You can take photographs to your heart's content and engage in casual conversation with the singing groups. Everyone is very friendly and they welcome the interest and admiration. A local ticket costs a fraction of the price of a VIP ticket, but when the gates open in the afternoon for the local ticket-holders, tens of thousands stream in and the temperature soars.

There is plenty to buy in the special vendor area where a plethora of locals sell handmade crafts for every taste. You cannot leave without at least one *billum* bag, a woven string sack carried by all the locals, but you had better get two.

Darlene D Kasten is an FOM docent with the Asian Civilisations Museum, the Malay Heritage Centre and STPI Creative Workshop and Gallery, and coordinates activities for FOM Curio and FOM Members Care.

All photos by the author except where noted

Beijing 101

A First-Time Visitor's Guide to Beijing

By Amanda Jaffe

A first-time visit to Beijing ticks all the boxes on my travel checklist – history, navigating new streets and cultures, challenging my assumptions. Welcome to a first-timer's guide to the city.

Imperial Beijing (Old and New)

Technically, Beijing has not been an imperial city for over a century, but it remains a city built on an imperial scale. There are cities where distances are shorter than maps suggest, but in Beijing the opposite is true. Many cities have one skyline-defining building, perhaps two. The grandeur of Beijing's skyline today is only its latest iteration.

At the heart of Beijing sits Tiananmen Square. The impact of its immensity and echoes of its history are visceral. At one end stands the old city gate of *Zhengyangmen*. At the other is the Palace Museum (the Forbidden City), with Mao's picture above the Tiananmen Gate. Between them sits the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall, the Mao Mausoleum, our first stop.

The mausoleum line stretches around the building but moves steadily. Many in line purchase a white chrysanthemum to place on a shelf before a large statue of Mao in the entry hall. Containers filled with flowers sit behind the shelf, apparently awaiting recycling. The line then snakes into the mausoleum's heart where Mao, draped in a hammer-and-sickle flag, lies within a crystal coffin. Guards keep the lines moving, but you can take your time after exiting; outdoor kiosks sell Mao memorabilia.

Across Tiananmen Square, the Palace Museum is overwhelming, both in size (over 720,000 square metres) and visitor numbers. The museum allots 80,000 tickets per day and often sells out. It's probably foolish to name a favourite site (or even several) within its walls, but mine were the Belvedere of Pleasant Sounds, a stunning three-tiered opera stage, and its companion Hall for Viewing Opera, both situated in the Palace of Tranquil Longevity.

Following the Palace Museum, the lakeside setting of the Summer Palace, an imperial getaway in Beijing's outskirts, seems tranquil by comparison. Highlights include Longevity Hill above the palace, the Long Corridor (over 700 metres long and containing some 14,000 scenic paintings), and the 17-Arch Bridge. Another three-tiered opera stage graces the Garden of Virtue and Harmony.



Interior courtyard, Yonghe Temple

Temples

Yonghe (Lama) Temple is one of the world's largest Tibetan Buddhist temples. It contains a series of increasingly impressive prayer halls culminating in a hall containing a 26-metre-tall Buddha carved from a single sandalwood tree trunk. If you're uncomfortable inhaling large quantities of incense smoke, you might want to explore here expeditiously.

The Confucius Temple and Imperial College are a short walk away on *Guozijian Jie* (Imperial College Street), the only Beijing *hutong* (alleyway) still graced by traditional archways. The Confucius Temple grounds contain stone steles listing scholars who passed their imperial exams and carvings of Confucian classics. Next door is the Imperial College, where the emperor would periodically lecture.



Long Corridor detail, Summer Palace



Crowds at the Palace Museum

Hutongs, Towers, and Parks

Walking from the Imperial College to the Drum and Bell Towers takes you through some of central Beijing's old *hutongs*, formed by the walls of courtyard compounds. Some are gathering places for hipster Beijing, filled with shops and snack stalls. Here you can join the crowd (impossible not to, given the throngs) and yield to a freshly baked, cheesy durian cake from a local stall.

Beijing's Drum and Bell Towers regularly announced the time until 1924. While you climb only to their second floors,

it's significantly more than two storeys up a steep flight of tall stairs. The view highlights Imperial Beijing's central axis, running from the towers, through the Forbidden City to Zhengyangmen. From the Towers, it's a short walk through the *hutongs* of Houhai to Beihai Park. An imperial garden for 1,000 years and public since 1924, Beihai Park contains scenic North Lake, cherry trees and Jade Flower Island, with its long corridor and hilltop Tibetan stupa.

Temple of Heaven Park

While Temple of Heaven Park contains a world-famous temple complex, it's also a public park filled with senior Beijingers engaged in early-morning routines, such as (among *many* others) tai chi, instrumental ensembles, ballroom dancing and card games. The temple complex includes the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests, which sits on an axis with the Imperial Vault of Heaven and the Circular Mound Altar, where the emperor would perform sacrifices on behalf of the people. Additional structures include the Fasting Palace (where the emperor prepared for prayer) and the beautiful Double Ring Pavilion.

Take a Field Trip

A first visit to Beijing would be incomplete without a field trip to the Great Wall. With over 500 kilometres of the Great Wall in Beijing, you have options for where to see it and its degree of restoration. By reputation, the Badaling section is said to be the most accessible, restored and crowded. I opted for Mutianyu, which offers a longer stretch of wall, more watchtowers and smaller crowds. The views at Mutianyu, both of the wall and from the wall, are spectacular, and the challenges of walking on even a highly restored section are more than authentic – and well worth the effort.

