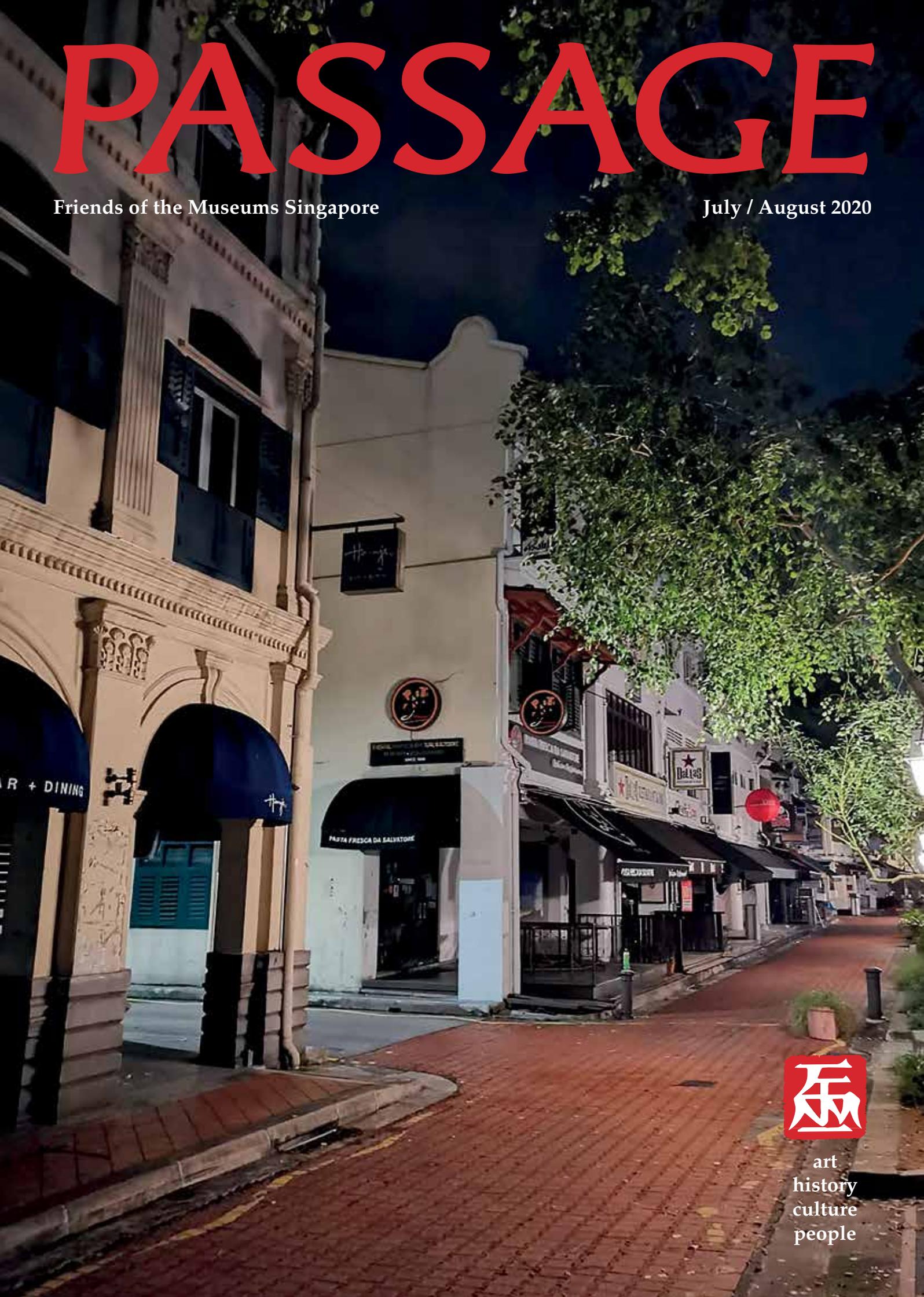


# PASSAGE

Friends of the Museums Singapore

July / August 2020



art  
history  
culture  
people

# President's Letter

Dear Friends,

It is during challenging times that the strength of an individual, cohesiveness of a family and unity of an organisation are tested. We in the FOM family are lucky to have supportive members and volunteers as we navigate our way through these unprecedented times of social distancing. Our museum, activity and communication leaders have found new and innovative ways to keep members engaged. The training teams and evaluators are mentoring the trainee docents virtually. FOM volunteers have taken to virtual meet-ups to share their research, host online discussions and even create works of beauty with Kantha embroidery workshops. All council members continue to work behind the scenes to ensure the smooth operation of FOM, while planning and preparing for alternate scenarios as social distancing measures gradually ease up.

Did you get a chance to attend one of FOM's MMLLs? This was our very successful virtual Monday Morning *Lockdown* Lecture series launched exclusively for FOM members from 18 May to 29 June. More than 300 members logged in to many of the lectures, not only from Singapore but also from around the world, including Europe, Australia and the United States. You can now enjoy our new *Armchair Travel* series, which runs from July to August. Read more about how our members have been spending their time in articles written by Andra Leo, Amanda Jaffe and Cécile Collineau. Check out the FOM website for information on these and other online events FOM has to offer at [www.fom.sg](http://www.fom.sg)

When the museums reopen, do visit the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) to feast your eyes on finely crafted jewellery, textiles and ceramics in the Materials and Design galleries located in the newly renovated third floor gallery space. For those of you who visited or guided the Guo Pei exhibition at the ACM, you will be pleased to hear that the ACM recently won the *Best Design Exhibition for Guo Pei: Chinese Art and Couture* at the *Global Fine Art Awards (GFAA) 2019*. It is heartening to see the ACM and Singapore museums getting recognised and taking their rightful place among the world's leading museums.

The Public Information Meeting (PIM) which had been postponed due to the Circuit Breaker will now be held in combination with FOM's Open Morning. This joint PIM and Open Morning are scheduled to be held at the ACM's Ngee Ann Auditorium and Foyer on 31 Aug at 10:00 am. The event is open to the public, so do bring your friends along to learn more about FOM, our activity groups and docent training programmes. We hope all goes according to plan and we are able to host these events, but if the situation changes, we will adjust accordingly. Please continue to check our website for the latest information.

Each year, FOM awards the Salome De Decker award to an FOM volunteer who has quietly and positively given their time and skills to FOM. The recipient of the Salome De Decker award for the year 2020 is Ms Roopa Dewan who has been a docent with STPI since 2010.

By the time this letter reaches you, mentor tours conducted virtually for the ACM, National Museum of Singapore and Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall will be completed. We are hoping that the URA / FOM Chinatown Heritage Trails trainees will also complete their mentor tours by the end of July. Congratulations to all the new docents. The wait is slightly longer, but I am sure you will soon be in the galleries and out on the trails leading engaging tours and receiving applause in person rather than virtual claps.

The recent experience of extended social distancing has given many of us time to pause and reflect on our lives. It has given me a greater appreciation of things I took for granted – meeting friends, visiting family, shopping, travelling, exploring museums and art galleries, and even the simple act of walking when and where I want. With the ending of the Circuit Breaker period and moving into phase 2, we can now look forward to a gradual return to normal life. However, this will be a new normal, when we still have to be mindful of how we interact with each other. Let us continue to stay vigilant and do our part for our own safety and that of those around us.

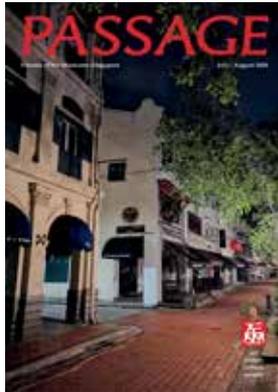
As Singapore celebrates its National Day on 9 August, best wishes to all who call this little red dot home. Stay safe and healthy.



Garima G Lalwani  
FOM President 2020



# Art 𠄎 History 𠄎 Culture 𠄎 People



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A publication of  
Friends of the Museums Singapore

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MCI (P) 103/12/2019

ISSN 1793-8619

UEN: T04SS0218E

### Supported by



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## Welcome PASSAGE

President's Letter

i

## Features

Sketchbook: Historical Views of Singapore <i>by Yusoff Abdul Latiff</i>	2
ArteFact: Greetings from Nagasaki-e <i>by Darlene D Kasten</i>	4
Museum Watch: Government Museum, Chennai <i>by Abha Dayal Kaul</i>	5
Sembawang Hot Spring <i>by Amanda Jaffe</i>	6
The Coronavirus Pandemic Told Through Art <i>by Lakshmi Raghu</i>	8
Netsuke: Artworks in Miniature <i>by Margaret White</i>	10
The Japanese Art of Kintsugi <i>by Rajul Shah</i>	12
The Ota Memorial Museum and the Floating World of Ukiyo-e <i>by Darlene D Kasten</i>	14
While the City Was Sleeping <i>by Andra Leo</i>	16
Riding the Rogue Wave to Immortality <i>by Soumya Ayer</i>	18
Ise Katagami: Beauty Cut in Paper <i>by Margaret White</i>	20
Papermaking is Like Cooking <i>by Swapna Mirashi</i>	22
Rewiring During the Circuit Breaker <i>by Amanda Jaffe</i>	24
A Time for Self-Enrichment: Follow an Online Course <i>by Cécile Collineau</i>	25
A Festival for Bookworms <i>by Cécile Collineau</i>	26
Island Notes <i>by Darly Furlong</i>	27

## FOM Member Activities

Explore Singapore!	28
Japanese Docents	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	32
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:** Boat Quay at 6:00 am. In the 1860s, this area handled three quarters of all shipping in the Port of Singapore. The bay teemed with *tongkangs* and dock workers unloading cargo. Because the river here resembles the belly of a carp, the Chinese believed this was where wealth and prosperity lay, so many shophouses were built along the riverside. Today, the old shophouses have been restored and are now home to restaurants, pubs and bars – a food and fun mecca for tourists and locals alike.

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

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

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

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

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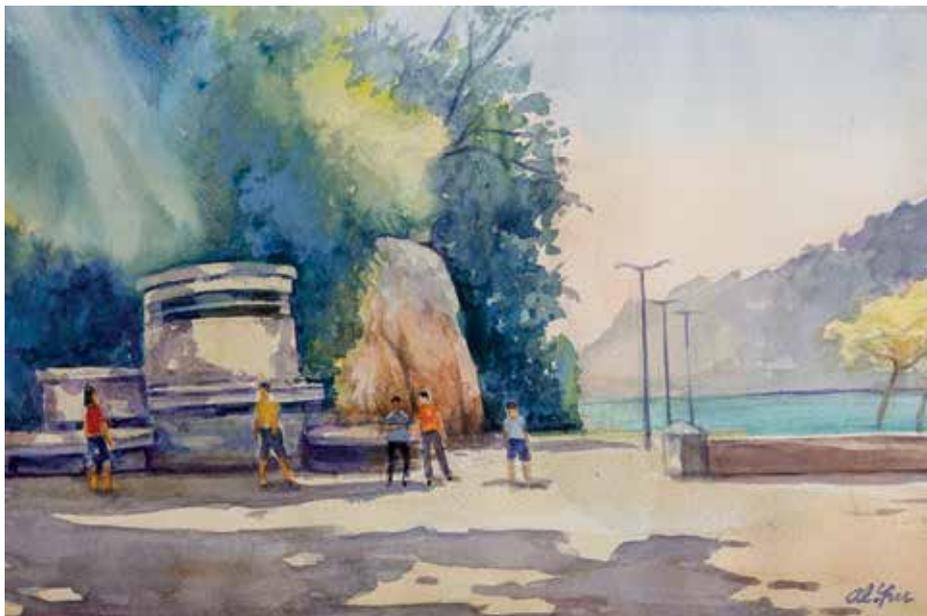
# Historical Views of Singapore

By Yusoff Abdul Latiff



14 Jalan Pisang was the home and office of the late Haji Ahmad Jamal Bin Haji Mohd Hassan, a well-known diamond trader and jewellery designer affectionately known as Haji Anang Banjar or Hj Anang Berlian. It all started when his father, Hj Mohd Hassan Bin Hj Mohd Salleh, from Kampong Melayu, Martapura, the diamond centre near Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan, decided to migrate to Singapore in the 1920s. He was a shrewd businessman who had good connections with the Chinese and the Jews, the diamond industry's main players. He imported large lathe machines for diamond cutting and smaller ones for polishing and refining, making Jalan Pisang the Banjarese diamond trade centre. When Haji Ahmad Jamal took over in the 1950s, he expanded the business and began custom designing jewellery. However, in the 1980s he terminated his business because it was difficult to compete against the bigger players and cheaper, imported mass-produced jewellery. His youngest daughter Faridah and her mother Hajah Fatimah, are both in this sketch.

Post-retirement, Haji Jamal was elected trustee of Sultan Mosque, and also volunteered his baritone voice as a muezzin. His daughter Faridah – Singapore's pioneer full-time *angklung* instructor and orchestra director – is an accomplished musician, smoothly combining the unique sounds of a bamboo orchestra with other instruments; while her mother Hajah Fatimah continues to practise her Banjarese culinary traditions.



