

PASSAGE

Friends of the Museums Singapore

January / February 2021



art
history
culture
people

President's Letter

Dear Friends,

A very Happy New Year to you! As we step into 2021, I am filled with hope and optimism for the year ahead. Soon we'll all be vaccinated and able to see our loved ones and each other, freely and safely. Meanwhile, FOM's docent-led museum tours have resumed. Visit the Asian Civilisations Museum, Gillman Barracks, Indian Heritage Centre, Malay Heritage Centre, National Museum of Singapore, STPI and Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall for a guided tour to get the most out of your experience.

Our Singapore Art Museum (SAM) docents have researched, scripted and audio-recorded the scripts for the *Time Passes* exhibition at SAM. Be sure to catch this interesting exhibition containing works by 10 Singapore-based artists, either online or in person at the National Gallery of Singapore until 21 Feb 2021.

STPI docents have been busy guiding the *Strange Forms of Life* exhibition, which runs until 31 Jan 2021. Both *Time Passes* and *Strange Forms of Life* are part of the wider *Proposals for Novel Ways of Being* initiative that comprises a series of exhibitions and programmes featuring artists' responses to the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you like being outdoors, you will enjoy the docent-led tours at Gillman Barracks (GB). Built for the British army in 1936, today the conserved barracks, set amid lush greenery, house art galleries, the NTU Centre of Contemporary Art (CCA) and several restaurants. Join the GB *History & Heritage* tour to learn more about GB and its place in Singapore's history. Alternatively, you may want to join the GB *Art & History* tour with its focus on contemporary art exhibitions by local and international artists. GB is one of the venues for Singapore Art week, which runs from 22 to 31 January.

Monday Morning Lectures, Fridays with Friends and Explore Singapore! (ES!) return this month along with many other member activities. Now is the perfect time to join one of our ES! Tours, organised by Lim Chey Cheng and her team, to visit some lesser-known spaces in Singapore.

The Asian Art and History for Museum Enthusiasts' (AAHME) programme ended on 11 December 2020. Thanks to the teamwork and effort put in by docents from all the institutions where we guide, participation remained high throughout the course. Our programme leaders, facilitators, speakers and virtual tour guides made this an unforgettable experience. Congratulations to the AAHME certificate recipients on successfully completing the intense 10-week course.

In December, you elected the FOM Council for 2020/21. I thank you for your trust in me and the other council members. I am delighted to have Susan Fong, Yasmin Javeri Krishan, Kwan Min Yee, Laura Soche, Gisella Harrold, Christine Zeng and Michelle Foo remain on the council to serve for another year. This year Kim Arnold will be joining us as the elected Council Representative for Activities while Charlotte Dawson and Irina Grishaeva have been co-opted to the council for Docent Training and Volunteer Data Management, respectively. I and my team look forward to serving you for another year. I would like to express my gratitude to outgoing council member Diana Loo for her contribution to last year's council.

FOM was awarded the Patron of Heritage Award (POHA) again this year by the National Heritage Board to acknowledge FOM's contribution to heritage causes (see page24). Congratulations to all FOM volunteers and members for this award.

According to the Chinese calendar, on 12 February we will welcome the Year of the Ox, which is associated with honesty and hard work. Based on these characteristics, one could be forgiven for thinking that all of our volunteers were born in the Year of the Ox. Best wishes to our members who celebrate Chinese New Year.

I wish you the best of health and happiness in 2021!



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

Garima G Lalwani
FOM President 2021



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Welcome PASSAGE

President's Letter

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On the Cover: Photos of children playing the recorder for the exhibition *Music for Everyone: Variations on a Theme*. The highlight of the exhibition was a three-channel video starring these children and called *Recorder Rewrite* by Ang Song-Ming. Photo by Yvonne Sim.

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

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

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

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

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Notable Singaporeans

By Yusoff Abdul Latiff



The plant lovers among us may know about the amazing achievements of Dr Tan Wee Kiat, retired CEO of NParks and Gardens by the Bay. He spearheaded the transformation of Singapore's most popular tourist attraction, the Botanic Gardens, into a UNESCO World Heritage Site. He was also responsible for conceptualising and developing Gardens by the Bay, especially the award-winning Flower Dome and Cloud Forest. These are iconic attractions and have seen 40 million visitors since their opening in 2012. Dr Tan was responsible for choosing 1.2 million of the total 1.5 million plant exhibits.

Gardens by the Bay constantly attracts visitors with thematic displays such as *Tulipmania* and *Cherry Blossoms*, as well as local, festival-based shows. As you enter the Flower Dome you get an exhilarating feeling of being suddenly transported into a temperate wonderland, a paradise of plants precision-nurtured by the rich, nutrient-filled soil and cool, humidity-controlled atmosphere. The permanent exhibits, such the 1,000-year-old olive trees that recently bore fruit, the gigantic baobabs, the multitude of cacti and majestic palms, will never fail to attract you at every visit. When a new theme is created, the atrium and intervening spaces are packed with the riotous splendour of blooms associated with Hari Raya, the Mid-Autumn Festival, Deepavali, Christmas and Lunar New Year displays, complete with topiaries, props and arrangements amidst the manicured floral scape.

The recent Mid-Autumn Festival was celebrated not only in the Flower Dome but also outside, in the Supertree Grove. There were giant lanterns and a floral tribute to healthcare workers. With the forthcoming Year of the Ox, I am sure visitors can look forward to an abundance of displays of chrysanthemums, marigolds, cilosias, 'lucky' bamboos, kalanchoes, orchids, peach blossoms, pussy willows, azaleas, peonies, adeniums, kumquats, pomelos, kalamansi limes, mandarin oranges and other auspicious items.



This was the stately mansion at 5 Temenggong Road, built and owned by Wong Ah Fook, the rag-to-riches Chinese migrant who arrived in Singapore in 1854 to work as a carpenter. With his enterprising spirit he delved into construction, agriculture, banking and land development. As a successful businessman he developed close links with the Johor sultanate and was responsible for constructing many major buildings in Johor Baru as well as Singapore. He built palaces for the sultan in Telok Blangah (next to this mansion), the now-dilapidated Istana Tyersall and others elsewhere.