When you first arrive at Mutianyu, you've merely reached the base of the mountain on which the Great Wall sits. Despite my original plan to hike up, I quickly conceded that if I wanted to spend more time *on* the wall than *getting there*, the cable car to the top was worthwhile. At the end of my visit though, I bypassed both the cable car and toboggan ride options in favour of a solid 30-minute walk back down.

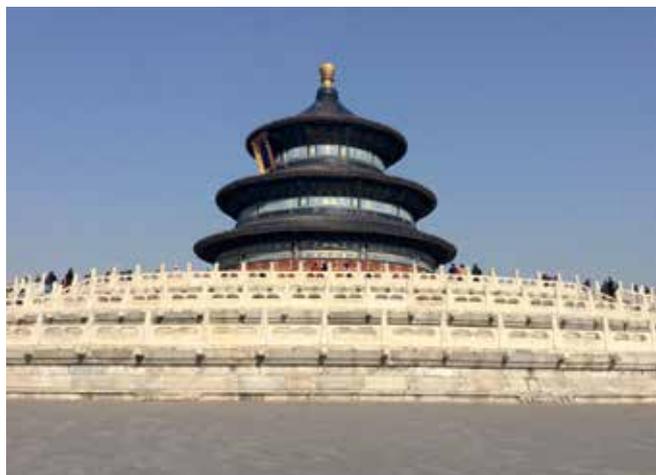
My journey to the Great Wall included a stop at the Ding Ling Tomb. As the only Ming tomb outside Beijing with an excavated burial chamber, Ding Ling allows you to appreciate the chamber itself, which is reminiscent of a large subway station – albeit one built to hold an emperor, two empresses, a burial



Interior, Drum Tower



Typical Beijing hutong



Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests

platform, marble thrones and everything needed in the afterlife.

Big City, Small Discoveries

Exploring Beijing offers ample opportunity for small discoveries. Here are a few of mine.

My preference for Google and Facebook-related services introduced me to China's internet restrictions. Determine the availability of your preferred online services before you visit.

Doing certain things in Beijing, especially on public holidays, means doing them with a crowd. Once you accept that five to ten strangers (at least) will appear in every picture you take, it's actually quite liberating.

If a large street sign faces you in the middle of a Beijing intersection, it names the street you are *on*, not the street you are *about to cross*.

Crossing Beijing streets requires fortitude. Major roads can have six car lanes and streets commonly have lanes alongside the sidewalk for non-car vehicles. While cars stop at intersections, non-cars seem less inclined to do so. In addition, many pedestrians occupy non-car lanes while waiting to cross car lanes, blocking the non-cars and creating another form of traffic jam.

Some of Beijing's best street food is on sticks. Skewers of spicy lamb, fish cakes and chicken hearts for dinner. Candied strawberries outside the Palace Museum. Glutinous rice cakes, sliced potatoes, even schnitzels appear on sticks.

It may sound clichéd but try Peking Duck in Beijing. Many old trees gracing Beijing's courtyards and parks need help. It's heartening to see custom-built tree braces supporting a tree in need.

Seize the opportunity to visit Beijing. Beijing, in its turn, will amply reward your efforts.



Guozijian (Imperial College) Street

Amanda Jaffe is an active FOM member with a deep interest in studying and writing about the history and culture of Singapore and neighbouring countries.

All photos by the author

Wuchang - City of the 1911 Chinese Revolution

By Nicholas Soh

As a volunteer docent at the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall, I had guided a special exhibition, *One Night in Wuchang: the 1911 Revolution and Nanyang*. To gain a better insight into the events that took place in Wuchang, I spent a week there. The Wuchang Uprising on 10 October 1911 toppled the Qing dynasty, heralding China as Asia's first republic after ending several millennia of imperial rule.

Wuchang forms part of the urban core and one of 13 urban districts of the prefecture-level city of Wuhan, the capital of Hubei Province. It is the oldest of the three cities (the other two are Hankou and Hanyang) that merged to become modern-day Wuhan, with the Yangtze and Han Rivers forming natural boundaries. Armed with my Baidu map and my Chinese language skills, it was not difficult to navigate my way around the city, both new and old.

Historically, the area around Wuhan had been contested by rival armies since the Three Kingdoms Period (3rd century CE). The famous Battle of Red Cliff took place in this neighbourhood. Today the best-known landmark in Wuhan is the Yellow Crane Tower overlooking the three cities. The existence of this tower was recorded as early as, or even before, the Three Kingdoms Period.

The old walled city of Wuchang had been the administrative seat of government of the three cities. The then governor-general's *yamen* (衙), his residence-cum-office, was situated here. Garrisoned in the walled compound were troops of the New Army that was securing the region for the Manchu government. However, a significant number of secret revolutionaries was embedded in this army at that time, awaiting the call to rise up against the Manchus.



Memorial of Wuchang Uprising of 1911 Revolution (Red Mansion)

I had chosen to stay in the Hankou area where the foreign concessions were established, much like in Shanghai. Hankou was one of the treaty ports that had opened as part of war indemnities after China lost the Second Opium War to the British. While exploring the waterfront area I had come across an upmarket residential development with the curious name of 'The Bund (外滩) 1861'. It dawned on me that 1861 was the year the British concession was founded.