The Dragon Tooth Gate (*Long Ya Men*) is a tooth-shaped granite outcrop (*Batu Berlayar*) in Labrador Park. It was a navigational aid for Admiral Zhenghe's fleet as it sailed through the Straits of Singapore on its expedition to Melaka between 1405 and 1433. However, this outcrop was blasted by the British in 1848 to widen the passage near *Pulau Blakang Mati* (literally Island of Death from Behind), now re-named Sentosa. A memorial replica of the Dragon Tooth is hidden behind the trees.

The machine-gun pillbox is one of many constructed along the southern coast in anticipation of a Japanese naval attack. However, the British were fooled – the Japanese invaded Singapore from the north. In the 1960s we used the pillbox as a changing room before dipping into the sea at the old Marine Parade Beach. Farther inland is the Pasir Panjang Garrison, a relic of the tunnels and underground bunkers completed in 1878 to defend Singapore against threats from other European powers.



This view of the container port at Tanjong Pagar with the city's financial hub behind it, doesn't exist any more. For more than 100 years the Tanjong Pagar coastline was converted into a series of docks for ship repairs and also wharves and quays for handling conventional cargoes, making Keppel Harbour one of the busiest in the world. In the 1970s a momentous decision was made to transform the area into a fully containerised port and along the way, it became a super-efficient transshipment port. Then in 2018, another bold decision was made to transfer the entire container port from this stretch of coastline to the new Tuas Megaport, which by 2040 is expected to be the world's largest fully automated container port with state-of-the-art technology, driverless machines and highly computerised operations. Perhaps the upcoming Port Memorial could retain a few of the iconic gantry cranes, with urban planners converting them into scenic attractions to remind us of our heritage, rather than letting them be buried in the archives of the Maritime and Port Authority.

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**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.

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# Greetings from Nagasaki-e

By Darlene D Kasten

Travellers to faraway destinations often bring home souvenirs to commemorate their experiences. In 18<sup>th</sup> century Japan, that souvenir sometimes captured a unique moment in time, such as the circa 1782 Japanese woodcut print found in the Trade gallery in the Asian Civilisations Museum featuring the *Schlllaak*, a Dutch East India Company ship under sail.

The silk-mounted ink on paper is a rare example of *Nagasaki-e*, colour prints made from woodblocks and published in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Nagasaki prefecture in Kyushu, depicting the Dutch, their ships or their exotic animals. The Dutch East India Company, also known as the VOC (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*), carried on exclusive European trade with Japan for 250 years, albeit restricted to the small, man-made island of Dejima in Nagasaki harbour. *Nagasaki-e* were made for and bought by Japanese who would have regarded visiting Nagasaki and seeing the foreign black ships and red-haired "barbarian" crews as the trip of a lifetime.

The main subject of our print is the *Schlllaak*, one of several VOC ships that arrived in Dejima every year to trade. Flying a VOC flag, its name written proudly across the stern, the dynamic rendering portrays the ship plowing a frothy wake through the sea. On board, sailors scamper through the rigging, unfurling flags and banners, hoisting sails and trimming sheets. Officers on deck keep watch through a spyglass, convey orders to a blackamoor and hold command, legs firmly planted with hands on hips. Printed in monochrome and published by Tomishima Denkichiro of Nagasaki, the colours of the Dutch flags, red coats of the crew and other details were applied afterwards by hand.

However, the charm of this print is not in the artistry or the skill level of the woodblock craftsmanship. Rather it is found in the Japanese inscription above the ship, written just "for fun", according to its author Rin Shihei. Rin Shihei, whose given name was Hayashi Shihei (1738-1793), was a famous loyalist and military scholar of the latter Tokugawa period and his observations are made through the eyes of a samurai.

Rin Shihei describes Holland, "the name of one of the Provinces of the Netherlands," as akin to Kyushu and situated "to the NW of the World." Holland's inhabitants, he notes, have "high noses, blue eyes, red hair, white skin and tall bodies." "Their food is bread, wheaten flour made like a *mochi* (rice-ball) and eaten roasted. Besides this, they are fond of fowls, meat and greasy foods. Furthermore, they eat lots of raw *daikon* (radishes)."

Rin's description of the ship, its crew and its cargo is very detailed. Of the cargo he says, "Now the goods imported from these ships include sugar, sappan-wood, rattans, woollens, velvets, San Thome (calicoes), Kaiki, incense, drugs like senyaku, cloves, jasmine, pepper and also glass and spectacles. Besides these, curios, strange birds and animals are also imported." Exports included "a million *kin*". (1 *kin* = 0.6 kilogrammes) of copper regularly each year. In addition, oil-paper umbrellas, pottery, lacquered wares, copper kettles, copper cash, dry goods, cloths, as well as saké, mustard, pickled *daikon* and fruits etc for provision."

The technology of woodblock printing dates to the Tang dynasty in China. Mass production of woodblock images in Japan began only in the 1600s, with most themes taken



A Dutch ship, Japan, mid- or late 18<sup>th</sup> century, ink on paper, silk, wood.  
Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum

from classical, literary and historical sources. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, artists began to add colour by hand and in 1765, new technology made it possible to produce single-sheet prints in a range of colours. The first polychrome prints, or *nishiki-e*, were calendars made for patrons in Edo, present-day Tokyo, where it was the custom to exchange beautifully designed calendars at the beginning of the year, souvenirs that captured another unique moment in time.

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**Darlene D Kasten**, a newly minted FOM docent at STPI Creative Workshop and Gallery, also guides at the Asian Civilisations Museum and the Malay Heritage Centre.

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# Government Museum, Chennai

## For Indian Art History Stalwarts

By Abha Dayal Kaul

A favourite thing we do on FOM study tours is head to notable museums and set eyes on memorable artefacts that most people have never seen before, not even in publications.

If in Chennai, do plan to visit the treasure-filled Indo-Saracenic style Government Museum in the historical Pantheon Complex. There's way too much to view on one day, but here are my highlights from our February tour before travel came to a sudden halt.

I suggest you start at the Amaravati Gallery to appreciate at close quarters a profusion of marble fragments from one of India's oldest Buddhist *mahachaityas*, or great stupas. This 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE site was left bereft after most of the carved stones were removed and sent off to London or brought here to Madras by the colonial government. Amidst numerous gems is a large stupa with remarkable details that are a delight to recognise – *dharmachakra* pillars,



*Surya, the sun god*

guardian lions, gateways, an empty throne suggesting the Buddha's presence, lotus blooms and other floral motifs, worshippers and celestial beings – all skillfully chiseled on white stone two millennia ago.

An enormous 5<sup>th</sup> century CE Standing Buddha from nearby Kanchipuram, though partially damaged, reminds us that this ancient city in the heart of Tamil lands was once a prominent centre of Buddhism, as recorded even by the Chinese monk Xuan Zang who visited several monasteries here on his famous 7<sup>th</sup> century journey to India.

Kanchipuram also emerged as a renowned Hindu sacred centre and is still dotted with scores of temples built by the powerful Pallavas in what became their capital city. Later, it was the mighty Cholas who held sway over most of the southern country, from their base at Thanjavur. An impressive find from Thanjavur is a rare 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century CE Surya, the sun-god, beautifully proportioned, barefoot and majestic, holding his trademark lotus in each hand.

In addition to its outstanding stone sculptures, the Chola period is defined by its refined bronzes and this Chennai museum houses one of the richest collections of such metal beauties in a vast gallery. A striking variety of bronzes with tiny details such as space between the folded hands of figures and curling locks of hair on the backs of images

achieved by the lost wax method, amazed us with their extraordinary craftsmanship and fine aesthetics.

We admired several forms of Lord Shiva, patron deity of the Cholas, although it was as King of Dance, Nataraja or Natesha, that he became the imperial emblem and political icon of south India's most significant dynasty.



*Lord Shiva as Natesha, King of Dance*

The epitome of Chola bronze-making, an 11<sup>th</sup> century CE Natesha from Thanjavur District, occupies pride of place in this gallery. He strikes a dynamic pose as he holds his unique drum and flame, dancing his cosmic dance of creation and regeneration – hair braids, serpents and sashes flying dramatically out into a circle of fire, the universe.

The museum also contains a priceless collection of Buddhist bronzes in the Chola style unearthed in the port town of Nagapattinam, once a major centre of all religions, especially Buddhism, and a point of close contact with Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. Not many are on display, but don't miss a large, stunning 12<sup>th</sup> century CE Avalokiteshvara, a



*The bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara*

*Bodhisattva* or compassionate being of light. Like Nataraja, he is surrounded by a dazzling halo of flames, which emerges here from the mouths of two *makaras*, mythical aquatic creatures from ancient Indian art. You will want to stay and see much more.

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**Abha Dayal Kaul** is an FOM docent and study tour leader who enjoys travelling to learn and share.

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*All photos by the author*

# Sembawang Hot Spring

By Amanda Jaffe

Deep in Singapore's heartland, midway between Yishun and Sembawang, is a unique spot. Sembawang Hot Spring is a geothermal spring fed by groundwater that has seeped underground, been heated deep within the earth and returned to the surface under pressure. Its source is believed to be the Bukit Timah Granite, one of Singapore's five major geological formations.

While Sembawang Hot Spring's written historical record is somewhat sparse, available bits and pieces offer intriguing snapshots of Singapore over the last 100-plus years. Some of those snapshots are a bit blurry; others are more detailed. Together, they tell a very Singaporean story.

## A Rare Commercial Opportunity

In 1908, W A B Goodall, a municipal ranger, discovered four hot springs on "a piece of swampy ground" within a pineapple plantation owned by Seah Eng Keong. Three of the springs were covered to concentrate the water flow, and Seah sent samples of the "sulphurous" water to analyst John C Thresh in England. Sulphurous or not, Thresh declared the water to be "of the highest degree of organic purity."

In a colony with few natural resources, the newly discovered hot spring presented a rare commercial opportunity. While Seah initially used the services of local bottlers Framroz & Co, by 1912 he had established the Singapore Natural Mineral Hot Springs Company and was in the mineral water bottling business himself. Zombun water, bottled at the source (by now named Seletar Hot Springs), was available in half and full bottles, still and sparkling, from several Singapore purveyors. The water was said to resemble the spring water of Kissingen, Germany, with qualities that received favourable comments from Singapore's "local medical men." Ads for Salina, another water bottled at the spring, also appeared.

Seah's mineral water bottling business changed hands several times until February 1921, when beverage company Fraser & Neave (F&N) acquired the bottling operations and the hot spring. F&N continued to market the water over the years under various names, including Seletaris, Zom, and Vichy Water.



*The Straits Times*, 14 August 1933, Page 14 (Column 2), courtesy of Singapore Press Holdings, with the permission of Fraser and Neave, Limited

## From World War II to a Careful Watch

World War II brought the Japanese occupation to Singapore. While bottling continued, occupying Japanese forces built thermal baths around the hot spring for use by Japanese officers. The hot spring seemed to meet its demise in November 1944, however, when an allied bomb struck close by, disrupting the water flow. Following the war, a geologist assured F&N that natural forces would return the spring to its original state. For the next twenty years, a "careful watch" ensued (per *The Straits Times*), until the spring finally returned in full force and temperature in 1964.

## A Proud New Nation

As the hot spring returned to life, plans for its next phase paralleled Singapore's status as a newly independent nation ready to make its mark on the world. In 1965, F&N announced a three-phase plan to build a new bottling plant and convert the area around the hot spring into a European-style spa. The plan was to create nothing less than "an internationally known health resort," according to F&N's Chairman, Mr Tan Chin Tuan.



Employees at work in the Semangat Ayer Ltd factory in Sembawang Road during its opening. Image from the Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

1967 saw phase one of the project completed, as Semangat Ayer Limited, an F&N subsidiary, opened a new plant near the spring that bottled Seletaris and radiated Singapore pride. *The Straits Times* hailed the spring as "The Fountain of Health at Seletar" and its water as "purely Singaporean." The plant, designed and built by Singaporean architects and contractors, featured "completely up-to-date machinery and methods." "Singapore companies" designed the products, from bottle caps to bottles, from cases to labels. The enterprise, moreover, promised a growing source of employment for Singaporeans.

## Focus on Defence

Despite the bottling plant's success, the following years left the hot spring's future in doubt. F&N's plans for a spa of international renown never came to fruition. In 1985, F&N ceded the land surrounding the hot spring to Singapore's Ministry of Defence (MOD), which eventually acquired the hot spring as well, and the bottling plant ceased operations



Families enjoying the hot spring



Socialising at the main water collection point

shortly thereafter. Eventually, in 1998, MOD announced plans to expand Sembawang Air Base, which had coexisted next to the spring since colonial days, and close public access to the spring for security reasons. The hot spring, it seemed, was destined to disappear in the interests of national security.