Lam Song Kee, whose brother Lam Ji Chiew, founded Kwong Lee Bank in Kuching in 1905, bought the mansion from the family after Wong Ah Fook's death. The bank established branches in Singapore and Malaya and after a long series of developments, was acquired and absorbed into MUI, then OCBC and later Hong Leong Bank.

Amy Lam, Lam Song Kee's daughter, told me that the mansion was acquired by the government in the early 1970s, for the construction of the cable car station. Today, after 40 years, the land is unkempt and still undeveloped, probably because the government planners of that time changed their minds and chose the Harbourfront site for the station since it is more aligned with Sentosa and Mount Faber. It is deeply regrettable that such a magnificent historical building was demolished and nothing was done to the land.



These three-storey Peranakan townhouses at Emerald Hill, numbers 39, 41 and 43, have differently designed roofed entrance gates. While No 41 has none, Nos 39 and 43 have similar designs, while no 45 has a grander one, a swift-tail ridged roof entrance. According to Julian Davison in his book *Singapore Shophouse*, these houses were designed in 1905 by architect Wan Mohd Kassim for Baba Goh Kee Hoon. House no 45, however, was designed by architect Wee Teck Moh for the Seah family. The houses are so humongous that only specially designed Peranakan furniture could grace their interiors. The name *Emerald Hill* has become well-known because of Stella Kon's one-woman psycho-drama, *Emily of Emerald Hill*, performed in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Melbourne, Edinburgh and Hongkong, with notable thespians such as Margaret Chan and Ivan Heng playing the role of the matriarch. Today Emerald Hill is still an enclave of affluent Peranakans. I once queued at a telco in Orchard Road and the young lady ahead of me was Emily Tan whose address was Emerald Hill. She must have been nostalgically named after the family's famous matriarch.

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.

Don't You Know Who I Am?

The Power of a Portrait in Qing China

By Lia Santis De Emes

The gentleman in the portrait seems to be staring straight at the artist. He is portrayed in a realistic three-dimensional style of light and dark shadows (*chiaroscuro*) associated with a western style of painting that was winning plaudits in China in the 19th century. I feel that there is a certain smugness in the gentleman's pose and the hint of a smile. He has plenty to smile about since he is possibly a wealthy Hong merchant in Canton attempting to pull rank in the late years of the Qing dynasty. The painting is a 19th century oil-on-canvas attributed to the artist Lam Qua, who studied under George Chinnery, one of the first English painters to open a studio and tutor Chinese artists. Lam Qua excelled under his tutelage and his repertoire included western-style paintings of harbours, foreigners

and merchants. He is also known for a series of paintings he made of patients at Canton Hospital. His studio was located among the Hong factories and he was among the first Chinese artists to be exhibited in the West.

Let's zoom into the picture. The Hong merchant is portrayed wearing official robes complete with rank badge, hat with a finial and a gorgeous court necklace. During the Qing dynasty, strict dress codes were prescribed. These helped the wearer 'signal' his occupation and rank. In this case, the wearer intended to be portrayed as a first rank officer, evidenced by his sombre Manchu-style robes, the red-crowned crane badge woven onto the front and back of his robe (which denoted the rank of civil official) and the red finial on the hat.

The portrait denotes a transition in the social class system established by the Qing dynasty. Scholar classes and civil official classes were being joined by the emerging merchant class, not based on scholarly merit but on business acumen. They had the network and the money; now they wanted to acquire the reputation and recognition. Ranks started being sold in the late Qing (1843) in the manner of today's Gucci and Chanel handbags, to signal social standing. In this case,



Chinese merchant dressed in official robes, attributed to the painter Lam Qua (1802–circa 1860), Canton (modern-day Guangzhou), China, 19th century. Accession No. 2016-00464. Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum

the artist mistakenly gave the red-crowned crane depicted in the badge a red wattle, spoiling the effect and leaving the wearer with a hybrid bird, which might have been the new symbol of the emergent merchant class. The court necklace finished off the attire by signalling that our merchant intended to be seen as a court official since only they (and their wives!) were allowed such a piece of jewellery.

There is a gorgeous example of such a necklace right next to the painting in the Asian Civilisations Museum's (ACM) Scholar's Studio. The long colourful necklace is also known as a mandarin necklace or *chau zho*. It consists of 108 amber beads divided into batches of 27 and separated by a larger stone made of jade. Three short strings with coral stones are balanced

by a long string, which holds another jade stone, worn at the back. The mandarin necklace was introduced by the Manchus and is based on a Buddhist rosary sent to the Manchu emperor by Tibet's Dalai Lama. Its 108 beads symbolize the 108 earthly worries. The batches of 27 stones are considered an auspicious number –three multiplied by nine. The combination of precious stones used for the necklace was regulated and codified in a Qing court decree for ceremonial paraphernalia. The emperor and his consort would wear cultivated pearls grown specially for their use, the upper ranks could use semi-precious stones such as jade and amber, while the lower ranks had coloured Peking glass. Personally, I would be happy with any of the stipulated options.

Come and discover this hidden gem during your next visit to the ACM.

Lia Santis De Emes is an ACM docent with an interest in power, politics and economics. This makes her a nuisance to her friends and family.

Navigating the Compass Dish

By Jen Quinn Choo

A close inspection of one of several Zhangzhou export wares in the Asian Civilisations Museum's Trade Gallery, reveals a vibrant scene with bold turquoise and black illustrations portraying elements of maritime trade and the familiar icons of a ship, fish and mountains. In addition to these common motifs, we also find a medley of unique symbols that have been hidden in plain sight, most notably the central dial with a faint spray of iron-red inscriptions as well as an arrangement of cosmological constellations. Ordinary as this dish may seem, its composition of uncommon images reveals much more than meets the eye.