Like the Shanghai Bund, many concession-era buildings



Eighteen-star blood-and-iron flag and the five-striped Republic flag flank the interior of the Memorial Hall

stood out in their neo-colonial splendour, their architectural styles ranging from Gothic to Neo-classical to Art Deco. New shopping and condominium complexes have replaced many of the old buildings. Farther along the riverfront a museum showcased Mao's swim across the Yangtze just prior to his launch of the disastrous 1966 Cultural Revolution.

I took the utilitarian cross-river ferry to Wuchang with commuters and fume-emitting bikes jostling for space. At the pier, I had asked for directions to the Revolution Museum and more than once, locals had directed me to *Hong Lou* (红楼) or the Red Mansion, because of its distinctive red brick exterior. A confusing signpost greeted me, indicating two different directions. One for the memorial hall (辛亥革命纪念馆) and the other for the museum (辛亥革命博物馆). They were not the same.

I ventured first to the iconic Red Mansion, the memorial hall whose walls date back to the early 1900s. A bronze statue of Dr Sun Yat Sen stood outside the gates. The entrance was flanked by two giant "eighteen-star blood-and-iron flags" (铁血十八星旗), the standard-bearer of one of the revolutionary parties. During the Wuchang Uprising the revolutionaries had successfully taken over this building and used it as the Chinese Republic Hubei Military Governor's headquarters.

Across the massive square from the Memorial Hall, the Museum has five permanent display galleries about the Revolution. In the hallway of the first gallery, you are greeted by giant tablet replicas of all the "Unequal Treaties" forced upon the Chinese by the Europeans and Japan more than 100 years ago, including a reconstruction of the Boxer Protocol signed after the defeat of the Boxers the year before.

The second gallery highlighted Dr Sun Yat Sen's formation of the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance and the numerous failed uprisings it led in southern China. It also introduced the two revolutionary parties directly involved in the Wuchang Uprising, the Mutual Advancement Society (共进会) and the Literary Association (文学社), both based in Wuchang.

In my opinion, the third gallery best captured the essence of that night in Wuchang. It was presented in the form of the



Unequal Treaties lining the entrance to Gallery 1

walled city of Wuchang, complete with dark, cobblestoned back lanes, barking dogs and the unseasonal chirping of crickets. The wax figures of crouching New Army soldiers cradling their weapons seemed ready to move into action. Others were presented in holographic form, appearing in front of visitors whenever they approached, bellowing out revolutionary slogans.

At one end was a model of the walled city of Wuchang, seen from the vantage point of Snake Ridge. It laid out the city wall, the location of the city gates, the governor-general's *yamen* and the Chuwangtai Armoury. Control of this armoury proved instrumental in the successful takeover of the governor-general's *yamen*.

The next gallery continued with the story of the Manchus fighting back and reclaiming Hankou and Hanyang from the revolutionaries. It detailed the part played by the northern warlord Yuan Shikai (袁世凱) who subsequently replaced Dr Sun as the Provisional President of the Chinese Republic. Opportunistic Brigade Commander Li Yuanhong (黎元洪) was profiled here. A native of Hubei Province and a high-ranking officer in the New Army, he was forced at gunpoint to lead the revolutionaries. Li was later elected the first vice-president and later president of the Chinese Republic, not once, but twice.

The last gallery showcased the development of Wuhan city and its status as the birthplace of the Chinese Republic. As to be expected in any self-respecting Chinese museum, the narrative included well-known personalities of the Chinese Communist Party. The Chinese Communists considered the revolution to be complete only after they had won power in 1949.



Replicas of cannons perched atop Uprising Gate



New Army soldiers ready for action

I also ventured to the last remaining city gate of Wuchang, Uprising Gate, formerly the Gate of Central Peace. Some locals were rehearsing their harvest-dance steps accompanied by traditional Chinese music. The erstwhile shallow moat had long been filled in and a highway runs partly in its old course. Chuwangtai Arsenal has been demolished and in its place stands a low, grassy knoll exhibiting concrete steles engraved with poems and quotations extolling the glory of the Chinese Revolution. I followed the length of the remaining wall to try to locate the governor-general's *yamen*, but to no avail.

Wuhan has positioned itself as China's "Optical Valley", like California's Silicon Valley. I had met and spoken to students from Mauritius, India and an Algerian-American, all studying western medicine there. "Because it is cheaper than back home" came the invariable reply. I had surprised a group of Iranian automobile workers attending a course in Wuhan by guessing their origins from their looks and department. I asked them about Eisenhower Avenue where my hotel was located during a 1979 Tehran visit. They laughed and said the name had been changed to Freedom Avenue since the Islamic Revolution of that year.

After my week's stay in Wuhan I boarded the high-speed train to Chongqing, another mega-city along the Yangtze. That is another story.



Neo-classical architecture along Wuchang's riverfront

Nicholas Soh is a history buff and loves guiding at the National Museum of Singapore, Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall and the former Ford Factory. He finds being a docent especially gratifying as visitors hang onto every word, unlike his former job as an airline pilot when passengers only wanted to hear the time of arrival and the temperature at the destination.

All photos by the author

Singapore Biennale 2019

(22 Nov 2019 – 22 Mar 2020)

By Yvonne Sim

When an art historian and academic helms this event with a team of six young curators (all under 40) from Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Romania, you get a very diverse selection of artworks for the sixth edition of the Singapore Biennale, taking place in various venues across the island. Patrick Flores, the artistic director, boldly issued the clarion call, "Every Step in the Right Direction", inspired by a Filipino revolutionary who uttered these words after a failed uprising. This is both all-embracing and open-ended, an invitation to take the first step to make change happen, no matter what the outcome may be.