### Public Access Prevails

As it turned out, the hot spring's place in the fabric of Singapore's heartland was the key to its survival. Throughout the years since its discovery, the spring had been known to locals in the area, who visited it and an adjacent well for purposes ranging from washing clothes to boiling eggs to defeathering poultry. Until 1983, a kampung originally named Kampung Ayer Panas (Malay for Hot Water Village) was located nearby. Even after the MOD acquired the land, locals continued to visit. As a 1998 article in *The Straits Times* explained, all one had to do was jump over the railing along Gambas Avenue where the red plastic bag was tied, pass through some shrubs, cross a drain, and wade through roughly 100 metres of wet ground and waist-high greenery.



Sembawang Hot Spring, before its current renovation, image courtesy of the National Heritage Board

When the MOD began to erect a fence around the area, a petition began to circulate and in early 2002, the MOD agreed



Today's entrance to the hot spring

to keep a gate to the spring open during the daytime. For a time, as many as 1,000 people reportedly visited at weekends. Although the MOD took steps to make the spring more accessible and less muddy, the drainage pipes and cement slab it installed left the spring functional but nothing more, and interest in the area waned. Gradually, the MOD's interest in the spring seemed to wane as well. In 2016, the MOD indicated it would return the hot spring to the state.

### Interacting with Heritage

Singapore's National Parks Board began developing the land around the spring with an eye toward capturing its rustic, "kampung-like" environment. In January 2020, Sembawang Hot Spring Park became the newest park in the NParks system, over 100 years after the hot spring's discovery.

A snapshot of Sembawang Hot Spring Park on a typical weekend morning captures a park alive

with activity. Visitors walk to the hot spring by way of a landscaped path dedicated to the flora of Singapore's old kampungs. Cyclists park their bikes along a green in front of a massive banyan tree. The hot spring itself flows through tiered pools that cool the water gradually from 70°C to 40°C, the perfect temperature for sitting and soaking one's feet while conversing. The old well, a reminder of the park's past, sits in a brick building nearby. Visitors flock to the Main Water Collection Point to collect steaming spring water in freely available wooden buckets or to cook the perfect soft-boiled onsen egg at the Egg Cooking Station. Every aspect has been reconceived with interaction top-of-mind.

We hope that typical weekend mornings will return soon. When they do, visit Sembawang Hot Spring Park. You'll find it along Gambas Avenue, just after it intersects with Sembawang Road, between Sembawang and Yishun.



The egg cooking station

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**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.

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Unless otherwise noted, photos by the author

# The Coronavirus Pandemic Told Through Art

By Lakshmi Raghu

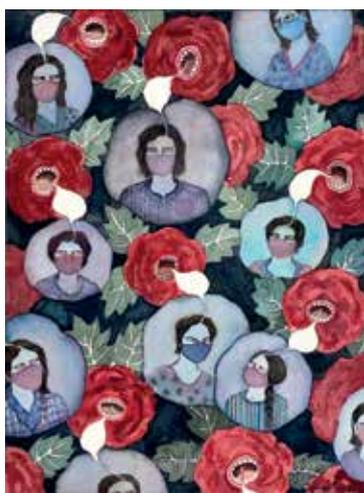


Street art by Indonesian artist Ray Andree

Art has always reflected man's concerns and celebrations. As COVID-19 ravages the world, it is important to remember that pandemics are not new to humanity. One of the earliest pandemics depicted in paintings is the virulent Black Death that arrived on European shores in trading ships and unleashed years of misery and suffering. Closer to our times, the deadly Spanish flu claimed millions of lives.

Horried by the havoc wreaked on society by the pandemics, artists of the time interpreted the crisis through a grim and macabre lens. Some of the most celebrated works on the Black Death and Spanish flu revolved around morbid and gory imagery of skeletons, death and suffering, usually against a bleak and desolate backdrop.

This is evident in paintings such as *Citizens of Tournai Burying the Dead During the Black Death* (detail of a 14<sup>th</sup> century miniature from *The Chronicles of Giles*), *The Dance of Death* from *The Triumph of Death* by Giacomo Borlone de Burchis, *Triumph of Death* by Pieter Bruegel, *The Family* by Egon Schiele, *Plague* by Arnold Böcklin, *Doctor Schnabel von Rom* by Paulus Furst and so on. These paintings are not just repositories of a collective history but are also indicative of the scope of imagination and



From the series *Painting in the Time of Corona*, by Dhruvi Acharya

creativity of the human agency at the time.

Today, as we continue to be in a state of limbo while the coronavirus pandemic continues to spread its tentacles far and wide claiming lives, artists around the world once again take to their drawing boards to reflect on a pandemic. Most approaches to the coronavirus pandemic show a departure from the bleak and grim approach of their predecessors. Their art ranges from the fantastical to the pretty, the bizarre, the surreal, the political and also to the straightforward, the comical and at times, the whimsical and vibrant.

Let us look at selected artists from Asia who have responded to the pandemic. All of their works are personal statements of the impact (psychological, physical, social, cultural, political and economic) the pandemic has had on them. Yet each of their works is significantly different in style, content, medium, thought process and purpose.

**Dhruvi Acharya**, an artist from India, started compulsively painting her series *Painting in the Time of Corona* as a vent for the stress she was experiencing from the lockdown. Decorative, surreal and infused with wry humour, her work is introspective of the physical, social and psychological impact the lockdown has had on her. Her works show sinister flowers in crimson with open mouths, symbolic of nature's bioweapon, the virus, around people as they go about their lives during the lockdown. Dhruvi's art shows the many facets of living during the lockdown, such as people with faces covered with masks, social distancing, the plight of daily wage labourers, the distress of health care professionals, and animals and birds that seem to have found new life in a world with no human interference.

Chinese artist **Shu Yong's** dramatic ink works are dynamic and pulsating with energy. They were intended as a clarion call to people around the world to join forces against

the virus. His abstract works are replete in Chinese symbolism that alludes to the emotions of strength, confidence, hope, determination and solidarity that are crucial to overcoming the pandemic.

Singaporean graphic artist, illustrator and writer of several Chinese story books, **Josef Lee's** first set of illustrations were his immediate response to the outbreak in Wuhan. His work is simplistic and straightforward in its intent – to spread awareness and show vignettes of life in lockdown.

Chinese artist **Tommy Fung's** surrealistic photographs are hyperbolic images infused with wry humour, a reminder of the uncertain and bizarre times we live in. Indian artist **Manas Sahoo's** sand sculptures on the beach are his attempt at spreading awareness of the pandemic.

**Duyi Han's** series titled *The Saints Wear White*, set inside a historical chapel in Hubei province of China, are digitally simulated fresco paintings of medical professionals in protective gear adorning the vaults and alcoves in the chapel and elevating them to the realm of the divine. His paintings, which are a tribute to medical professionals, exude a sense of calm and divine serenity.

Fiery comets, symbols of the virus, plunge towards our planet, but are kept at bay by a winged superhero, in this case a doctor in a decontamination suit and mask. Indonesian artist **Ray Andree's** work is reminiscent of a packed with action fantasy comic book of superheroes and villains. His bold and vividly coloured street art stemmed from frustration at the indifference of his people towards following safety measures to fight the virus. What started off as a one-man show is now a project with many contributing artists.

Indian folk art has long been used for social messaging. **Folk artists with the Dastkar**, a prominent society for the arts and crafts people in India, are using their craft to spread awareness about the pandemic through bold, vibrant, colourful, quirky and fun imagery. Their technique relies heavily on the use of natural pigments, lines, stylised imagery and well-defined outlines.

Some of their work on the pandemic shows people wearing masks, washing hands and following social distancing.

While several artists draw attention to the lives of ordinary people and medical professionals in the lockdown, there are others whose work is political. For instance, **Matsuyama Miyabi's** *Freewill*, originally meant to express her feelings over the Chinese Government's promotion of ultra-nationalism, became associated with censorship around the pandemic following the news about the coronavirus whistleblower, Dr Li Wenliang's death. **Kuang Biao's**



Indian folk artist Ambika Devi's Madhubani art shows people wearing face masks

poster is a tribute to Dr Wenliang and urges people to call governments out for their authoritarian attitudes.

*Share Your Quiet* is an archive of the different kinds of 'quiet' that people are experiencing in their confined environments. **Pallavi Paul's** work dismisses the public display of clapping and clattering of utensils to express solidarity as 'noise' created to distract attention from pressing issues in the country, such as the displacement of migrant workers, loss of jobs, hunger, poverty etc and, in turn, is a barometer for measuring the deafening silence all around – the silence of protest and of dissent.

**Sarah Naqvi's** *Saffron Biryani* is part of a bigger project called *Queerentine*. This audio-visual initiative is a light-hearted satirical take on the growing communal tensions in India with reference to the anti CAA – NRC protests that have been put on the back burner because of the lockdown. Through the title *Saffron Biryani* – saffron alluding to the colour



Freewill, by Matsuyama Miyabi

of the ruling party's flag and *biryani*, a rice dish that has its origins among the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent – she shows how even food can be politicised. Her work not only draws attention to the growing animosity against religious minorities in India but also to gender, caste and economic minorities.

COVID-19 will not be the last of the pandemics. There will be many more. Art about them will continue to flourish as well, not just as a reminder to be appreciative of what we have but also as a celebration of the resilience and strength of the human spirit and its ability to create and nurture even in times of pestilence.

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All photos courtesy of the artists

# Netsuke: Artworks in Miniature

By Margaret White

...go to a museum and wander past the cabinets of netsuke and look at a single one. Let your eyes settle. You will have both a moment of quiet delight and a mood of introspection to carry away. Edmund de Waal (Hutt 2003:9))

*Netsuke* (the word is both singular and plural) have enchanted a wide audience for several centuries. Although primarily a man's functional dress accessory, they are also seen as aesthetically beautiful, tiny works of art.

What exactly are *netsuke*? *Netsuke* (literally 'root-fix') are small (approximately 2.5-6cms) and usually carved from wood or ivory and worn as part of traditional Japanese dress as a toggle by which an article may be attached to the *obi* (sash) of a kimono. The origins of wearing hanging accessories from belts are cross-cultural, beginning with the nomads of Central and East Asia, West Asia, and spreading through China, Korea and Japan. It is believed that the art of carving *netsuke* began in Fujian Province in southeast China in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when an ivory carving industry grew up stimulated by demand from Iberian traders and missionaries for Christian images (Earle 2003:108).

However, belts with objects dangling from them evolved into a unique form in late 16<sup>th</sup> century Japan when a man wearing a kimono – a garment with open sleeves and no pockets – felt the need to carry small items. The *obi* was tied around the waist to hold the kimono closed and items could be tucked into the band. These hanging items were collectively known as *sagemono* and could include a tobacco



Netsuke in the form of a boar, ivory, date unknown, photo by the author

pouch, a pipe, a money container or an *inro* (consisting of multiple compartments) for holding personal medicine or seals and ink pads, paper prayers or alms for beggars. An *inro* was held together by a *netsuke* and an *ojime* (bead), connected by two cords strung together through *himotoshi*, specially drilled holes, so the *inro* could be adjusted.

*Netsuke* were worn by all strata of society in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They developed into a fashionable and elaborately ornamental status symbol for the samurai or warrior caste who were keen to circumvent the sumptuary regulations restricting expenditure on materials without drawing attention to themselves. This was an important part of urban chic! A man may have owned quite a few *netsuke* and *inro* from which to choose, according to the season, special occasion, etc. Ensembles of *inro*, *netsuke* and *ojime* with a common decorative subject were often sought after.

How were these miniature works of art crafted? In the main *netsuke* carving centres of Osaka, Kyoto and Edo (Tokyo), the method of training a *netsukeshi* was through a system of apprenticeship. A *netsukeshi* would be apprenticed to a master for many years to learn the necessary carving skills. Carving tools consisted of many files, chisels, knives, drills and saws. The work was slow and meticulous. Despite this, pay was low and only improved if one had a wealthy patron. Thus, a *netsukeshi* usually only crafted *netsuke* as a sideline to his profession of perhaps wood carving or metalworking.

Up until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, wood was the main material used to carve *netsuke*. Fruitwood, boxwood and cypress were preferred. Elephant ivory, although much desired, had to be imported and was very expensive. However, the term *ivory* also included tusks, teeth, bones, antlers and vegetable (tagua nut) ivory. Coral, metal or lacquer were also used.

The shapes and styles of *netsuke* varied. *Manju* could be round and hollowed inside in the shape of a flat, New Year's rice cake or bun, or they could be face or mask-shaped or *sashi*, which were long and thin, to be hooked



Netsuke in the form of an old man standing on a rock, ivory, 20<sup>th</sup> century, photo by the author



Netsuke in the form of a female Noh mask, Tomotoshi, carved ivory and rope 19<sup>th</sup> century, courtesy of the Art Gallery of New South Wales

over the *obi* or inside the *obi*. Most common were *katabori* or figural *netsuke* carved three dimensionally, while *kagamibuta netsuke* had a metal disc set into a shallow round bowl usually made of ivory, wood or metal. There were also *karakuri* (trick) *netsuke* with moveable parts, such as a *kitsune* (fox) with opening and closing jaws or *netsuke* with 'hidden surprises'.