The first motif is a fish, which traditionally has represented harmony and prosperity, adorning surfaces of Chinese porcelain since the Tang dynasty. The characteristics of the fish depicted on this Zhangzhou dish, however, offer a different interpretation. The towering appearance of the monstrous sea creature's mouth behind the ship of dizzy mariners may allude to mariners' fears of giant ship-swallowing fish. Alternatively, it could also represent the notorious mythical creature known as a *makara*,¹ a mythical marine animal associated with the form of a crocodile, notorious for devouring defenceless seafarers.

The second noticeable characteristic is that the triple-masted ship is unlike common junks of the time, sporting a tapered bow and stern as well as an extension of sailormanned oars. A similar model at the Hong Kong Maritime Museum suggests that this ship is similar to that of a *Shāchuán* (沙船), which translates to 'sand boat'. The name informs us that the ship was used for coastal voyages, perhaps along the Southeast Asian peninsula or to nearby island nations, namely Japan or the Philippines. Another familiar icon is the three-peaked mountain, which alludes to the heroic legend of the Eight Immortals, depicting a paradise that offers a refuge of harmony, safety and abundance.

In the centre of the dish is a dial with inscribed characters illegible to the modern-day Chinese reader, yet they seem unmistakably familiar to what is known as 'Lesser Seal Script', an archaic style used by officials in the Chinese government. Upon closer inspection, the characters 天下 (tiān xià yī), or 'all under heaven', reveal the aphorism of ultimate control or China's fundamental belief in its authority over land, sea and sky.²

Surrounding this centre dial is a ring of faint characters. Drawing a reference to the ancient Chinese technology of the *luó pán* (罗盘), or the magnetic compass created over 2,000 years ago, each character corresponds to one of the mansions of Chinese astronomy. Before the invention of the modern-day compass, such dishes were used as portable functioning navigation devices, activated by filling the dish with water



Dish with compass and ships. Zhangzhou, Fujian province China. Late 17th century. Diameter: 33.5 x 7.8cm, porcelain, overglaze iron-red, turquoise blue and black enamel. Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore. #2011-00159.

and placing a needle made of the magnetic lodestone on the surface. It would be drawn toward the earth's north-south polar axis.

This aptly ties in with the feature of the constellations. Dating as far back as 5000 BCE, to the antecedents of the Chinese, traces of cosmography have been found on artefacts such as Neolithic pottery, often depicted as "lozenges containing concentric squares, crosses or diamonds."³ The four specific constellations depicted by connected dots represent four of the lunar lodges or mansions, which reaffirms its use as an early compass dish.

Navigating the scenes of this seafaring dish unveils a composition of instrumental and functional icons embedded within what at first glance appeared as a very ordinary dish. If only we could uncover more of its mystery, where it was going and who its users were.

Jen Quinn Choo is an avid art worm currently pursuing her Master's in Museum Studies and Curatorial Practices.

¹ Darian, Steven. "The Other Face of the Makara." *Artibus Asiae* 38, no. 1 (1976): 29-36.

² Zhao, Tingyang. 2006. "Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept 'All-under-Heaven' (天下 Tian-Xia)." *Social Identities* 12 (1): 29-41. doi:10.1080/13504630600555559.

³ Sullivan, Michael, *The Arts of China*, 6th ed., University of California Press, 1961, p. 17.

The Ox in Chinese History and Art

By Patricia Bjaaland Welch

Oxen as Sacrificial Animals

During the Shang Dynasty (16th C – circa 1050 BCE), “performing rituals and making sacrifices were of enormous importance ... with the most common offerings wine and food, followed by domestic animals, such as oxen, pigs, sheep and dogs.”¹ As would be expected, larger animals (such as oxen) were valued more highly than smaller animals, and were even divided into white (*bai* 白) and non-white or multi-coloured (*wu* 勿)². “In the real world, oxen of pure white colour are extremely rare. But the divination is quite specific: white oxen should be offered, to be used, to be burned, in sacrifice to some of the most important ancestors in the Shang genealogy.”³

Furthermore, once slaughtered, cooked and its bones picked clean, their scapulae were used for further divinations.

From this, we can see that the colour of specified ritual animals must have had a meaningful code, but the most important take-away is the undisputed high value of oxen. The sacrifice of an ox or water buffalo⁴ was a substantial sacrifice. A traditional admonition went “Do not kill draught oxen or throw away written paper”.

The Ox as an Agricultural Symbol

It was during the later Zhou Dynasty (ca. 1050-221 BCE) that Lao Tzu, the father of Daoism, shared his belief in the transient nature of the universe (“Reversal is the movement of the Dao”) and is said to have turned his back on society, departing on the back of a water buffalo, one of the ultimate symbols of the rural and hence ‘simpler’ life. (Fig 1) From



Fig 1. Laozi departing from China on the back of an ox, Longshan Temple, Taipei, Taiwan

then on, the water buffalo or ox has served as a symbol of all those who would follow Lao Tzu’s lead and turn their backs on the world – whether in the 10th century BCE or the 21st century CE. For example, scholars have identified a large number of paintings throughout Chinese history that have depicted oxen as “an ideal of retirement from officialdom ... [stemming] from the stresses of political and bureaucratic life ... making the rural life seem more attractive in retrospect.”⁵ Nor was this imagery confined to literati paintings.

When we look at the traditional Chinese zodiac, we see that seven of the 12 animals represent what would have been China’s traditional barnyard or domesticated animals:



Fig 2. The star-crossed lovers as portrayed on a rafter of the Longshan Temple in Taipei, Taiwan

the ox, horse, goat, pig, rooster, dog and rabbit. The remaining four are wild (the tiger, rat, snake and monkey), while the last is mythological (the dragon). Amongst the farmyard animals, the ox was the heavy lifter. “It was the strength and virility of the ox” that caused it to become one of China’s most powerful fertility symbols.⁶ It became the symbol of agriculture and the dawn of each annual agricultural season. For this reason, it was the detail in the picture of an ox on the cover of each new year’s almanac from the Han dynasty on, that informed even illiterate farmers about what to expect in the coming year.