From a dizzying array of works by 77 artists from Southeast Asia and beyond, here are seven highlights from the National Gallery of Singapore (NGS) and Gillman Barracks (GB).

In the Skin of a Tiger is a large installation made of red, green, white, sky blue and dark blue banners cut into geometric shapes. There are 13, crafted from pieces of discarded political flags from the 2018 general election and representing all of Malaysia's states. To create this work, the artist called upon some 100 volunteers in Malaysia and Singapore to get together and sew on the banners. Using threads the same colour as the banners, they could sew anything they wanted. It was a one-day event in Kuala Lumpur's National Gallery and again at NGS. From something once divisive and partisan, this community effort stands for unity and a purposeful move towards change for a better future.



In the Skin of a Tiger: Monument to What We Want (Tugu Kita), 2019 by Sharon Chin, b 1980, lives and works in Port Dickson, Malaysia (NGS)

Haifa is a self-taught artist who uses murals to increase public awareness about what is happening in her war-torn country, Yemen. *War and Humans* is raw and hard-hitting. One of the visuals shows a bullet-embedded wall and a boy with a missing leg. The colours she uses are symbolic – red for spilled blood and yellow for fear and famine. Haifa works with a group of mostly women to capture aspects of real-life experiences through street art in her hometown of Sana'a.

Min Thein Sung's 'paintings' consist of dust applied to canvas and cotton, all 29 pieces. In Min's own words, "Dust paints time". The dust that was used for these paintings took



War and Humans, 2019, Series of 9 murals by Haifa Subay, b 1992, Dhamar City, Yemen. Lives and works in Sana'a, Yemen (NGS)

two years to collect and settle. Think about dust as a by-product of the disintegration of human skin and hair cells. While two years in a human life have passed and cannot be recovered, these paintings 'immortalise' life in a different form. The next time you vacuum your house and empty that vacuum bag, you may look at the dust in a whole new way.

Dennis Tan's multi-media installation and performance, *Many Waters to Cross*, revolve around building a traditional racing boat known as a *kolek*. He spent many weekends on an island off Batam, watching the *koleks* racing out at sea. This led him to embark on a project to build a *kolek* in Singapore, by himself, through trial and error. Using makeshift and found materials, he took over eight months to do this. For Dennis, it was not just building a boat; it was an effort to understand the *kolek's* cultural background. The boat eventually fell apart, but it remains as testimony to one man's valiant effort to revive a lost craft.

Nabilah Nordin's work is a cheeky take on the Biennale's theme. In order to get to "every step in the



Time: Dust, 2017 – 2019, by Min Thein Sung, b 1978, Mawlamyine, Myanmar. Lives and works in Yangon, Myanmar (NGS)



Many Waters to Cross, 2019, by Dennis Tan, b 1975, Singapore. Lives and works in Tokyo, Japan (NGS)



Present-past-patterns, 2019, by Vanghoua Anthony Vue, b 1989, Brisbane, Australia (GB)

right direction”, how do you tackle “an obstacle in every direction?” Visitors can choose to navigate the many routes that can take them somewhere, nowhere or everywhere. Nabilah’s sculptures might not be the prettiest, but come closer and you will find familiar shapes in everyday items and found objects. Each component’s past identity is masked by layers of paint and plaster. Nabilah’s art examines notions of identity, home and place. She sees her sculptures as constantly moving and changing.

Present-past-patterns is the recreated landscape of Anthony’s personal history and bi-cultural Hmong and Australian heritage; the bright pinks and greens are the colours used in traditional Hmong costumes. In this work, Anthony also draws upon the shared histories of the Hmong in the Laotian Civil War of 1959-1975 and that of Gillman Barracks, a former army camp. The repeated

black and white patterns are images reminiscent of his parents’ refugee camp experience. The Hmong are animists and believe that everything, animate or inanimate, has a spirit/soul. Thus, the installation has a powerful spiritual connection with this space in GB, one that will endure after it’s gone.



An Obstacle in Every Direction, 2019, by Nabilah Nordin, b 1990, Singapore. Lives and works in Sydney, Australia (GB)



5 Rehearsals of a Wedding, 2017, by Kray Chen, b 1987, Singapore

The photo above shows a snippet from a single-channel, 29-minute video about the five parts of a typical Singapore Chinese wedding day. The short drama is performed by Kray and four friends, with dead-pan expressions for comic relief. The scenes feature the groom and his entourage trying to fetch the bride from her parent’s house (but not before getting past obstacles set up by the maid of honour), the tea ceremony, the photoshoot, the solemnisation and the banquet. However, the bride is missing. This can be seen as a rant by the artist who is single, or as social commentary on a time-honoured ritual that may well be dying out because of the expenses involved in a typical wedding banquet.

Yvonne Sim is a docent with Gillman Barracks, SAM and ACM. She went through the Chinese wedding ceremony and can identify fully with navigating the obstacles of this tradition.