What were the subjects of *netsuke*? Early Japanese *netsuke* strongly reflected western-inspired Chinese origins. However, subjects could mirror broader trends in Japanese art, varying as widely as the personalities of their makers. Categories encompassed mythical legends from both China and Japan, religious themes, zodiac animals, literary heroes, characters from *Kyogen* or *Noh* plays or they could be erotic in nature or a form of social satire.

In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century *netsuke* production became more interesting and inventive. The aim of the carver was to suggest liveliness or motion or even comedy. Some *netsuke* were designed to sit on a flat surface, so appearing as decorative ornaments. An owner of numerous *netsuke* might keep them out of sight for the most part, only sharing their viewing and handling appreciation with a few friends who may have studied them over them over a cup of tea. Of course, tactility was very important because when it was worn, a *netsuke* would be handled frequently.



Manju wood cutter and woman with multiple silver chains originally attached to a tobacco pouch, ivory, silver, metal, 19<sup>th</sup> century, courtesy of the Art Gallery of New South Wales

Knowledge and appreciation of *netsuke* was stimulated in the West from around the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, after Commodore Perry took a crate-load of them back to the US. This was around the time when trade opened the door to Japan and the craze for *Japonisme* gained in popularity. Even though the demand for *netsuke* by Japanese men declined as they adopted Western style clothing, *netsukeshi* continued to carve *netsuke*, produced specifically as collectors' items for those in the West.



Netsuke in the form of two dragon heads encircling a bell, staghorn 19<sup>th</sup> century, courtesy of the Art Gallery of New South Wales

I was utterly charmed by a *netsuke* I purchased almost 30 years ago in Singapore without really knowing what it was. I loved the intricately carved figure of an old man standing on a rock, one foot on a tortoise, a monkey and peach on his shoulder. It invited closer inspection and handling. The motif of the tortoise (symbolizing longevity) and the monkey holding a peach, symbolizes the homophonous relationship between a monkey and a nobleman. (Welch 2008: 137) A more recent acquisition is a boar, a common animal still roaming wild on Japanese islands such as Naoshima and Shikoku. It has been carved in the round, has inlaid eyes and is amusing to ponder as you turn it over.

Today, *netsuke* are still carved in Japan and are avidly collected, commanding very high prices internationally. *Netsuke* are extraordinary examples of intricate craftsmanship and deserve your attention if you get the opportunity to view some of these small sculptures.

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# The Japanese Art of Kintsugi

By Rajul Shah

## Introduction

If you've ever been to Japan, you know it's a uniquely aesthetic experience. While the experience of Japanese hospitality (*omotenashi*) leaves one feeling like royalty; there is a sense of experiential beauty every second of the day. Whether it's the presentation of the food on your plate, the calming zen of a Japanese garden or the simple serving of tea; a typical day in Japan gives you a peek into life perfected. The simplicity feels luxurious. In Japan life imitates art and art imitates life. The two concepts are intertwined in a symbiotic relationship. One simply could not exist without the other. *Sumi-e* brush painting, woodblock prints, *washi* paper, pottery...even the weave of a traditional kimono, carry meaning and a purposeful translation of an object's spirit and function into the artwork. The Japanese art of *kintsugi* is the perfect amalgamation of all that is Japanese.

## Kintsugi

*Kintsugi* or *kintsukuroi* is the art of mending broken items. Using adhesive and gold or silver metal, a broken piece of ceramic/pottery is glued back together along its break lines. In other cultures, a chipped teapot or broken bowl would often be thrown out and a new one bought to take its place, thereby 'saving' the function of the broken item, rather than the item itself.

In Japan, when a piece of pottery is broken, it is the item itself that is repaired. Not only does this preserve the function for which the piece was intended, but it also adds an element of beauty that was not seen before. A cup that serves as a vessel to transfer delicious tea or a bowl that serves hot, steamy ramen, and/or a ceramic structure to display the delicate brushes an artist uses for painting are 'reborn' into stronger, 'wiser' and more beautiful forms of themselves.

Aspects of Japanese culture are intermingled with the development and continuity of this art form, including *Wabi-Sabi*, *Mottainai* and *Mushin*.

*Wabi* refers to transient and stark

beauty. *Sabi* refers to the beauty of natural patina and aging. *Mottainai* is an expression of regret at waste. *Mushin* is the need to accept change. There is also a belief that everything has a life. Whether it be a teacup or a stone by a waterfall, every object has a *kami* (spirit).

A vessel is dropped and breaks on the floor into five large pieces. The beauty of the original vessel is accepted to be transient. The vessel is not wasted. It is repaired by glueing the original pieces to each other; allowing for the natural beauty of the piece to come through. As the vessel is restored to its original purpose, its imperfections have been embraced. It is admired for its 'scars', which speak to the beauty of the vessel's age and experience. A teacup is held with reverence for its 'service' and its spirit.

## History

The art of *kintsugi* started somewhere in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It is said that Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa broke his Chinese celadon tea bowl and sent it back to China for repair. The bowl was repaired with metal pins holding it together – like staples – as this was the standard mode of repair. The Shogun was not happy with the bowl's appearance. So local master craftsmen experienced in the art of lacquer and *maki-e* (painting fine gold and silver landscapes onto lacquer trays and objects) came up with a more aesthetically pleasing solution. They mended the broken pieces, filling the cracks with lacquer-made tree sap, known as *urushi*. (This material



On the left, a broken teacup is repaired using the crack method of kintsugi and on the right, using the piece-method, the missing piece from this stone tumbler is replaced with epoxy and gold-leaf. Image from Best Living Studios, [www.bestlivingjapan.com](http://www.bestlivingjapan.com)



Broken in air shipment from Hong Kong to Tokyo, the crack method was used to repair this ceramic brush stand – adding another dimension of beauty. Photos by the author

has been used for some 9,000 years by Japanese lacquer masters as a glue, putty or paint.) Once the *urushi* was applied and the bowl was structurally strong, gold or silver paint would be applied over the break lines, making the piece unique.

By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, *kintsugi* had come into its own. It is at this time that a Japanese warrior decided to purchase and purposely break standard tea bowls. He repaired them to resell and make a profit. According to Louise Cort (the curator of ceramics at the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M Sackler Gallery), "That seems to indicate that by the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, *kintsugi* was a commonly used technique for repairing – and at the same time, ornamenting – ceramics for tea".

#### Kintsugi Techniques: Piece-Method, Crack and Joint-Call

Within *kintsugi* three types of methods are typically used. These are the piece-method, crack and joint-call. All three of these techniques use epoxy (replacing *urushi*), gold and silver. The finished results can look very different.

The piece-method uses epoxy to glue pieces together and fill in spaces where pieces are too small or fragmented to join up. Lacquer is also used as a putty to fill in any gaps or holes where chips from the original vessel might be missing. This method can be the most challenging because the epoxy/lacquer cannot be removed once it's dry. Structurally, the pieces must be glued in place at the same time. The artisan may have to glue 15 pieces back together in a very few minutes.

The crack approach is the most common technique, using a touch-up with minimal lacquer. This approach results in the visual definition of *kintsugi* with shimmers of gold or silver veins moving through the piece.

Joint-Call can be the most difficult and intriguing technique when pieces from different vessels are fitted together almost like a mosaic. The result is a true one-of-a-kind piece of ceramic artistry.



This bowl is given a new look and a new life using the joint-call method of *kintsugi*, where a broken piece from a different vessel is used to join with this one. Photo courtesy of Flickr.com

#### Kintsugi Today

Today, the art of *kintsugi* is kept alive by artisans, non-artisans as DIY techniques and tourists looking to experience a piece of Japanese culture. There are also ceramic artists (Tomomi Kamoshita and Yee Sookyung) who have adapted this art into their work, as well as artists who have transferred the art into other mediums, such as painting, jewellery and sculptures (Elisa Sheehan, Rachel Sussman and Tatiane Freitas).

#### The Moral of Kintsugi

There is a lesson to be learned from this art of *kintsugi*, a moral to this story, so to speak. Make the most of what you already have – even if it seems broken, it can be repaired, improved and made more beautiful than before. It's okay to show our vulnerabilities as that is what makes humans human. We make mistakes and we are flawed. But we don't need to remain broken. We can put ourselves back together, heal our wounds and grow in spirit.

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# The Ota Memorial Museum and the Floating World of Ukiyo-e

By Darlene D Kasten

In the heart of Tokyo's trendy Harajuku district, you will find the Ota Memorial Museum, a testament to the city's medieval past. The Ota Museum is wholly dedicated to the art of *ukiyo-e*, the paintings and woodcut prints that flourished during Japan's Edo period (1603-1867).

By combining *uki* for sadness and *yo* for life, the word *ukiyo-e* originally reflected the Buddhist concept of life as a transitory illusion, involving the cycle of birth, suffering, death and rebirth. But during the Edo period, *uki* took on another meaning, to float, and the term became associated with pleasurable distractions and ways to detach from ordinary life. Typical themes included the Kabuki theatre, sumo wrestling, beautiful women and handsome men, travel and the beauty of the four seasons.

*Ukiyo-e* started humbly as the audience for prints consisted of ordinary citizens, not members of the elite. The woodblock technique enabled mass production which meant affordability and therefore led to their popularity. Prints were used on lunar calendars, on pamphlets and novels, and on posters advertising theatre, teahouses and pleasure houses. At first *ukiyo-e* were monochrome, but by the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century polychrome prints were made. The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the emergence of master artists including Suzuki Harunobo, Kitagawa Utamaro, Toshusai Sharaku, Katsushika Hokusai, Utagawa Hiroshige and Utagawa Kuniyoshi.

*Ukiyo-e* served to document the leisure activities and climate of the era, as well as the decidedly Japanese aesthetic. It therefore gave outsiders a window into the mysteries of Japan, an intimate view, which had been closed to foreigners for centuries.

*Ukiyo-e* was one of the first forms of Japanese art that found its way



Utagawa Kuniyoshi / Utagawa Yoshitori, Thirty-six Famous Restaurants in Edo: Mukōjima, Negiuri Tomoinosuke from the exhibition Utagawa Kuniyoshi - and his daughters, 4-27 October 2019, Ota Memorial Museum of Art



Ota Memorial Museum of Art, photo by the author

across the seas to Europe and America with the opening of trade between the countries. It served as an ambassador of Japanese culture abroad and had a profound effect on Western art movements such as Impressionism, Art Nouveau and Modernism, inspiring Western artists such as Vincent Van Gogh, Claude Monet and Edgar Degas.

The Meiji period (1868-1912) that followed the Edo saw an influx into Japan of Western technology such as photography, leading to diminished interest in *ukiyo-e* within Japan. At the same time, the *Japonisme* movement in the West caused a widespread outflow of prints from Japan to Europe and the United States. This drain of an irreplaceable Japanese traditional art form attracted the attention of Ota Seizo V, the president of Toho Mutual Life Insurance Company in Tokyo. Ota started acquiring and conserving *ukiyo-e* and by the time of his death in 1977, had amassed a collection of about 14,000 works. Three years later, Ota's heirs opened his namesake museum in Tokyo, the only museum in Japan dedicated exclusively to the art of *ukiyo-e* across its 300-year history, with an array of master artists and themes.

The collection on display changes monthly and in October 2019, 80 works of Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797-1861) were exhibited. Kuniyoshi was an *ukiyo-e* artist who specialised in powerful *musha-e* warrior pictures, landscape pictures incorporating the methods used in Western paintings and *giga* caricatures drawn full of humour. Also on display were rare works by his two daughters, Yoshitori and Yoshijo. Although the number of works his daughters produced was small, the exhibition showcased the close relationship and respect Kuniyoshi had for female artists in an otherwise male dominated society. Right on, Kuniyoshi!

There are many places in Japan besides the Ota to float

away into the world of *ukiyo-e*. The Tokyo National Museum exhibits national treasures and important cultural items including *ukiyo-e*. Also in Tokyo is the Sumida Hokusai Museum. It features a permanent exhibition room with Katsushika Hokusai's works throughout his life. Outside Tokyo, there is the Hokusai Museum in Nagano Prefecture's Obuse, which similarly pays tribute to the master. And in Nagano Prefecture, the Japan Ukiyo-e Museum in Matsumoto exhibits selected woodblock prints from the vast collection of the Sakai family, a wealthy merchant family that started collecting *ukiyo-e* about 300 years ago. Then there are Kyoto and Osaka. The Kamigata Ukiyo-e Museum in Osaka is the only museum in the world to have a permanent Kamigata *ukiyo-e* exhibit, woodcut prints from Kyoto and Osaka that typically feature portraits of kabuki actors. But there are two sister museums that deserve mention, the small Kyoto Ukiyo-e and Osaka Ukiyo-e Museums.

Last October, the Osaka museum featured an entire release of the *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido Road*, limited editions published in 1833-34 by Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858). Hiroshige was a popular *ukiyo-e* artist in the landscape genre and some of his landscapes in the series on the famous highway that ran from Edo, present-day Tokyo, to the Imperial capital of Kyoto, proved to be so popular that editions of 30 or 40,000 were printed.