Its role as an agricultural symbol made the ox the companion of the ‘Oxherd Boy’ in his association with the ‘Weaving Girl’. The folk tale of the star-crossed romance of these two figures who irritated the gods by their forbidden relationship (he was mortal, she celestial) is the symbolic depiction of China’s two main rural occupations: agriculture and sericulture/weaving. (Fig 2)

Oxen as Crushers of Stones and Bearers of Burdens

Nor were oxen used only for farm work, they did the heavy lifting everywhere. Several examples illustrate their usefulness throughout Chinese history. They were essential workers helping China win the prize of being the world leader in ceramics. Clay is heavy and it was China’s oxen that not only helped cart heavy loads of it from its sources to the kiln centres where it was processed and refined (usually by crushing it underfoot or tied to pulverisers) but also helped lug the finished wares to the transport centres. (Fig 3)



Fig 3. Watercolour and ink on paper painting of oxen treading clay, Guangzhou 1770–1790, courtesy V&A Museum, London

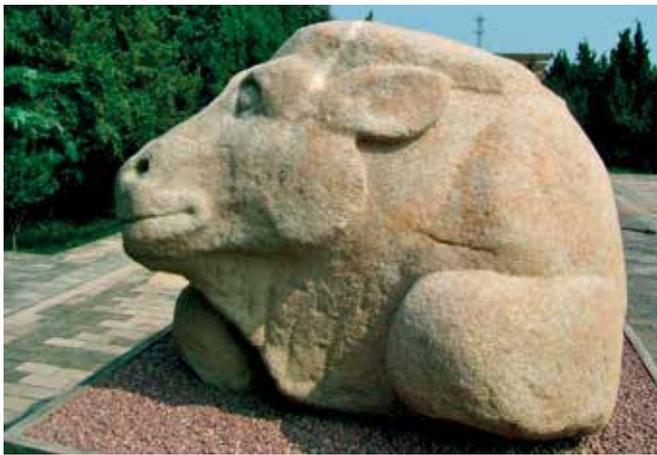


Fig 4. Sculpture of an ox, one of the earliest stone sculptures in China, from the tomb of General Huo Qubing, Han Dynasty, circa 141-57 CE, visited by several FOM study tour groups. Photo courtesy of Kim Arnold



Fig 5. A scene of Taming the Ox from the 7-12C Dazhu Rock Carvings, a World Heritage Site, 165 km west of Chongqing, PRC. Visited by an FOM Study Tour Group in 2016

One need travel only a little in China to discover bronze statues of oxen lining the shores of lakes and rivers. This practice dates back to the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE), following the example set by a legendary emperor who, after controlling China's floodwaters, placed an iron ox alongside the waters of each of his projects. If you are in Beijing, visit the Summer Palace to see the life-size bronze ox overlooking Lake Kunming, dedicated by the Qing Emperor Qiánlóng in 1755.

They were also amongst the army's most useful draftees. During the early days of the Ming dynasty in 1387, when the Hóngwǔ emperor was preparing to invade the Baiyi people in the south, he sent "a military officer ... to Sichuan to buy 10,000 ploughing cattle. These were to be used to plough the fields necessary to feed the troops on a likely long-term expedition".⁷ When fields had to be flooded to stop enemy armies, who helped open the dikes? Ox recruits. When the Han Emperor Wǔdì (r 141-87 BCE) wished to honour one of his favourite fallen military generals, he had the general's tomb decorated with large stone carvings, including a seated ox, symbolizing the general's strength and power. This is among the earliest known of such sculptures in China. (Fig 4)

Oxen as Religious Symbols

Chinese Buddhism adopted the fabled stubbornness of oxen as a metaphor for an intellect that doesn't allow itself to be opened to the teachings of the Buddha and a route to enlightenment. Religious texts compare someone who declares he does not know how to find 'the Buddha within', with someone "looking for an ox while riding on one". Other texts comment on how controlling unhelpful activities or thoughts in humans is like tending an ox: "It is like the herder tending the ox with a stick, guarding it from going unrestrained to trample the crop."⁸ Apparently taming an ox required a strength of focus not unlike that required in religious pursuits. (Fig 5)

Oxen as Symbols of a Virtuous Reign

If oxen symbolize the country life and hence the masses (as we see in such paintings as *One Hundred Oxen* in the Song dynasty), (Fig 6), then it stands to reason that a painting of a herd of oxen grazing peacefully on a lush plain would be a sign of a peaceful, prosperous reign. This has led some scholars to wonder if these paintings were personally commissioned by certain emperors themselves. For now, however, as we enter a new year, after a year of many natural and man-made adversities, let us all wish for a peaceful, prosperous and healthy Year of the Ox.



Fig 6. Detail from the Scroll Five Oxen by Han Huang of the Tang dynasty. Collection of the Palace Museum (Beijing)

Patricia Bjaaland Welch is a researcher, author and lecturer who focuses on East Asian history and art. She collects ceramics and Chinese hat knobs, and during 2020 spent half of her time cataloguing her library.

All photos by the author unless otherwise noted

¹ Wang Tao Shang Ritual Animals: Colour and Meaning (Part 1), in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, U. of London, 2007, Vol. 70 (No. 2 (2007), pp. 309-10.

² Note this character had a different meaning on OBI (Oracle Bone Inscriptions) than it has today.

³ Wang Tao, p. 325. In addition to beheaded humans, usually war prisoners.

⁴ The Chinese language does not ordinarily discriminate between ox (niú 牛) and water buffalo (shuiniú 水牛); hence this article uses the term 'oxen' to refer to both unless otherwise specified.

⁵ Scarlett Ju-Yu Tang, "Ox-herding Painting in the Sung Dynasty" in *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 52, No. 1 / 2 (1992), p. 60

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁷ Geoffrey Wade, "Domination in Four Keys: Ming China and its Southern Neighbours 1400-1500", *Ming China: Courts and Contacts 1400-1500*, ed. by Craig Clunas, Jessica Harrison-Hall and Luk Yu-ping, London: The British Museum, 2016, p. 16

⁸ P'u-chi, *Wu-teng hui-yüan, chüan* 3, p. 267, quoted in Scarlett Ju-Yu Tang, p. 63.