All photos by the author

FOM Members Show They Care

By Darlene D Kasten

FOM Members Care has been hard at work showing we care about Singapore. Whether you wore red to walk in East Coast Park or joined one of six specially dedicated URA/FOM Chinatown Heritage Walks in Tanjong Pagar, every step you took on 23 November 2019 on behalf of FOM Members Care contributed directly to feed a needy resident in Singapore's southeast community through the *FairPrice Walk for Rice @ South East* initiative.

A total of 1,087,800 metres was walked by a combined 230 participants, which translates to 5,439 bowls of white rice, 5,439 bowls of brown rice and 2,719.5 bowls of oatmeal donated by NTUC FairPrice on behalf of FOM. Well done!

Thank you to all the FOM members and their supportive families and friends whose participation made our inaugural FOM Members Care event an unequivocal success. A special thank you to URA Executive Director Stella Clare Wee and participating URA/FOM Chinatown Heritage guides Gisella Harrold, Dobrina Boneva, Deena Goh, Maria Conde, Charlotte Dawson, Anna Alexander, Neeraja Rao, Ayana Chatterjee and Yanjun Liu.

On 22 February, FOM Members Care joined the Singapore Heritage Tile Project for a Heritage Tile Tidy Up to uncover decorative vintage or Peranakan tiles at Bukit Brown Cemetery. Thank you to Singapore Heritage Tile Project director Jennifer Lim for giving us the opportunity to become urban archaeologists for a day.

To learn more about the Singapore Heritage Tile Project, click here to visit www.jenniferlimart.com/singapore-heritage-tile-project



FairPrice Walk for Rice @ South East in East Coast Park, photo by Vince Kasten

to the health and quality of life in Singapore. The largest contributor to this phenomenon is the widespread slash-and-burn agricultural policies undertaken in neighbouring Indonesia and Malaysia caused by the uncontrolled expansion of palm oil and paper plantations.



PM Haze sustainable palm oil campaign, photo by Ian Wood



Japanese tiles from 1930s tomb, Bukit Brown cemetery, photo by Finnbar Fallon

Our next opportunity combines care for our environment with care for our health. In honour of the United Nations observance of the International Day of Forests, FOM Members Care will team up with the People's Movement to Stop Haze (PM Haze) on 20 March to promote the use of Certified Sustainable Palm Oil (CSPO) by local restaurants and eateries.

PM Haze is a non-profit focusing on outreach, research and advocacy on the transboundary haze crisis. Air pollution in the form of haze is the greatest environmental threat

PM Haze is driving a global movement to stop the haze by empowering the community with knowledge, means and values. Steering consumption patterns towards sustainable palm oil and paper is one of the main ways they act to empower our community. For more details and to join with FOM Members Care and PM Haze in helping Singapore become haze-free, visit www.fom.sg/memberevents.aspx?CID=12.

These are some of the ways FOM members show they care about preserving the heritage of Singapore, its history and culture, supporting friends and neighbours in need and improving the health of the local environment and the planet.

Continue to check our webpage www.fom.sg/memberevents.aspx?CID=12 for upcoming opportunities. We are always looking for ways to make meaningful contributions to the community. If you have suggestions for or questions about our planned events, please email us at FOMMembersCare@gmail.com.

Darlene D Kasten is the coordinator for FOM Members Care, a coordinator for FOM Curio and a docent with STPI Creative Workshop and Gallery, the Asian Civilisations Museum and the Malay Heritage Centre.

Island Notes

Singapore Art Week Is Back

By Darly Furlong

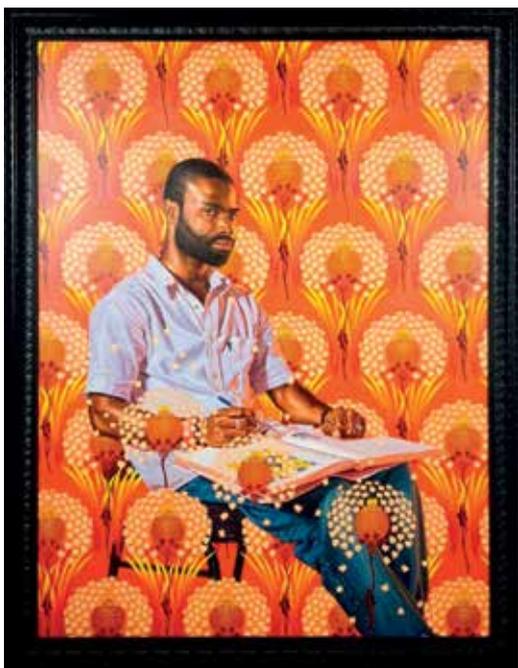
The annual Singapore Art Week in January opened the go-to, visual arts season in Southeast Asia, celebrating artists and their talent. The artworks were displayed in various locations all over Singapore, along art trails and venues such as *Art After Dark* at Gillman Barracks.

I went to the SOTA Gallery to see the *IMPART Collectors' Show 2020* – a bold experimentation with modern, industrial and traditional materials. It featured artistic creations made of synthetic hair, tulle, metal and the iconic Indian *bindi*.

If you missed it, don't forget to catch this visual treat next year.



Time is a Weight I Carry by Odelia Tang



St Gregory the Great by Kehinde Wiley

Darly Furlong is a passionate volunteer for museum-based learning for children and for causes that facilitate social justice. She is also interested in the myths and legends of the ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman civilisations.

20-23 MARCH AND 22-25 MAY, 2020

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Explore Singapore!