The Tokaido Road was one of two main routes to Kyoto during the Edo period's relatively peaceful time, which allowed for an increase in domestic travel. The scenes show the real-life experiences of travel on foot, including sudden rainstorms, perilous river crossings, and intense sun and wind. A variety of dress and occupation make the images culturally interesting, but it is the personalities that come to life through expressions and body language that make them masterpieces. Facial details show the exertion of the men ferrying sumo wrestlers in their litters, the annoyance at having one's sedge hat blow off in a gust, and the sheer contentment of weary travellers resting and smoking pipes at a roadside stall. The colours are sublime and the works of course feature Hiroshige's signature blue, which as a cross-cultural point of fact, is the exact Prussian blue used on Dutch ships.

At the same time, the Kyoto museum celebrated the 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hokusai's death with an exhibition of



*Okitsu, 17<sup>th</sup> Station of the Tokaido, Utagawa Hiroshige, from the exhibition Hiroshige Utagawa / Old-time fifty-three stages on the Tokaido highway, 2019.7.10-2019.11.22, Osaka Ukiyo-e Museum*



*Fine Wind, Clear Morning, Katsushika Hokusai, from the exhibition Hokusai Katsushika 170 years anniversary plan – Two Big Waves, 2019.6.1 – 2019.10.31, Kyoto Ukiyo-e Museum*

his *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji* including *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* and *Fine Wind, Clear Morning*, commonly known as *The Great Wave* and *Red Fuji* respectively. Much has been written about *The Great Wave*, the quintessential Hokusai print in which a breaking wave crashes violently onto three fishing boats; the fragility of human life contrasted with the supreme force of nature as Mount Fuji looks on imperturbably. (NB. Another article on pages 18-19 in this issue discusses *The Great Wave* in more detail.) In 2017 the British Museum produced a one-and-a-half-hour documentary called *Hokusai* on this very subject. Among its many recognitions and honours, Japan recently announced that the woodcut image will be featured on the newly minted 1,000-yen banknote to be put into circulation in 2024.

The mythical mountain is forefront in *Red Fuji*, noble and powerful in a typically minimalist Japanese composition without perspective. Uncharacteristically, Hokusai excludes the human element here, concentrating instead on the rare phenomenon of the sacred mountain. Crimson red in the morning sunlight, the work presents the Fuji of early summer as the snow on the peak begins to melt and exposes its reddish hue.

As a final note, make sure to save time to view the highly informative film on the history and techniques of *ukiyo-e* in the basement of the Ota, and also make a stop on the third floor of the Kamigata museum. The latter is dedicated to rice-growing and the roof has been converted to a small rice field.



*Keisei Yamato Soshi, drawn by Syunchō, from the 73<sup>rd</sup> feature exhibition, Ukiyo-e from various aspects: The Color Yellow, Sep 3 – Dec 1, 2019, Kamigata Ukiyo-e Museum*



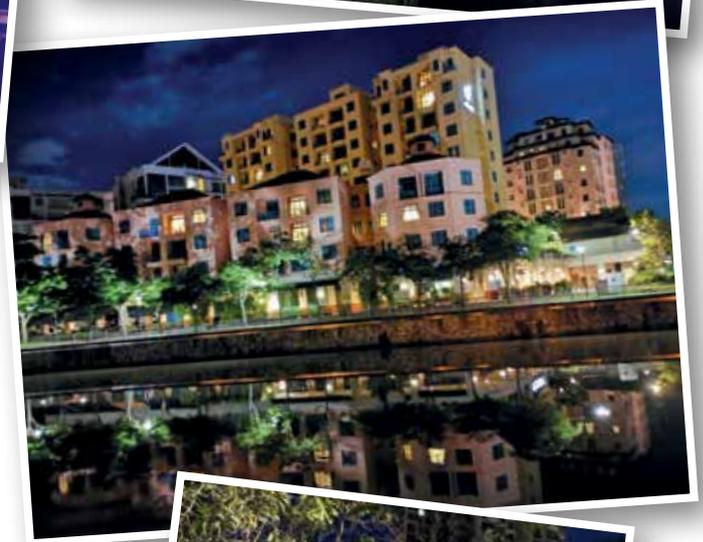
## While the City Pre-Dawn Perspectives in

By Andra

When the world we were used to was suddenly turned upside down, we had to find ways to cope. Each of us had to find something to relieve the isolation, loneliness and boredom we had to endure for more than two months. For me, staying busy was easy; I have the bi-monthly issues of *PASSAGE* magazine to organise and also photo journals to write about my various trips. That was my usual daytime activity, so nothing much had changed. What did change was my exercise routine.

With gyms and pools closed, I decided to switch the timing of my daily walks to the early morning, when it would be much cooler and there would also be fewer people out and about. I began getting up at 5:00 am, setting off along eerily silent streets, heading for the Singapore River along what are usually very busy main roads.

I experienced an extraordinary feeling of freedom – with silence all around me and only the occasional vehicle disturbing the peace. Rarely, another morning person would go jogging or walking past. What I did hear earlier than usual, was the birds waking up to greet the new day, chirping and chirruping, welcoming the dawn well before it actually arrived. Perhaps the lack of traffic noise was a factor in this – they could hear each other.



# Was Sleeping

## the Time of COVID-19

Leo

My usual destination was the riverside walk, beginning at Clarke Quay and extending to the Esplanade where I crossed the river and walked back along the other side. The riverside walk is a clear favourite for joggers, walkers and cyclists. Although initially they were few, the numbers increased as dawn approached. By 6:45 am the riverside became very busy as young parents joined the other exercisers, with babies or small children in tow.

However, the biggest surprise during these pre-dawn walks was a photographer's delight – vistas that seem unremarkable by day had become magical by night because of the colourful lighting that transformed bridges, trees and buildings into artworks. So I began documenting my pre-dawn rambles, finding interesting angles and different perspectives of views that by the light of day might seem unprepossessing, but were now remarkably eye-catching. While the walk was familiar, it was transformed into a fairyland of colours and quirky vistas during those early hours. This is my photographic record of my walks while most of the city was sleeping.

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**Andra Leo** has always enjoyed taking photographs and recording her experiences while walking, hiking and travelling.

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# Riding the Rogue Wave to Immortality

By Soumya Ayer



Under the Wave off Kanagawa, also known as The Great Wave, from the series Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji (*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), circa 1830–32, Katsushika Hokusai

In the year 1810, 50-year-old celebrity artist, Katsushika Hokusai was returning home from a 21-day pilgrimage to a Buddhist temple where he had prayed to the Bodhisattva Myouken to make him a great artist, when he was struck by lightning, a rare but often deadly event. He was hurled into a paddy field, fell unconscious, his hair and clothes probably singed, his body in pain as if stung by a thousand wasps. Lightning strikes are said to alter brain circuitry, change behaviour, and in some cases, confer extraordinary talents. In Hokusai's case, he suffered from bouts of paralysis and did declare that the lightning strike changed his life forever. He withdrew from public life and the social circles that he was part of.

This single event had a dramatic effect on his art because he had to retrain himself as a painter, creating multiple volumes of *Hokusai Manga*, which added to his fame. Although he was famous, he was self-effacing, proclaiming that before the age of 70 he had not created anything worthy. He wrote, "At a hundred, I shall be a great artist. At a hundred and ten, every dot or stroke I paint will be alive." He signed this declaration as "art crazy old man". Hokusai was obsessed with painting and achieving immortality. He drank a potion concocted from potato whisky, sugar and dragon-eye fruit, one that he believed would grant him longevity. He lived longer than most, dying at the age of 88.

As he lay on his deathbed, he wished that heaven could grant him another 10 years because he needed just five more to become a real artist.

His most recognisable work is the woodblock print titled *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* (*The Great Wave*, 1831) which he created at the age of 72, a decade after suffering a stroke and two decades after that thunderbolt from heaven. The print is of a towering wave, its crest sprouting foamy claws that are ready to plunge into three fishing boats below. The scientific term for this unpredictable wave is a rogue wave, which is capable of sinking large ships. There is a great deal of tension in this composition as the boatmen cower beneath the wave. In sharp contrast to the drama unfolding in the foreground, the backdrop features the snow-capped peak of Mount Fuji, an enduring symbol of stillness. This painting is an exploration of the connection between stillness and movement, of a world where change is the only constant, and the engagement with this truth through stillness is the key to achieving transcendence.

Hokusai's life was buffeted by crises as turbulent as his rogue wave. Apart from the stroke and the lightning strike, he was widowed twice, lost his daughter, had an errant grandson who led him into debt, lived through famine, lost all his work in a fire, and yet through those tumultuous years he sought refuge in his faith and in his art. He was a devout

Buddhist and he chanted mantras as he walked the streets of Edo (now Tokyo), a talented eccentric.

Hokusai was born in 1760 in Edo. He was adopted by a mirror-maker who produced mirrors for the shogun. However, Hokusai did not follow in his step-father's footsteps. Instead, from the age of fourteen he trained to be an *ukiyo-e* artist. *Ukiyo* means floating world and *e* means picture. During the Tokugawa period (1603-1868) the 'floating world' referred to the lifestyle of meaningless pleasure that was typical for many that lived in the cities of Edo, Kyoto and Osaka. The *ukiyo* culture encompassed the pastimes of samurai, merchants, poets, kabuki actors, geishas, sumo wrestlers and prostitutes as they met at tea-houses, theatres and brothels. The woodblock prints that featured this world were called *ukiyo-e*, and it developed into one of the most enduring art forms. Apart from illustrations in books, these prints were used in posters featuring the most famous geishas, kabuki actors, landscapes, or scenes from folklore and historical events.

Although Hokusai's earlier works depict traditional subjects, such as actors and geishas, his subject matter changed later and he turned to depicting the natural world. To him, Mount Fuji bore great spiritual significance not only for its sacredness but also as a symbol of immortality, therefore it featured in several of his works. This association of the volcano with immortality is woven into Japanese myth. Hokusai's prints depicting Mount Fuji were produced in the thousands and were very popular with the people who worshipped the mountain.

During the Tokugawa period, Japan was closed off to the world; the Dutch were the only Europeans allowed to trade in Japan and they were confined to a man-made island in Nagasaki Harbour. Once a year they would travel to Edo to meet the shogun in his castle. Hokusai encountered new ideas, such as the use of linear perspective, through Dutch



One of Hokusai's prints of the mountain he was drawn to, *The Dragon of Smoke Escaping from Mt Fuji*, courtesy of Wikipedia



Katsushika Hokusai, in an 1839 self-portrait, courtesy of Wikimedia

engravings and prints, and we see this influence in *The Great Wave*. He was never quite the same after his stroke in 1820 and depended on his talented daughter Katsushika Oi. She too was passionate about painting and cared for Hokusai till his dying day. Many of Hokusai's works after his stroke are said to bear the ghost hand of his daughter. Nothing more is known about her after Hokusai died.

Four years after Hokusai's death, in 1853, an American fleet commanded by Matthew Perry, sailed into Tokyo Bay and forced Japan to open up to trading with the West. Hokusai's work reached Europe and made a big impact on budding Impressionists such as Monet, Degas and Van Gogh.

Hokusai's desire to be immortal, like his favourite mountain, did come to pass. In 1999 Hokusai was counted among the top 100 most important people of the millennium by LIFE magazine, the only Japanese to have made it to the list. His iconic *The Great Wave* still rides a wave of popularity, being featured in souvenirs, Japanese passports and even Uniqlo clothing. The Bodhisattva Myouken must have answered Hokusai's prayers that day when he was hurled off his feet, because today he is regarded as one of the world's greatest artists, one who created 30,000 works of art over a career that spanned 70 years.

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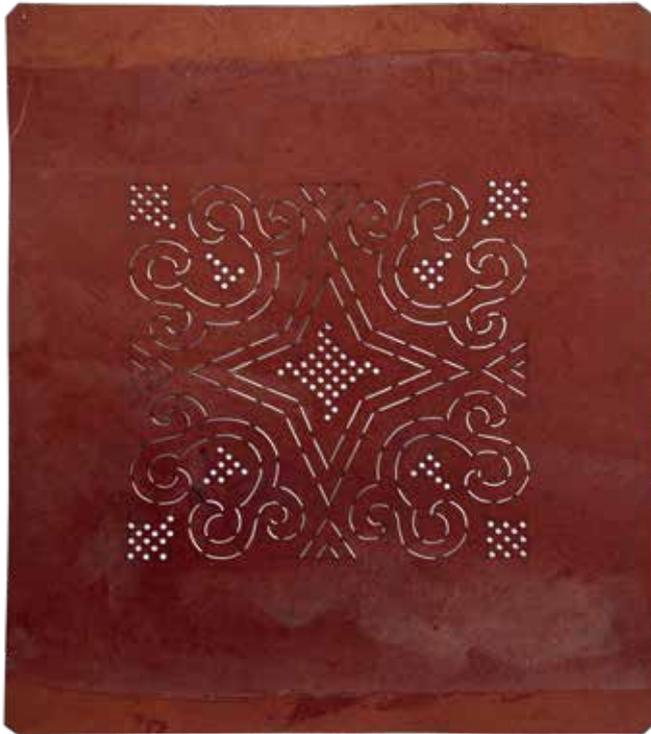
**Soumya Ayer** is an FOM volunteer who guides at the ACM and IHC.