“A Land in Heaven”

Revealed through Sanxingdui Bronzes

By Wang Li-Ching

The Shang dynasty (circa 1600-1046 BCE) is broadly recognised as the first dynasty in Chinese history. Centred in the Yellow River Valley, away from the Shang heartland, an archaeological discovery at *Sanxingdui* revealed a radically different bronze culture.

Sanxingdui, meaning ‘Three Star Mounts’, originally referred to three earth piles, the remains of an ancient wall. It became the name of a nearby village situated in the Chengdu Plain (Sichuan Province in southwest China). In 1986 two large sacrificial pits were found, dating from the 11th to the 12th century BCE, contemporary to the late Shang period. The discovery brought to light thousands of ritual objects from an unrecorded civilisation in the upper Yangtze region. Sichuan, known by the Chinese as “A Land in Heaven” for its abundance, was the cradle of this magnificent and mysterious culture.

Each of the pits had three distinct layers; objects were buried in a prescribed manner and sequence, which testified to orderly rituals performed by a complex society. The deposits from the pits included a huge number of elephant tusks, jade, gold articles, cowrie shells, pottery and most notably, almost a metric ton of bronze.

One of the most striking items is a life-size, standing figure (Fig 1). With an overall height of 262 cm and weighing over 180 kg, it was the largest known bronze figure in the world at that time. It would have been a stunning icon, glowing with the colour of corroded bronze. The figure was dressed in splendid three-layered robes for performing rituals. His outer garment was lavishly ornamented with patterns of geometric shapes, eyes, and dragon-like creatures. These motifs probably imitate contemporary embroidered designs on robes, most likely in fine silk. Many legends about the origins of sericulture are centred on this region. The Chengdu Plain has been a fertile silk production area since ancient times. It is said that women produced enough silk to “clothe all under Heaven”. Where else in the world of 3,000 years ago would we have seen a man wearing an embroidered silk robe?

The majestic figure stood on a square base supported by four elephant-like trunks at the corners. Its oversized hands



Fig 1. Standing figure on a pedestal, image courtesy of the Sanxingdui Museum website www.sxd.cn

were sculpted to hold a sacred object to be offered in sacrifice. The object needed to be curved to fit into its hands. It is thought to be an elephant tusk. With the 80 tusks interred in the pits and various references to the image of elephants, elephants no doubt commanded significant spiritual meaning. You may wonder where the tusks came from. Archaeological findings suggest that until the

second millennium BCE the Yangtze Valley still had a warm and humid subtropical climate, fit for elephant habitats. The tusks found at *Sanxingdui* were local yields.

More than 40 bronze heads and 20 masks of various sizes were unearthed (Fig 2). Many share similar facial features to the standing figure: heavy and broad eyebrows, large upward-slanting eyes, broad nose, wide but thin, tight-lipped mouth. Among them, at least six bronze heads were adorned with gold sheets, which formed the shape of a mask. In addition to gold masks, a gold staff and many other gold items were found. Such extensive use of gold objects was unique to the people of the “Land in Heaven”. They were blessed with gold deposits, which were widely distributed around the Sichuan Basin.

The extraordinary finds also included several enormous human-like masks (Fig 3). The largest is 138 cm wide and 66 cm long. Its intimidating presence was announced through



Fig 2. Head with a golden mask, photo by the author



Fig 3. Mask with protruding pupils, photo by the author

its sheer size and the unyielding facial features: the startling, 16 cm-long projecting pupils and the large wing-like ears, which symbolized supernatural seeing and hearing powers. Its wide smile could be meant as a reassuring sign.

These bronze heads and masks were designed to be mounted onto bodies made of materials such as wood and clay or attached to architectural structures. They were not only visual icons for display but also formed part of the sacrifices. They were deliberately hammered, battered and even burned before being placed in pits. In contrast to the contemporary Shang vessels on which human or human-like images were rarely used, *Sanxingdui* people did not shy away from depicting human figures and positioning humans in the universe.

The reconstruction of an altar (Fig 4) based on surviving fragments provides a visual picture of their spiritual world. It consisted of three levels: the bottom level is a pair of standing composite animals; the middle level has four standing human figures supporting hills on their heads; the top level is a four-sided structure, each side adorned with five standing men topped by a human-headed bird. At the top of the structure, four stylised birds proudly look out. Humility and a respectful relationship between humans and nature were gracefully expressed through the structure.



Fig 5. Plaque of taotie face, image courtesy of the Sanxingdui Museum website www.sxd.cn



Fig 4. Divine altar, photo by the author

Several plaques in the form of animal-like faces were also found. Unlike the solemn appearance of the heads and masks mentioned earlier, these faces look playful. The plaque in Figure 5 shows a grinning face with two large eyes, a fine nose and a wide mouth with neatly aligned teeth. Its eyebrows extend sideways, curling up and merging with hook-like horns. Its face looks similar to a totem known as *taotie*, a mythical animal whose meaning remains a mystery. *Taotie* were key iconographic figures on Shang bronze vessels and accredited with spiritual power. They even travelled beyond the Yangtze and found their way to Southeast Asia. In the Asian Civilisations Museum's Ancestors and Rituals gallery, a covered tripod vessel from North Vietnam is on display. The monster masks above its ring handles are reminiscent of the *taotie* face.

The influences of Shang culture are also reflected in the casting technology. While hammering or lost wax methods were used in other parts of the world, the ancient Chinese practised section-mould casting: multiple carefully and accurately carved clay sections were assembled to form a complete mould. Though the *Sanxingdui* bronzes had a very distinctive appearance compared with Shang vessels, they were cast using the same techniques.

The object shown in Figure 6 is called a *lei*, a type of food or wine container used by the Shang people during rituals and banquets. This archaic-looking vessel would have been a fashionable and highly valued object to the *Sanxingdui* people because it was an exotic imported good. Its form, decoration (*taotie* again), and casting technology all point to Shang influences.