Exploring Balestier Road – A Heritage Trail off the Beaten Track

Thursday 19 March
10:00 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$25

Few people have heard of Balestier Road or know that it is a heritage trail. Singaporeans shop here for lighting, bathroom equipment, as well as good food. However, it also has an eclectic mix of shops such as old-style bakeries, a coffee-bean/powder shop, karaoke lounges and night clubs from a bygone era. Balestier has a rich history with links to the first American Consul to Singapore and Dr Sun Yat Sen. It is also home to one of the earliest Malay film studios and various temples including one with a permanent *wayang* (opera) stage. Architecture here ranges from art deco to flamboyantly decorated shophouses to modern condominiums. Join us on this heritage walk and discover another facet of Singapore and its history.



An Introduction to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

This tour has been postponed. Please check the FOM website for the new date

For more than 2,000 years the Chinese have used a system of medicine known as Traditional Chinese Medicine or TCM. The underlying concepts and theories of TCM treat the body, mind and emotions (or spirit) as a single entity and its practices take a holistic approach to prevention and cure. It also emphasises balance within the body and its relationship with natural forces. Along with prescribing medicinal herbs, TCM often includes nutritional therapies, treatments such as acupuncture, cupping, massage or *tuina*, and exercises such as *taiqi*. If you are curious about TCM, join us and learn about its basic principles and practices, followed by a visit to a traditional Chinese medical shop.



The Joy and Fun of the Gamelan – a Workshop

Thursday 2 April
10:00 am – 12:30 pm
Fee: \$30

Those of you who have travelled to Indonesia

must have heard melodic tinkling music welcoming guests to hotels and restaurants. It is often played live, so you may have seen the musicians with their instruments – the gamelan. This is a unique opportunity to learn about it, including the differences between Javanese and Balinese gamelan orchestras and their instruments. Our instructors will teach you to play at least two traditional songs and discover the gamelan's history, traditions and related cultural activities such as *wayang kulit* (Indonesian shadow puppetry) and Javanese dance. After this workshop, hearing gamelan music will never again be the same for you.



Kampongs in the Sky

Thursday 16 April
10:00 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$30

Singapore's government housing programme is one

of the nation's great success stories. Housing Development Board (HDB) estates are all around us, but we often know very little about them. How did the population of Singapore go from living in rural villages (*kampongs*) to living in high-rise apartments while still keeping the community spirit intact? Our guide will explain how this was achieved and then we will tour one of the earliest town centres on foot, Toa Payoh, built in 1966. You will see what makes this a lively, self-contained hub, the nucleus of every HDB estate. An optional local lunch will follow.



Little India Heritage Walk

Thursday 23 April
10:00 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$25

Join us on a guided walking tour of Little India; wander along

its shophouse-lined streets and experience the hustle and bustle of an organic, evolving neighbourhood. Among colourful stores and landmarks, learn about the rich history of this heritage precinct, its past trades and inhabitants and its enduring relevance. We will stop at points of interest, including commercial establishments, places of worship and the Indian Heritage Centre. This city exploration will give you fascinating glimpses into early and contemporary Singapore and help you gain new insights into our island state's diverse Indian communities. Come along to enjoy the myriad sights, smells and even tastes of Little India.

Monday Morning Lectures

The first lecture, 2 March, will be held in the Function Hall, level 5, Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), 45 Maxwell Road, The URA Centre, 069118. The rest will be held in the Ngee Ann auditorium (in the basement) at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM), 1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555 and will begin promptly at 11:00 am. Refreshments will be provided at the ACM, but not at the URA. Latecomers are asked to enter via the rear door.



2 March 2020 • How Singapore's Hawker Culture Started

Speaker: John Kwok

Venue: Function Hall, level 5 the URA (Urban Redevelopment Authority)

This talk will look at the history of hawker culture in Singapore. By knowing how it began here we may better understand why it deserves its place as part of Singapore's intangible cultural heritage.



9 March 2020 • Namu-Amida-Butsu

Speaker: Marina Thayil

Venue: Ngee Ann auditorium (basement), ACM

This lecture is about the development of Buddhism and the corresponding Evolution of Art during the Heian period (794 – 1185) in Japan. This era is considered to be a high point in the culture of the Japanese court's aristocracy and the pursuit of aesthetic refinement.



16 March 2020 • A Portrait of the Artist as a Remarkable Woman: The Life and Art of Georgette Chen

Speaker: Sara Siew

Venue: Ngee Ann auditorium (basement), ACM

Georgette Chen forged an artistic vision that was inextricably linked to the Nanyang and continues to enchant and inspire art lovers today. This talk presents Georgette's life and practice from a relatively rare perspective provided by a study of her extensive personal archive spanning five decades. It also contemplates the relationship between visual and literary modes of expression.



23 March 2020 • Beautifying the Cloth: Talk on Indian Textile Arts

Speaker: Sangeeta Roy

Venue: Ngee Ann Auditorium (basement), ACM

Sangeeta will talk about handcrafted textiles from India with a special focus on the crafts meant for beautifying the cloth after it comes off the loom. She will offer an overview of post-loom textile crafts in India and will trace the evolution of India's textile industry through changing times and aesthetics.



30 March 2020 • Champa Dynasty in Vietnam and the Influence of Hinduism

Speaker: Piu Lahiri

Venue: Ngee Ann Auditorium (basement), ACM

The Hindu Kingdom of Champa existed from the 2nd to the 16th century CE in the central area of present-day Vietnam. The earliest Royal Shivalinga and oldest Sanskrit rock inscriptions in Southeast Asia were both found here. The distinctive brick temples are the last remaining edifices of a kingdom that was the farthest outpost of Indian Civilisation in Southeast Asia.