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# Ise Katagami: Beauty Cut in Paper

By Margaret White

The perfection of craftsmanship is central to Japan's culture, growing from the Shinto ideals of purity and cleanliness (*kirie*) and the Buddhist ideals of simplicity and refinement. One could regard the following craft as exemplifying these values. The art of Japanese paper stencils or *Ise katagami*, literally pattern papers, was already known more than 1,000 years ago in Japan and was developed in conjunction with textile dyeing during the middle of the Muromachi period (1336-1573). It is thought to have evolved from the stencilling of armour and leather. The use of stencils enabled the precise repetition of motifs as well as facilitating the process of decorating a surface. The craft was called *Ise katagami* since the town, formerly Ise Prefecture, now Mie Prefecture, was the historical centre of the craft. Today, *katagami* is primarily centred on the districts of Shiroko, Jike and Ejima in the city of Suzuka.



Star and arabesque motif

Historically, Japan is regarded as producing the most sophisticated stencils (Gillow and Sentance 1999:114). *Katagami* reflects the richness and interest of Japanese design as well as the prowess of fine cutting techniques. Stencil craftsmen preferred to create designs with special significance and beauty in Japanese daily life. Hence, patterns could include landscapes, geometric and stylised shapes, birds, animals, flowers or everyday objects. One popular motif was maple leaves floating on the eddies of a stream, which originated from the tradition of floating the stencilled fabric in a stream with the current acting as a gentle agitator to remove the paste.

The Tokugawa shogunate (1603-1868) reorganised society and trade, encouraging conspicuous consumption and supporting artisans. Creativity was spurred and stencils in specialty designs were sold along the trade and pilgrimage routes surrounding Kyoto. The trickle-down effect meant

that the lower classes in Japanese society gained access to mass-produced cotton with stencilled fabrics, although of a less refined quality than those worn by the merchant class.

During the Edo period (1603-1868), *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints often depicted garments that were thought to represent stencil-dyed silk or cotton textiles. The use of three 'signature' Edo *komon* (minute, repeating dense patterns) on *kamishimo* (vests with stiffly extended shoulders and matching *hakama* trousers) can be observed on the clothes of samurai.



Leaf motif

A stencil was created from a base of multiple thin layers of handmade *washi* or Japanese paper made from the inner bark of the mulberry tree and bonded together with a glue extracted from tannin-rich persimmon juice or *kakishibu*. The paper was slowly smoked over several weeks, yielding a strong and flexible, water-resistant brown paper. A highly-trained artisan using different types of razor-sharp knives would carve an intricate design. Several techniques were employed; push carving (*tsukibori*), which produced delicate openwork patterns such as floral designs, drill carving (*kiribori*) for cutting a large number of small holes, stripe carving (*shimabori*) in which parallel lines were cut, and tool punching (*dogubori*) using a knife with a tip in a predetermined shape for motifs such as a petal or diamond.

The stencils were then ready for the resist-dyeing or pattern dyeing (*katazome*) process. Rice paste was applied with a wooden spatula through the stencil onto the cloth that was laid out on long boards. The rice paste was made from a mixture of glutinous rice flour, finely ground, defatted rice bran, glycerine and salt, which when wetted and steamed, was very sticky and clung to the fabric. When dyed, the colour did not adhere to the areas coated with rice paste. Finally, the rice paste was washed away. By multiple realignments of the stencil, large areas could be patterned on long bolts of silk or cotton cloth for kimono or other

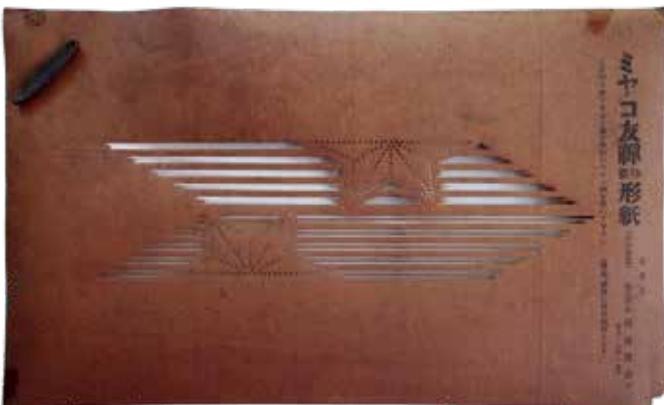


Child's kimono, cotton, water plants and ducks beside a stream, Ryukyu Islands 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century. Image courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London

garments. In the child's kimono shown here, the tailoring method involved using one bolt of cloth extending from front to back, with no shoulder seams. The stencil has been turned at the shoulder to ensure that the motif always appears the right way up.

Stencils with large sections of paper cut out were reinforced by sandwiching a mesh of silk threads between layers of paper. Each stencil plate had two small pinholes that served as register marks. A pin was passed through each of these holes and into the corresponding marks left by the previous impression. In this way, design continuity was ensured. Designs could be printed vertically or horizontally. The stencil was generally not used for more than one kimono, though multiple stencils could be cut at the same time.

At the beginning of the Meiji period (1868-1912) and the opening-up of Japan to the world, textile manufacturing underwent rapid changes. European mechanisation accelerated textile production and to some degree, Japanese textiles were adapted to Western tastes. Earle (1986:192) notes that the application of the resist-paste technique was revolutionised by Kyoto master, Hirose Jisuke (1822-1896). Jisuke developed a method of directly applying pre-coloured



Arrow and star motif

paste (*yuzen*) instead of resist-paste through stencils onto synthetically dyed fabric, thus accelerating production. Textiles became less expensive to produce and were available to a wider cross-section of consumers.

Beautifully patterned *katagami* fabrics began to be avidly collected in Europe and America in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, rather than by the Japanese. Along with Japanese woodblocks, *katagami* became influential in European arts and decoration, exemplified by artists such as Vincent Van Gogh, James Abbot Mc Neill Whistler, John La Farge, Louis Comfort Tiffany, Arthur Wesley Dow and Frank Lloyd Wright.



Mandarin duck

Happily, in 1955, a new appreciation of this craft in Japan conferred six *katagami* artisans (five men and one woman) with the 'Living National Treasures' designation. In 1993, *katagami* was designated one of the Important Intangible Cultural Properties of Japan. In addition, the Association for Preservation of *Ise katagami* Techniques organisation is dedicated to the preservation of the art of *Ise katagami* stencil-making. There have been continuing efforts to pass on and develop relevant techniques. There is also the *Ise-Katagami* Stencil Museum in Suzuka, which opened in 1997. Many stencils are now preserved in museums and private collections in Japan and around the world, including an extensive collection held by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

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**Margaret White** is a long-time FOM member and Past President who is a keen traveller in Asia. She has repeatedly visited Japan where she continues to learn about its culture and customs while indulging in her passions for writing and sketching.

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Unless otherwise noted, all images are from the author's collection

# Papermaking is Like Cooking

By Swapna Mirashi

“Papermaking is like cooking”, says Gordon Koh, Senior Papermaker at STPI Creative Workshop and Gallery. Over the years, his ‘kitchen’ has been dishing out some outstanding art. This article looks at STPI’s papermill, collaboration between artists and technical experts and the highlights of its many experiments over the years, through the eyes of the man behind it, the master papermaker, or the chef, as he calls himself.

Paper is made from fibres such as those from cotton, linen and mulberry; with water added, they are beaten to make pulp. This is then passed through an assembly called ‘mould and deckle’, which helps drain water from the pulp and also defines its shape and size. What results is a sheet of paper pulp. Upon drying, this becomes a sheet of handmade paper and is what artists use to create works of fine art.

What happens when an artist gets access to a paper mill, a team of skilled papermakers and the freedom to imagine and materialise their vision? As demonstrated over the years at STPI, this collaboration allows art to be created at every stage of the paper-making process and results in breakthrough innovations in art and papermaking.

Japanese artist Shinro Ohtake’s words (STPI Artist-in-Residency, 2015) sum up the possibilities of such collaboration. His large-scale fluorescent paper pulp paintings were a technical feat for both Ohtake and STPI. He said, “It was a brand-new challenge creating images using a ladle instead of a brush, but the expressive approaches derived from experimenting with a size I had never tried before (in papermaking) led to a big evolution for me. There was the possibility of realising new ideas.”



Shinro Ohtake’s paper pulp painting

Every year, four to six established artists from across the world are invited for a residency programme at STPI. These artists come with huge experience in their own preferred medium but may have no previous experience with print art or papermaking. They come with an open mind, a positive



STPI has Asia’s leading papermill for Western-style, handmade paper. This picture shows Do Ho Suh’s thread drawing on paper.

learning attitude and a fresh perspective to print and paper. An artist residency is stretched out in phases over one to two years; artists are invited to reside in quarters at STPI. Each phase lasts one to two weeks with the artist working closely with the workshop team to experiment and explore materials and techniques for the final artwork. When finished, this collaborative body of work is showcased in the STPI gallery for appreciation and sale.

Since its foundation in 2002, STPI has hosted over 100 artists, painters, sculptors, video artists and performance artists. A story circulating at STPI says that once artists discover the paper mill, it is hard to get them away from it.

Usually the STPI workshop is buzzing with activity and the team members are hard to get hold of, but because of the COVID-19 Circuit Breaker period, I had an opportunity to interview Gordon. He has been with STPI since its inception and received a Master’s in Arts (Sculpture) from LASALLE College of the Arts, then trained under master papermaker Richard Hungerford during his first eight years at STPI.

Gordon has collaborated with several artists over the years and helped create some stunning artworks at STPI. I asked him what his top three picks were, the ones he was most proud of. He believes that today’s innovations and breakthroughs in papermaking (at STPI) are the result of collaborating with various artists such as Zhan Wang, Do Ho Suh and Ronald Ventura. It was not only about creating a particular artwork with them but discovering new techniques while creating art. They were challenged to come up with innovative methods, to explore more deeply and create more complex techniques for the works they produce today.

“When working with Zhan Wang (Artist-in-Residency, 2010) I created a Galaxy series, stone paper. It was the first time I had put other elements into the paper-making process; this was stressful. I had to grind stone into a fine powder, then add it to the paper pulp. Such stone paper or paper stone is heavier than the stone itself because of the pulp’s added weight. The process itself was very challenging. While overcoming the challenges and successfully completing

the galaxy series, we discovered a technique that could be reapplied, and would later create spice paper/ vegetable paper for Haegue Yang (Artist-in-Residency, 2012) and cement paper for Sam Durant (Artist-in-Residency, 2015 and 2020)."

During Artist Do Ho Suh's Residency in 2013, the team came up with a technical innovation to create his thread drawing on paper, which uses an oversized sheet (8' x 5'). The largest paper STPI had made till then was 5.5' x 4'. Currently, STPI can accommodate oversized paper of practically any size.

"Creating 3D paper is a challenge as it defies the law of gravity," says Gordon. "So when we committed to a project to create 3D broccoli paper for Ronald Ventura, it was almost mission impossible. After several experiments, we successfully created hollow broccoli structures made solely from paper pulp. After this breakthrough, nothing seems impossible any longer."

When asked about collaborating with artists, Gordon said, "Collaboration is the norm. It takes both parties to make it work. Ideas, concepts and opinions from both sides are offered for discussion. To explore and achieve new trajectories, boundaries/ comfort zones are pushed and tested. Through it all, unique artworks are birthed. With STPI's strong support I can conduct deeper research and development with no restriction or limitation to making traditional paper."

When asked what his favourite artworks featuring paper were, he said; "I like Li Hongbo's method of using thousands of layers of brown paper – cut, folded and glued together so it looks like a three-dimensional sculpture. The stretching, accordion-like parts that he shapes into variable forms are brilliant."

Asked how techniques and paper art may evolve, Gordon said that technology had given papermaking an edge and that this will be a big part of the art of papermaking. Techniques will be more innovative, quality will improve. Finally, it is the artist who will direct how technology and traditional papermaking will come together.

About his workplace, Gordon says, "STPI's paper



*Hollow broccoli structures made solely from paper pulp*



*A hands-on workshop in progress*



*The team*

mill is not just for making paper; every sheet has meaning and life. There is the freedom and flexibility to experiment, to research and try out different methods. Collaborating with diverse artists allows us to redefine paper and make anything possible. Working in the STPI paper mill is akin to working in a kitchen. A chef is unable to run the kitchen by himself, so teamwork is essential. The STPI team consists of second-in-command Tai-tien (the Sous Chef), Awal and Edmund (Chefs de Partie) each of whom specialises in his area of work and Richard (Kitchen Porter), our all-round support."

The highlight of guided tours at STPI is a visit to the Creative Workshop, where the art is made and the paper mill is housed. Gordon recommends that visitors look at the beater room, the main 'cooking area', where all the secret recipes are created. STPI offers hands-on public workshops in papermaking, paper sculpting and a combination of paper and print. These programmes will continue once the current pandemic subsides.