However, it was produced in the middle Yangtze region. The three-dimensional features on the shoulder are characteristic of bronze vessels made in the south, meaning that this piece was acquired from trading partners downriver. The "Land in Heaven" may sound isolated, it was actually connected to many neighbouring cultures.

You may wonder what happened to the enchanting *Sanxingdui* culture. Another archaeological site, Jinsha, was discovered in 2001 in the Chengdu Plain. Many scholars believe that Jinsha replaced *Sanxingdui* and became the region's centre. Sichuan was eventually conquered by the Qin state from the Yellow River Valley and gradually integrated into the Chinese empire and played an important role in history.



Fig 6. Bronze Vessel, lei, image courtesy of the Sanxingdui Museum website www.sxd.cn

Wang Li-Ching is a docent at the ACM and is the Honorary Secretary of the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society. The ACM held an exhibition highlighting finds from Sanxingdui and Jinsha in 2007 and several FOM study groups have visited the two sites over the past years.

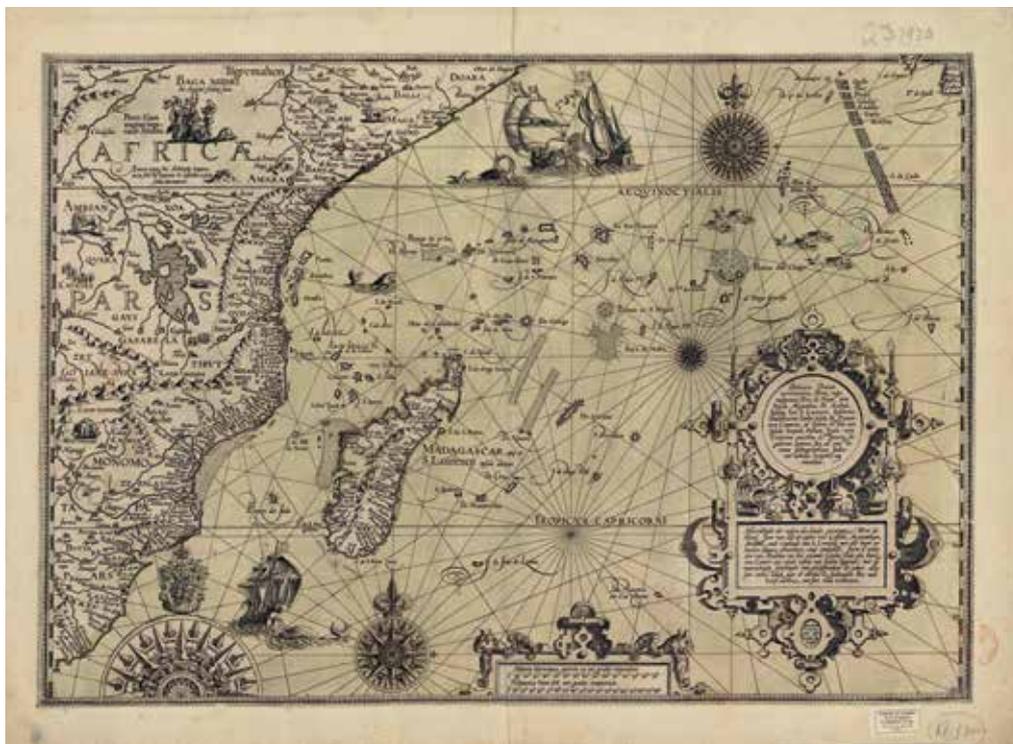
An Overlooked Story:

Chinese Porcelain and Ceramics from the East African Coast

By Caroline Carfantan

Many articles have been written about the love for and expansion of trading routes for Chinese ceramics. The fondness of rulers of the Near and Middle East for porcelain is well-documented as it was probably the most highly regarded import from China to these regions from the 9th to 15th centuries. As testimony to this craze, two of the largest collections of the oldest blue and white porcelain and ceramics outside China are currently housed in the Topkapi Sarayi Museum in Turkey and the Ardabil Shrine in Iran.

But the rich merchants and princes from the Near and the Middle East were not the only lovers of Chinese ceramics and porcelain. They were also held in high esteem in the Arab communities of the East African coast, a region known as the Swahili Coast. This region was at the edge of a trans-ocean maritime realm that stretched from the Philippines and the Spice Islands to the eastern coast of the Indian Ocean. This 500-kilometre-long coastline includes the shores of Kenya, Tanzania and northern Mozambique, as well as the islands of Zanzibar, Pate, Comoros and northern Madagascar. Chinese ceramics and porcelain were the ideal maritime trade good.



Map of the Swahili coast from *Navigatio ac itinerarium Johannis Hugonis Lisiotini*, engraved by Arnold Florentius van Langeren and published by *Hagae Comitibus: apud A. Elsevirum*, 1599. Courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France

Their heavy weight and the fact that they were waterproof made them an excellent ballast, which stabilised vessels on the open seas. The earliest glazed wares uncovered by archaeologists were traded to East Africa from Islamic cities around the Persian Gulf. Later, Chinese ceramics and black glass beads as well as textiles, were bartered and exchanged for numerous high-value East African commodities. These included ivory, tortoise shell, ambergris, rock crystal, timber, iron, Zimbabwean copper and gold and also exotic birds, animals and slaves.

The lovers of the Tang Shipwreck gallery at the Asian Civilisations Museum, may be interested in knowing that 20 Changsha shards from the ninth century were found at the archaeological site of Shanga. Shanga is an ancient port located southeast of Pate Island in the Lamu Archipelago on Kenya's east coast. Some historians believe it is the oldest Muslim settlement on the East African coast and south of the Sahara.