6 April 2020 • Odyssey of the Tamils from the Coromandel Coast to Singapore

Speaker: Nalina Gopal

Venue: Ngee Ann Auditorium (basement), ACM

This presentation reconstructs the history of Tamils in Singapore beginning with a whistle-stop tour of pre-modern focal points and leads to the identification of lesser known 19th century Tamils in Singapore. Through glimpses into Tamil genealogy, this presentation establishes an uninterrupted narrative about Tamils in Singapore from the 19th century to present times.

There will be no MML on 13 April owing to the Good Friday holiday on 10 April



20 April 2020 • Singapore Dance: The Multicultural Heritage Past and Present

Speaker: Dr Chua Soo Pong

Venue: Ngee Ann Auditorium (basement), ACM

Singapore is a society in which each ethnic group is encouraged to preserve its community's unique cultural heritage and arts, and to appreciate and respect that of others. This talk discusses how multiculturalism is practised by leading choreographers and their roles in promoting racial harmony from a historical perspective.



27 April 2020 • Ghosts of the Deep: Shipwrecks and Lost Lands

Speaker: Georgia Socha

Venue: Ngee Ann Auditorium (basement), ACM

Between 2016-2018, the largest maritime archaeology expedition to have ever been conducted discovered a fleet of ancient shipwrecks in the Black Sea. The aim of the project was to investigate the hotly debated Great Flood Theory, when large areas of land were inundated as waters rose after the last Ice Age. This lecture will discuss recent research into the shipwrecks and ancient settlements, which have brought to light a new understanding of the Great Flood Theory and the people of this time.

Japanese Docents

Greetings from the JD Coordinators. I am Ikuko Nakamaru, JD Coordinator 1 and have lived happily in Singapore for 30 years, for which I am very thankful. I joined the JDs five years ago because I wanted to do something for Singapore. I wanted to introduce how great a country Singapore is to the Japanese and how well Singaporeans treat them. I am very appreciative of Mr Lee Kuan Yew's words, "Forgive, but never forget". I feel very apologetic towards Singaporeans for the difficult times of the Japanese occupation and am truly thankful for their willingness to forgive and reconcile.

I am very much enjoying guiding and especially love to guide art tours for children. *Imaginarium* was a wonderful exhibition. Exhibition opening ceremonies have been a wonderful experience for us. They provide a great opportunity to meet and talk to the artists. FOM's VAM is also something we look forward to every year. I am very grateful to FOM and the JDs for training, supporting and giving me these beautiful experiences and memories. Now that I have been appointed to this position to support my fellow JDs, I will try my best for them.

My name is Keiko Fujita, JD Coordinator 2 and I came to Singapore about five years ago to accompany my husband who was transferred here. When I first arrived, I was very lonely. Fortunately, I learned about the JDs at a university alumni gathering. As I like museums and wanted to learn more about Singapore, I found it very interesting. I immediately checked out how to join the JDs and looked forward to the day when I could be part of the group. The training was more difficult than expected, but the time I spent with my batch mates was very fulfilling. It has been four years since I joined the JDs and I have taken over the role of Coordinator 2. I would like to thank you for all the encounters and experiences and will do my best.

**Ikuko Nakamura, JD Coordinator 1 and
Keiko Fujita, JD Coordinator 2**



Textile Enthusiasts Group

Programme: The Half-Naked Fakir
Speaker: Marina Thayil
Date: Friday 13 March
Time: 10:00am arrival for 10:30 start
Venue: TBA

In 1931, during India's struggle for independence, Winston Churchill angrily exclaimed that it was "alarming and nauseating" to see that Gandhi, a London-trained lawyer, had "now become a seditious fakir... striding half-naked up the steps of the Vice Regal Palace... organising and conducting a defiant campaign of civil disobedience". Years later, Gandhi declared that he took the remarks as a compliment. In this lecture, Marina Thayil will discuss this revolutionary in a loincloth and examine the reasons for Gandhi's personal choice of attire and his search for integrity in identity and appearance. The talk will also address the decline of the Indian textile trade and the reason for Gandhi's use of the spinning wheel in the struggle for India's independence.



Programme: Private Textile Tour of the Heritage Conservation Centre
Date: Friday 20 March
Time: 9:30am
Venue: Heritage Conservation Centre, 32 Jurong Port Road, Singapore 619104

Join us for a private TEG tour of the Heritage Conservation Centre. The HCC is where many of the National Heritage Board's museum artefacts are stored and conserved, including textiles. This tour will include a presentation on artefact handling and storage, as well as some hands-on discovery and opportunities for Q & A.

Programme: Batik Textiles: The Artefacts of Indonesia's Sociocultural Evolution
Speaker: Tony Sugiarta
Date: Friday 17 April
Time: 10:00am arrival for 10:30 start
Venue: Asian Civilisations Museum Discovery Room

Social standing, political uprising or scientific data visualisation, there is a story behind every batik textile and motif. From simple body covers, batik transforms into contemporary art as a work that represents different ideologies. Join Tony Sugiarta as he embarks on a historical time train to unravel the social and cultural evolution depicted in Indonesian batik textile throughout history. Discover fun facts, misconceptions and maybe, decode the message behind your own batik collections.