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**Swapna Mirashi** is a docent at STPI Creative Workshop and Gallery and is also a writer.

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*Photos courtesy of STPI Creative Workshop and Gallery, Singapore*

# Rewiring During the Circuit Breaker

By Amanda Jaffe



In one sense, FOM has always operated on a very physical plane – training docents to guide in Singapore’s museums, presenting museum lectures on-site, helping members and the community explore Singapore and Asia as living museums. The restrictions of the Circuit Breaker thus posed a significant and unprecedented challenge. How could an organisation such as FOM, which depends so heavily on physical venues and gatherings, still deliver value?

It soon became apparent that while physical venues and gatherings played a central role in FOM activities, the intellectual pursuits at the heart of those activities did not depend on physical venues and gatherings for their continuity. If the FOM community could find new ways to communicate and exchange ideas amid the Circuit Breaker’s restrictions, FOM could continue to deliver value. To do that, FOM would need to find a way to rewire during the Circuit Breaker.

Technology became the glue that enabled the FOM community to flourish during the Circuit Breaker, with members helping leaders and each other adapt to new ways of doing things and conceive new opportunities. FOM’s docent activities, such as ongoing training, mentor tours, town hall events, curator walkthroughs and research for new galleries, all moved online. Members of the Asian Film Study Group gathered to chat online while watching a film in their

homes, discussing it later via Zoom. Study groups, the Textile Enthusiasts Group, and book groups met virtually, sharing ideas and staying engaged. Monday Morning Lectures became Monday Morning Lockdown Lectures.

New ways of doing things also led to new things to do. For the first time, FOM offerings have continued into the summer. New groups have formed as well. A Theatre Group began meeting to discuss the many online offerings that blossomed during the pandemic. The Textile Enthusiasts Group sponsored a Zoom-based Kantha embroidery workshop. FOM Study Groups also went online, with a summer group concurrently studying the topics of *Asian Politics and Art* and *Built Spaces: Architecture and Urban Planning in Asia*.

Armchair Travel Talks, another new summertime online offering, is scheduled to run from 6 July through 24 August. Speakers in the series will lead participants on virtual journeys to visit and experience the Buddhist pilgrimage sites of India; the dancing dervishes of Turkey; Israel and Jordan; Yogyakarta; and Northern China from Luoyang to Pingyao. While travel restrictions may hinder the ability of members to take these journeys in person for the time being, Armchair Travel Talks promise to bring these fascinating destinations into members’ homes.

Physical venues and face-to-face meetings will, eventually, return. Meanwhile, the Circuit Breaker has inspired FOM to rewire its thinking and its offerings to meet unprecedented challenges. The result has offered us all a renewed appreciation for the priceless intangible value FOM provides.

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**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.

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Screenshots of Zoom events courtesy of Gisella Harrold



# A Time for Self-Enrichment: Follow an Online Course

By Cécile Collineau

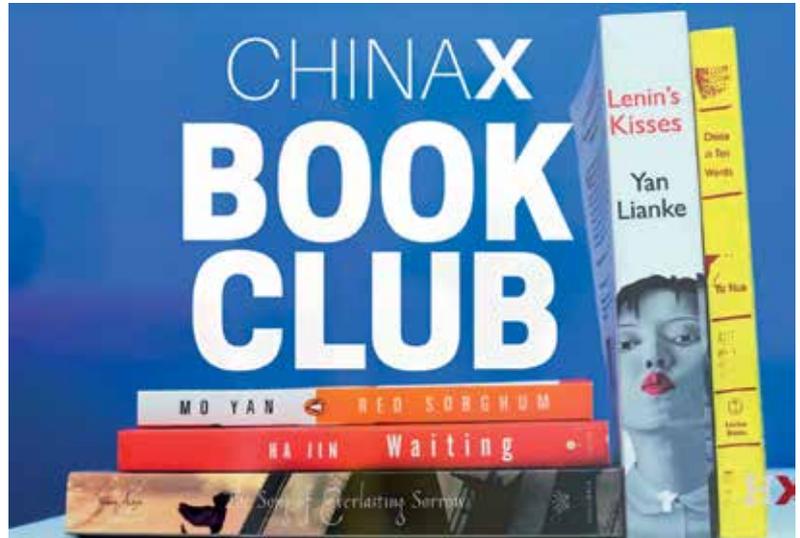
When the Singapore government announced the Circuit Breaker at the beginning of April this year, as a book-addict I prepared myself for lockdown-mode. I rushed to buy big fat novels at my local bookstore, double-checked that my National Library membership allowed me to borrow e-books and searched for short online courses on literature.

Harvard University's continuing education department offers a five-week free online course on modern and contemporary Chinese literature called *ChinaX Book Club: Five Authors, Five Books, Five Views of China*. It is presented by Harvard professor David Wang and covers five essays and novels. *China in 10 Words* by Yu Hua, *Red Sorghum: A Novel of China* by Mo Yan, *Lenin's Kisses* by Yan Lianke, *Waiting* by Ha Jin and *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* by Wang Anyi.

I like the structure of the course. Each week, Prof Wang introduces a new book. He discusses the context (for example: the Japanese occupation of China in *Red Sorghum*; human rights issues in *China in 10 Words*; economic inequalities in *Lenin's Kisses*; women's condition in *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*). There are interviews with the authors (I particularly enjoyed listening to Nobel literature laureate Mo Yan because he is usually not so loquacious) and lively conversations between Prof Wang and two PhD students who discuss the literary aspects of the work: the rise of native-soil literature, the importance of magic realism, the influence of Faulkner and Garcia Marquez, the growth of diaspora literature etc.

Each module offers interactive activities; one of them is a close reading of a passage of the book with questions asked by the teacher, with personal annotations that you add. Although I didn't join in, the learners are also able to interact on a forum to discuss specific

aspects. What I found more interesting are the 10 guiding questions to reflect more broadly on the book and the issues it raises. Actually, these could well be used to start book club



Screenshot from website

discussions. The glossaries for each module are useful; they either refer to the videos or the vocabulary used in the book. I found some of the explanations more targeted towards students who have limited knowledge of China (such as what is the People's Liberation Army or what is a filial son). Nevertheless, I learned a lot (about the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement, for example, or what the responsibilities of a District Party Committee Secretary are). Even better are the additional resources listed at the end of each chapter, suggestions of books by the same author, works by other writers, films and websites. For example, I watched or re-watched two films by Chinese director Zhang Yimou (I'm a big fan of his, and also actress Gong Li), *To Live*, based on the eponymous book by Yu Hua and *Red Sorghum*, adapted from Mo Yan's novel. While I enjoyed both the book and the film, I found them quite distinct, with a much grimmer and more pessimistic narrative in the book. Two documentaries by Carma Hinton also recommended in the course, left a deep impression on me – *Morning Sun*, which talks about the Cultural Revolution, and *The Gate of Heavenly Peace*, which describes the circumstances leading to the tragic events of 4 June 1989 in Tiananmen Square. Both are available on YouTube.

I definitely recommend this course. It is accessible for those who do not know much about China and also for people who already have extensive knowledge of the country. Studying a nation through the prism of literature always adds deeper insights and nuances to what we know.

**My tips:** Anyone can register for this MOOC (massive open online course) on the EdX platform. The five-week course runs until December 2020. While it is not necessary to read the five books before starting the course, they provide an even greater appreciation. It is not very time-consuming if you just watch the videos (less than two hours each week) but it is possible to spend endless hours if the learner wants to be more deeply involved. While the course is free of charge, you can receive an official Harvard certificate for a fee.

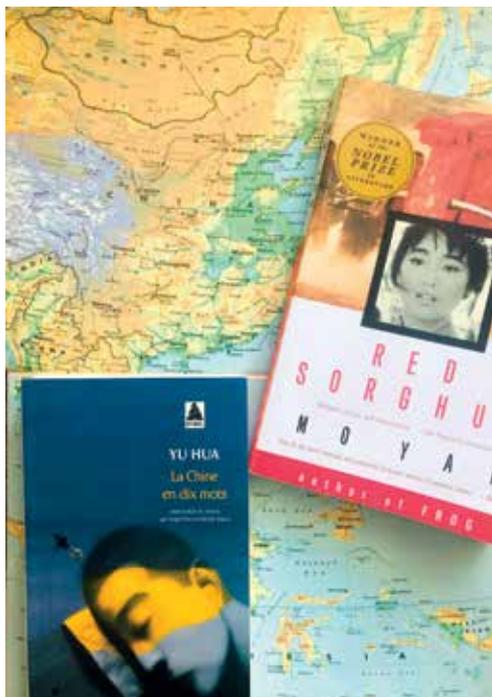


Photo by the author

# A Festival for Bookworms

By Cécile Collineau

At the end of January every year, a literary miracle takes place in Rajasthan, the Jaipur Literature Festival. Self-proclaimed as “The Greatest Literary Show on Earth”, this event gathers authors and readers from all over the world for an over-the-top celebration of words and ideas. Spread over six halls and tents and over a period of five days, attendees have an opportunity to listen to more than 200 talks by novelists, journalists, essayists, politicians, activists, poets, chefs, actors and historians, at the historical Diggi Palace (built in 1860), in the centre of Jaipur.

This festival was founded in 2006 by William Dalrymple, an author familiar to many FOM members. With the immense crowds visiting today (more than 400,000 visitors in 2020), it is hard to believe the first session was attended by fewer than 100 people, some of whom “appeared to be tourists who had simply got lost”, according to Dalrymple (still a co-director of the festival). But over the years, crowd-attracting authors and speakers kept coming and visitor numbers increased. Past speakers have ranged from Nobel Laureates J M Coetzee and Orhan Pamuk to Muhammad Yunus. An annual event that goes beyond literature, the festival has also hosted Amartya Sen, Amitabh Bachchan, His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Oprah Winfrey, Stephen Fry, Thomas Piketty and the former president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai.

I’ve had the opportunity to attend the event twice, in 2017 and 2020, and can run out of superlatives when describing this festival’s atmosphere. First, the setting. I start the visit by drinking a piping hot masala tea served in an earthenware disposable cup from the *chai-wallah*, just before the entrance gate. At the beginning of each day, a classical Indian musician or singer performs on the main stage, followed by a meditation session. At midday, the buffet for the delegates is a smorgasbord of Rajasthani delicacies: my favourites are the *chaat* salad and the home-made *rotis*. The Mughal-style architecture of the halls and colourful printed tents definitely add to the local flavour. There is also a bazaar on site. It is



difficult to resist buying the softest, lightest and warmest Kashmir shawls I have ever touched.

The pop-up bookstore is a goldmine, stocked by two of Delhi’s bookshops at less than half the price of what you would pay in Singapore. Every evening, cultural performances are organised in historical venues in or around Jaipur – an evening dance performance at the Amber Palace is one. But what really seals it for me is the intellectual stimulation I experience for five days. Among my favourite lectures this year were: *Where Does Fiction Come From* with Howard Jacobson, Leila Slimani, Elizabeth Gilbert and Avni Doshi holding the wittiest, most fascinating talk on the process of creating a novel, and William Dalrymple presenting his new book *The Anarchy*, on the history of the British East India Company. What a showman! He was on his home turf and the crowd was indulgent. We could all have listened to him for hours.

What makes this festival unique? It’s a combination of factors: the quality and diversity of the speakers; the international feel with an Indian touch; the ubiquitous culture of Rajasthan; and the location inside a historical setting in the heart of the city. It’s not all perfect: the crowds are overwhelming; with many idle bystanders; the traffic jam on the main



## Island Notes

# Neighbourhood Pride

By Darly Furlong



road is chaotic; some books introduced by the authors are not recent. You also sense a bit of insecurity. When I was there, the political situation in India was heated and this was palpable. Even before COVID-19 came to dominate the world stage, there were uncertainties about the future of the festival – the difficulty of ensuring safety for the very large crowds in this iconic venue seems to be one of the main reasons why the Diggi Palace may stop hosting the event, although this is still under discussion. Many fear the festival would lose some of its soul if it had to move out.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Jaipur Literature Festival acted quickly in April 2020 and organised online conversations, all uploaded on YouTube (search for JLF Brave New World). The list of speakers in the lecture series is impressive: Margaret Atwood, Alain de Botton, Elizabeth Gilbert, Elif Shafak, Gloria Steinem, Rupi Kaur, Yotam Ottolenghi and Orhan Pamuk...and many more. You can also watch the sessions on Facebook (JLF); Each one lasts about 45 minutes. A new one is posted online every Wednesday and Saturday, but they can be streamed any time after this. At the moment, the next Jaipur Literature Festival is scheduled for 28 January to 1 February 2021, but who knows what the state of our world will be six months from now.

### Tips:

- Although entrance to the festival is free, do buy a delegate ticket. It will give you priority entrance to some talks, the evening concerts and access to the delegates' lounge any time of the day to eat delicious food, escape the crowds and mingle with the writers.
- If you cannot stay five days, schedule your trip to attend the weekday sessions: weekends and public holiday crowds do spoil the fun.