Chinese green wares from Longquan and Fujian, as well as 14th century blue and white porcelain from Jingdezhen, are further evidence of these commercial networks. In comparison to other ceramics found, the volume of Chinese shards and wares is comparatively low and there are no records to date on their transactional value. Even so, historians agree that the Chinese ceramics are of high quality and must have had a high value in the Swahili material culture. According to Bing Zhao, researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research¹: "The Chinese archaeological team working in Kenya has recorded large Longquan green-glazed stoneware dishes of a quality equal



Dish. Excavated from the Vohemar necropolis site, Madagascar. China Longquan kiln complex, late 14th century CE. Green glazed stoneware with stamped decoration. Photo by Bing Zhao, courtesy of the Natural History Museum of Nîmes, France

to those sent to the Chinese imperial court in the late 14th and early 15th centuries". Another proof of their value is in the fact that broken pieces were not discarded. Instead they were repaired; holes were created and wires were inserted. Apparently, they were kept for several generations.

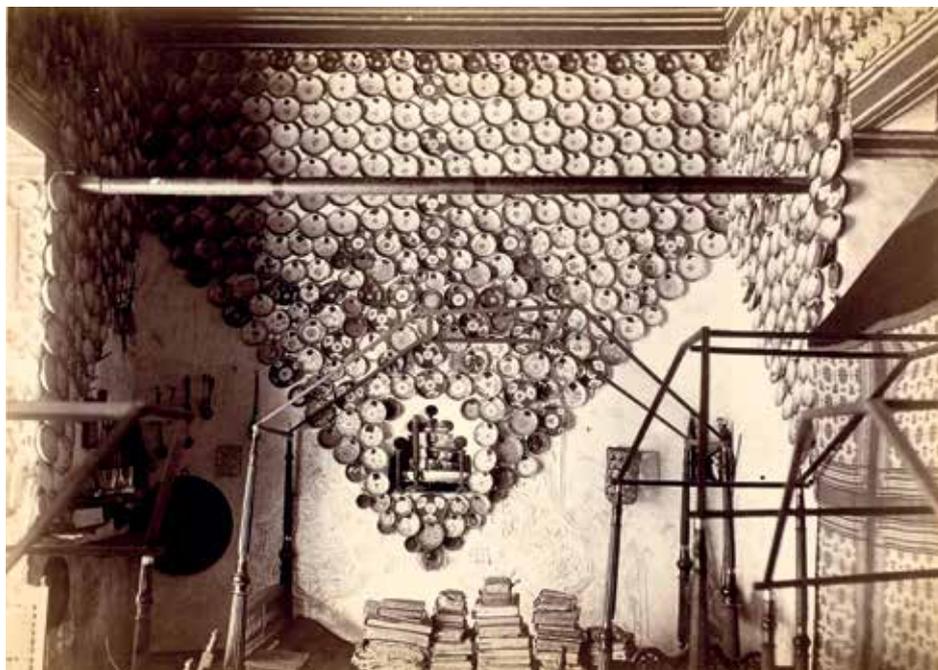
As early as the 13th century, Chinese ceramics were used on the Swahili coast to decorate the façades of pillars or dome tombs. These two types of burial monuments are believed to have been reserved for elite families, probably those who controlled the maritime trade. Using ceramics in the tomb decoration added light to the tomb's plain white surface by reflecting sunlight. Their perceived value must have been high. The inherent value might have been linked specifically to the colour blue since blue dyes were unknown in East Africa until after the 16th century.

Today, blue and white porcelain plates from the 16th to 17th centuries can still be seen on the eight-metre-high Great Pillar of Mamburui Cemetery in Kenya. However, this tomb is a rarity today as not many of these Chinese ceramics remain in the Swahili coastal areas. In the 19th century, as power moved from the local merchants and regents to European countries, thousands of bowls, plates and vases were bought from impoverished families or looted by Europeans. According to Sandy Prita Meier, Assistant Professor of African Art and Architectural History at New York University², "Chinese and Middle Eastern porcelain was the most desirable souvenir not only because of its great value in the European antiques market, but also because it was difficult to obtain. One could not buy porcelain in stores or markets, but instead had to find middlemen with connections to locals willing to sell it, or to people willing to desecrate graves."

The looting was even recorded by one of its perpetrators,



Photograph of 16th-century Swahili tombs near Dar es Salaam, present-day Tanzania, 1880s, by Sir John Kirk courtesy of the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh



Photograph of the interior of an 18th century merchant mansion in Lamu Town, present-day Kenya, 1884, by Sir John Kirk, courtesy of the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh

Richard Burton, known in Europe as an explorer and adventurer. The notes in his diary reveal a different character, that of a looter of ancient Swahili tombs. He writes that the locals tried to prevent his actions and that he was fully aware that the sites had not been abandoned.

The Scottish naturalist Sir John Kirk, who travelled to Zanzibar alongside the explorer Dr David Livingstone, also recorded Chinese ceramics in the photographs he took of local scenes and people. His pictures provide insight and visual documentation of how porcelain was displayed in Swahili upper-class houses. In his photographs, one can see porcelain dishes directly attached to the wall in a large triangular shape, sometimes covering almost the entire wall of a room, highlighting the sheer mass of porcelain. It is not known when people started to hang and display Chinese porcelain dishes in this manner, using repetition and multiplication. For some, these hangings were a display of luxury, worldly sophistication and cultural refinement. To others, it was a display of power and wealth, and to others still, a symbol of the spiritual purity of elite Muslim families.

Another less prosaic interpretation comes from the oral records of Mombasa's older generation, as grandmothers describe the "magical powers" of these plates. When a dish cracked, it was more than a crack. That crack was warding off what Westerners would call the evil eye, a curse transmitted through a malicious glare, usually inspired by envy. A beautiful object such as a porcelain dish could offer protection by distracting the spiteful gaze and absorbing its negative intentions. So, when a displayed plate broke, it had fulfilled its duty of protecting the family and household by catching and neutralising someone's malevolent gaze.

Caroline Carfantan is an FOM guide who believes that objects are more than mere commodities; they are also fabulous storytellers of regional and international interactions and beliefs.