To register for these TEG events, please sign up on the FOM website.

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Museum Information and Exhibitions

Asian Civilisations Museum

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

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.

Living with Ink: The Collection of Dr Tan Tsze Chor (through 22 March)

Living with Ink: The Collection of Dr Tan Tsze Chor at the Asian Civilisations Museum presents highlights from the collection of Singapore's renowned art collector Dr Tan Tsze Chor. Since 2000, the Tan family has donated over 130 treasured Chinese paintings, porcelain, and scholars' objects to the museum. The exhibition includes paintings by modern Chinese masters Ren Bonian, Xu Beihong, and Qi Bashi and explores how Chinese art was appreciated by networks of overseas Chinese collectors and philanthropists, giving you a glimpse into the Singapore art world in the turbulent 20th century.

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

The Posthuman City. Climates. Habitats. Environments. (through 8 March)

Taking NTU CCA Singapore's overarching research topic *Climates. Habitats. Environments.* as a departure point, the exhibition examines the urban fabric as a habitat for a diversity of species and engages these topics through imaginative options offered by artists and architects. The featured projects, at the intersection of art, design and architecture, range from installations to time-based media, address questions of sustainability, the quality and quantity of air, water and food, nature as a form of culture, and implementation of lived indigenous knowledge.

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



11:00 am on Wed and Fri for the special exhibitions

Tamil tours (FOM) 11:30am on the first Friday of each month for the special exhibition

The Indian Heritage Centre (IHC) celebrates the history and heritage of the Indian diaspora in Singapore and the Southeast Asian region. From early contacts between the Indian subcontinent and this region, the culture and social history of the community after the arrival of the British, through to the early stirrings of nationalism and political identity, and the contributions of Singapore's Indian community – the five galleries take visitors on a fascinating journey through the Indian diaspora. Located in Singapore's colourful and vibrant Little India precinct, the centre opened in May 2015 and is our only purpose-built museum.

From the Coromandel Coast to the Straits - Revisiting Our Tamil Heritage (through 30 April)

The exhibition presents a compendium of narratives that recount the experiences of Tamil diasporas in Southeast Asia and Singapore from pre-modern to contemporary times. It is presented in two parts: part one enumerates the odyssey of pre-modern Tamil diasporas in Southeast Asia while part two offers glimpses of lesser known 19th century pioneers and some of the oldest Tamil families in Singapore. It also includes digital showcases featuring holograms of artefacts in the collections of other museums and institutions

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 (through 29 March)

Explore the 200 years leading up to the establishment of an entrepôt in Singapore in 1819, 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.



Museum Information and Exhibitions

NUS Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts

University Cultural Centre
50 Kent Ridge Crescent, Singapore
119279

Tel: 6516 8817

www.museum.nus.edu.sg



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.

Wartime Artists of Vietnam: Drawings and Posters from the Ambassador Dato' N. Parameswaran Collection (through 27 June)

Wartime Artists of Vietnam is the fourth in a series of shows drawing from the remarkable collection of the ambassador and consists of 1,208 wartime artworks, one of the largest known private collection of its kind outside Vietnam. The exhibition takes as its preamble a line from the poem *A Soldier Speaks of His Generation* (1973): "... our generation has never slept". Expressing the profundity of the war experience and its enduring effects on the human psyche, the phrase is an entry point from which the presentation can be read and accessed. Included alongside these artworks are supporting texts and excerpts of poems and memoirs.

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, 1.30pm/2.15pm/3.15pm/4.00pm

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

The Peranakan Museum

39 Armenian Street, Singapore 179941

Tel: 6332 7591

www.peranakanmuseum.sg



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

Singapore Art Museum

71 Bras Basah Road, Singapore 189555

Tel: 6332 3222

www.singaporeartmuseum.sg



The Singapore Art Museum 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.

Singapore Biennale 2019 - Every Step in the Right Direction (through 22 March)

<https://www.singaporebiennale.org>

FOM guided English tours:

National Gallery Singapore: Mon -Wed 2:00 pm

Gillman Barracks: Thurs - Fri 2:00 pm

This international contemporary art exhibition focuses on the imperative of making choices and taking the steps to consider current conditions and the human endeavour for change and betterment. Singapore Biennale 2019 is showing at various historic and public spaces in Singapore, including museums and galleries. With over 70 artists and art collectives from around the world and a strong focus on Southeast Asia, the sixth edition welcomes over 150 works across a breadth of diverse mediums including film, installation, sound art and performance

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.

Genevieve Chua: Twofold

(through 19 April)

In her largest solo exhibition to date, Genevieve Chua explores expanded ideas of painting via works made over the past 10 years alongside screen prints and installations developed during her residency at STPI. This show will be guest-curated by Melanie Pocock from Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, UK.

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)

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

From Brush to Lens: Early Chinese Photography Studios in Singapore

(through 3 May)

This exhibition showcases over 90 artefacts from the late 19th to early 20th century, including *carte de visites* and photographs by European, Chinese and Japanese studios. These photographs provide an important visual record of the diverse groups of inhabitants in colonial Singapore.

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



Friends of the Museums

Museum Docent Training

12 05 2020

Tuesday • 10am

Find out more at our :

Public Information Meeting
National Museum of Singapore
Basement Theatrette
93 Stamford Road
Singapore 178897

FOM training is conducted in English.
Check us out at www.fom.sg for more info

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