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**Cécile Collineau** is the FOM book groups coordinator. She suffers from *tsundoku* (buying more books than she can read).

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Photos by the author



In the last few months of restricted movement, my family and I took the opportunity to explore our neighbourhood and learn its rich history. Opera Estate was largely coconut and nutmeg plantations in the 1800s. Then Abraham Frankel, a Jewish entrepreneur from Lithuania, bought the land around Siglap in 1912 and developed Opera Estate (the streets are named after European and Malay operas). Frankel was a miner earning a pittance in Borneo. He moved to Singapore for its Jewish diaspora and the calming British political presence. His family's fledgling bakery and furniture businesses thrived in Singapore, where he amassed a fortune.

Interestingly, the Frankels showed Albert Einstein around their estate in Siglap when he came on a stopover from Tokyo in 1922. So what is your neighbourhood's history?



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**Darly Furlong** is a passionate volunteer of museum-based learning for children and leads other causes in Singapore that facilitate social justice.

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# Explore Singapore!

## From Observer to Contributor

By Kathy Seck

I arrived in Singapore in 2015 and was introduced to FOM through a friend. After the MMLs, we usually wandered among the display tables and the Explore Singapore! offerings always looked interesting, so I signed up and quickly discovered the tours' distinctiveness. They are unique, not for tourists or newbies, but for those who

already have some knowledge of Singapore. I have visited an old dragon kiln where traditions are maintained, toured a family soy sauce factory, learned about aspects of historical



Singapore along the riverside, seen Little India, Kampong Gelam and Balestier Road and explored many other places. Over time I got to know the regulars and committee members and found myself looking forward to my Thursday outings.

After a particularly interesting tour of the Jewellery Institute in 2019, Chey Cheng approached and asked if I would consider joining the committee. It was easy to say yes.

I have gained so much from these tours and they have made my stay here much richer. I knew it was time to give back. But oh my, I had no idea what goes into arranging these tours. It is a well-oiled machine, but there is a lot of research and effort involved and I am only too glad to contribute some computer skills.

So for anyone who is really interested in the beautiful Red Dot we call home, have a look at the tours – there is something for everyone. I hope to meet many of you in the second half of the year, when we hope to resume our tours.



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**Kathy Seck** is Canadian, originally from Toronto, and enjoys learning about Singapore and the region.

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## Newbie in the Explore Singapore! (ES!) Committee

By Elsa Gianni

I felt so honoured, and at the same time shy, because being a committee member of Explore Singapore! means becoming part of an existing and very successful organisation. Could I live up to that? What could I possibly add?

When my family and I arrived here in 2017, I had never been to this part of Asia and needed to understand the country we were settling into. Fortunately, I learned about FOM, signed up and joined an Explore Singapore! tour to Bukit Brown Cemetery. My senses and curiosity were stimulated. From then on, I was exploring Singapore almost every Thursday – heritage buildings such as the house of Tan Yeok Nee, Fullerton Hotel and Clifford Pier; religious sites including the Sri Sengapa Vinayagar Temple and Shuang Lin Monastery and introductions to Singapore's diverse cultures, Chinese Opera and the tea ceremony, Malay food in Geylang Serai, Deepavali in Little India. ES! tours also took



me to contemporary places, which helped me understand what makes Singapore a first world nation – the Newater plant, Marina Barrage and the Heritage Conservation Centre showcase advanced technology and science.

In none of the seven countries we have lived in did I ever find an organisation as rich and giving (sharing) as FOM. I believe that what Explore Singapore! does mirrors every aspect of the diversity and harmony for which Singapore is appreciated, demonstrating respect for its history and future. There is so much to learn and I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute in the committee.



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**Elsa Gianni**, from the Netherlands, is married to an Italian and joined the ES! committee in 2019.

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# Explore Singapore!



## Exploring Balestier Road – A Heritage Trail off the Beaten Track

Date: To be announced  
10:00 am – 12:00 noon  
Fee: \$25

Few people have heard of Balestier Road or know that it is part of a heritage trail. Singaporeans shop here for lighting, bathroom equipment, as well as good food. 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. Join us on this heritage walk and discover another facet of Singapore and its history.



## An Introduction to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

Date: To be announced  
11:00 am – 1:00 pm  
Fee: \$25

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. TCM often includes nutritional therapies, treatments such as acupuncture, cupping, massage or *tuina*, and exercises such as *taiqi*. Join us and learn about TCM's basic principles and practices, followed by a visit to a traditional Chinese medical shop.



## Kampongs in the Sky

Date: To be announced  
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 know very little about them. How did the population of Singapore go from living in rural villages (*kampongs*) to high-rise apartments while still keeping the community spirit intact? 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

Date: To be announced  
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 its rich history. We will walk its vibrant streets, stopping at points of interest, including commercial establishments, places of worship and the Indian Heritage Centre. This will give you fascinating glimpses into early and contemporary Singapore and help you gain new insights into our island state's diverse Indian communities



## The Joy and Fun of Gamelan – a Workshop

Date: To be announced  
10:00 am – 12:30 pm  
Fee: \$30

Those 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 the differences between Javanese and Balinese gamelan orchestras, about the instruments and also how to play them. You will learn about its history, traditions and related cultural activities such as *wayang kulit* (Indonesian shadow puppetry) and Javanese dance.



## Ethnobotany Garden Tour

Date: To be announced  
Time: 10 am – 12 pm  
Fee: \$30

Tucked away into a corner of the Botanic Gardens is a special Ethnobotany Garden, featuring a large variety of ordinary, as well as unusual plants, most of which are native to Southeast Asia and have been used for centuries in this part of the world, and other regions, for food, medicine, cultural practices and material crafts. Within the garden is the Centre for Ethnobotany, which highlights the role plants have played in shaping the world we know today and aims to preserve indigenous knowledge. Join us on this specially organised tour and gain an understanding of another aspect of the history of this region – its plants – their historical, economic and anthropological roles.

# Japanese Docents

Have you ever seen Robert Zao's saga tree at the National Museum of Singapore (NMS)? The artwork was created to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Singapore and shows the father and daughter collecting saga seeds in the Botanic Gardens. I learned a lot about these seeds from this artwork. It is a hard, shiny red seed, also called the "love seed" or "lucky seed". It is said that collecting 100 pieces will make you happy. Some have a heart shape. If you find a heart-shaped seed, you can feel happy just with that. Also, in the old days, four pieces weighed exactly one gram, so the seed was used instead of a weight.

When I saw this work for the first time, the Japanese docent (JD) who guided me was wearing a beautiful saga seed necklace. I started to make accessories using the seeds. To make such an accessory, you need to collect the seeds first. I started walking around St Andrew's Cathedral and Fort Canning Park looking for them and was very happy when I saw a lot had fallen onto the ground in Saint Andrew's Cathedral grounds. I was able to collect about 200 each time. As I walked in search of the saga seeds, I noticed that there were saga trees everywhere in Singapore, and a lot of beautiful red seeds on the roadside that I had never noticed before.

My hobby is handicrafts such as knitting, beading, etc... and I am organising the JD's handicrafts activity club,



*Shugeibu*, which means handicrafts activity club in Japanese. We get together on an irregular basis mainly at my house, but sometimes we meet at the NMS café and other places. Making accessories using saga seeds has become a very popular activity for the JDs. For us, they mean a lot because we believe the saga seed is a symbol of Singapore.

The process begins with drilling a hole in the seed. The popular accessories among us are earrings and necklaces. You can see our artworks in the photo. During January and February, we made rabbit dolls using batik and kimono fabrics for the *Hinamatsuri*, which is a girl's festival in Japan held on 3 March. *Shugeibu* is not only a handicrafts activity, it is also an opportunity to socialise as well as a time to relax. It is always fun to chat with other JDs.

Unfortunately, *Shugeibu* has not been active owing to the COVID-19 crisis. During the Circuit Breaker period, I have had a lot of time to finish my handicrafts pieces by myself. But I really miss the time I spent with *Shugeibu*. I hope this situation will be over soon and we can get back to normal life as soon as possible. I also want *Shugeibu* and the guiding to resume.

**Tatsue Kamo & Junko Sato, Japanese Docents**

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# Shang Antique

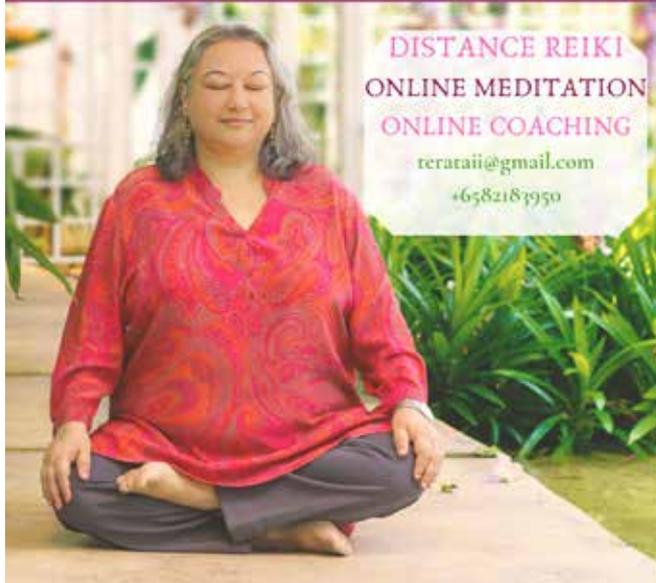
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# Museum Information and Exhibitions

*All museums are closed and all guided tours by FOM docents are suspended till further notice.*

## Asian Civilisations Museum

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

### Opening hours:

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

### FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am, 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.

### New Gallery: Material and Design

Visit the museum's newest galleries which mark the completion of the museum's multi-year refresh as Singapore's museum of Asian antiquities and decorative art. The third-floor galleries are focused on decorative art, and are collectively themed Materials and Design. The two new galleries, Fashion and Textiles, and Jewellery, together with the refreshed Ceramics gallery, comprise a display of over 300 precious and finely crafted masterpieces, telling stories of Asian identities, histories and cultures.

## Gillman Barracks

9 Lock Road, Singapore 108937  
[www.gillmanbarracks.com](http://www.gillmanbarracks.com)

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

Opening hours: Tues to Sun – Refer to individual gallery pages online for opening hours

Closed Mondays & Public Holidays

### FOM guided tours:

Sat 4:00 pm: Art & History Tour

Sat. 5:00 pm: History and Heritage Tour

To register please visit [www.fom-gillman-barracks.eventbrite.com](http://www.fom-gillman-barracks.eventbrite.com)

## NTU CCA

Non-Aligned  
(through 27 Sept)

The various colonial territories of the British Empire gained their sovereignty and independence at different times, in processes of decolonisation that played out in the histories of nations, but also determined the lives of individuals. *Non-Aligned* brings together three moving-image works by artists, filmmakers, and writers who look into the challenging transition periods from colonial rule to the independence of nations.

## Indian Heritage Centre

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

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

Tues to Thurs 10:00 am to 7:00 pm, Fri & Sat 10:00 am to 8:00 pm

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

### FOM guided tours: Tues-Fri

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.

## Malay Heritage Centre

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

### Opening hours:

Tues to Sun 10:00 am – 6:00 pm (last admission 5:30 pm), closed on Mondays

FOM guided tours: Tues to Fri 11:00 am;

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

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

## National Museum of Singapore

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

### Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am – 7:00 pm

### FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm (English)

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

### The Singapore History Gallery

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

## NUS Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts

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

Free admission

### Opening hours:

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

Monday: Visits by appointment for schools/faculties only.

NUS Baba House

157 Neil Road, Singapore 088883

Tel: 6227 5731

[www.babahouse.nus.edu.sg](http://www.babahouse.nus.edu.sg)



# Museum Information and Exhibitions

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

Now conceived as a heritage house facilitating research, as well as the appreciation 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](http://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](http://www.singaporeartmuseum.sg)

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



## STPI Creative Workshop and Gallery

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

## Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall

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

### Opening hours:

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

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

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

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



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

## ACM Design Award

# Singapore's Asian Civilisations Museum Wins Best Design Exhibition at the 2019 Global Fine Art Awards

The Asian Civilisations Museum was awarded the Global Fine Art Awards' (GFAA) Best Design Exhibition, for its first fashion-focused exhibition, *Guo Pei: Chinese Art and Couture*. The exquisite showcase, which spotlighted art through couture in a juxtaposition of masterpieces created centuries apart, emerged on top against internationally renowned institutions, with Denver Art Museum and the Dallas Museum of Art's *Dior: From Paris to the World* (USA) attaining an Honourable Mention in the same category. Other notable institutions in the running included the Victoria and Albert Museum (UK), and Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum (Spain).

Held in New York, the GFAA is the first annual award to recognise the world's best curated art and design exhibitions and installations, and honours innovation and excellence in exhibition design, historical context, educational value and public appeal. This sixth edition saw exhibitions nominated across six continents, 27 countries and 74 cities. The Asian Civilisations Museum was the only Southeast Asian institution to receive an award this year.





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Seats subject to venue restrictions and availability on a first come, first served basis