¹ Source: Zhao, B. (2012). Global Trade and Swahili Cosmopolitan Material Culture: Chinese-Style Ceramic Shards from Sanje ya Kati and Songo Mnara (Kilwa, Tanzania). *Journal of World History*, 23(1), 41–85.

² Meier, S. P. (2015). Chinese Porcelain and Muslim Port Cities: Mercantile Materiality in Coastal East Africa. *Art History*, 38(4), 702–717

Chinese Fashion Influencers before Instagram

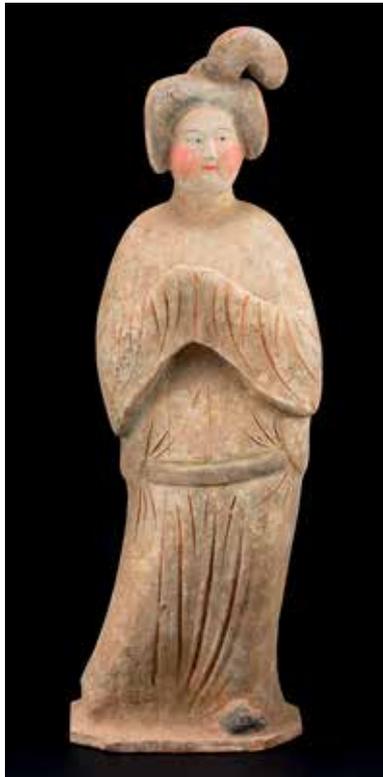
By Darlene D Kasten

In April 2020, the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) opened three galleries dedicated to materials and design: the revamped Ceramics, the new Jewellery, and the Fashion and Textiles galleries. The latter is a rotating exhibition space that will present textile arts in keeping with the museum's annual themes. The inaugural exhibition during ACM's Year of China is called *Fashion Revolution: Chinese dress from late Qing to 1976*. With it, ACM officially joined the worldwide coterie of museums, costume institutes and galleries that celebrate fashion as a decorative art.

In a way, ACM has always showcased Asian fashion. The sculptures, paintings and other decorative arts displayed in the museum portray images of people wearing historical dress that wordlessly communicates the wearers' culture, position and place in society. Twenty-first century social media may provide new platforms for today's fashion influencers, but historically the Chinese used traditional decorative arts to inform trends in Chinese dress.

Unfortunately, one of the ACM's resident examples of early fashion influencers did not make the cut with the new Ceramics gallery revamp, but that doesn't diminish her place in Tang fashion lore. This is a large earthenware figure of a *fei mui*, one of the so-called 'fat ladies', made as part of a group of burial figures for the tombs of the Tang dynasty's ruling elite. Dressed in a long robe with an elaborate hairdo, traces of pink pigment still visible on her cheeks, this court matron was reputedly influenced by Lady Yang Guifei.

As the daughter of a high official and the favourite consort of Emperor Xuanzong, Yang Guifei was one of the few curvaceous women in Chinese history to have been considered beautiful. She wore clothing – some say appropriated from men – that accommodated a fuller figure, a contrast to the slenderness of Sui and early Tang beauties, and influenced the new ideal of feminine beauty as plump and voluptuous. As a result, long, loose fitting robes



Fei mui, Tang dynasty (618-906 CE), China, earthenware clay. Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum. Purchased with funds from the Shaw Foundation



Lavender Kesi semi-formal robe with chrysanthemums and shou character, China, 1890-1905, silk tapestry weave, silk floss, gold wrapped threads. On loan from the Chris Hall Collection. Image courtesy of the Asian Civilisations Museum

with high necklines became court fashion. Unfortunately for Guifei, she also became a royal scapegoat for the failures of the emperor and met her demise at the hands of her enemies.

Like Yang Guifei, our next historical fashion influencer, Cixi, began as a royal concubine who rose to be noble consort to an emperor. But unlike Yang, Cixi became Empress Dowager of China, the power behind the throne for nearly five decades towards the end of another Chinese dynasty, the Qing. Her influence at court was legendary as was her influence on fashion. Cixi was notoriously obsessed with clothing and for one short trip it is said her servants packed 56 trunks with robes, vests and jackets!

On display as part of the *Fashion Revolution* exhibition is an informal lavender silk *kesi* robe, embroidered with silk and gold-covered threads and lined in dazzling turquoise. Possibly once belonging to the Dowager Empress, the colours at the very least indicate Cixi's immense influence. Bright aniline dyes had only just been invented in Europe and imported to China in the late 19th century during Cixi's reign. Since garments worn for private use by the nobility were not under imperial control, a multiplicity of colours developed for informal dress. Shades of blue and purple were much favoured by Cixi with lavender considered her signature colour.

Political intrigue at court may have influenced the choice of auspicious symbols on the robe, such as the *shou* for longevity, the bat for good fortune, the *ruyi* for nobility, the peach for immortality, and the chrysanthemum for the wisdom that comes with age. Cixi was apparently quite fond of footwear too. She is often shown in portraits raising the hem of her gown to reveal a splendidly decorated shoe.

Cixi's influence lives on today, most recently through the modern Chinese fashion influencer Guo Pei, whose namesake special exhibition began ACM's *Year of China* in 2019. She once

said that to her, the Empress Dowager was a mythic figure and you can see Cixi's influence in at least one of the ensembles Guo Pei displayed at the ACM. The "Arab Princess", part of Guo Pei's 2010 *One Thousand and Two Nights* collection, is decorated with embroidered bluish purple wisteria, which Guo Pei acknowledges was a nod to Cixi. The wisteria was among Cixi's favourite flowers and to celebrate her 60th birthday, she famously commissioned porcelain from the imperial kilns in Jingdezhen decorated with a wisteria design.

After the old imperial order had crumbled in China, an influx of democratic and Western ideas influenced a varied sartorial expression. During the Republican period (1912–49), a new street style emerged, particularly in Shanghai, considered the 'Paris of the East', where urban women had unprecedented access to westernised fashion and culture. As with most street style, the influencers were not a single identifiable person but instead came from the groundswell of youth culture. Early Republican hipsters were courtesans, university students and career women.



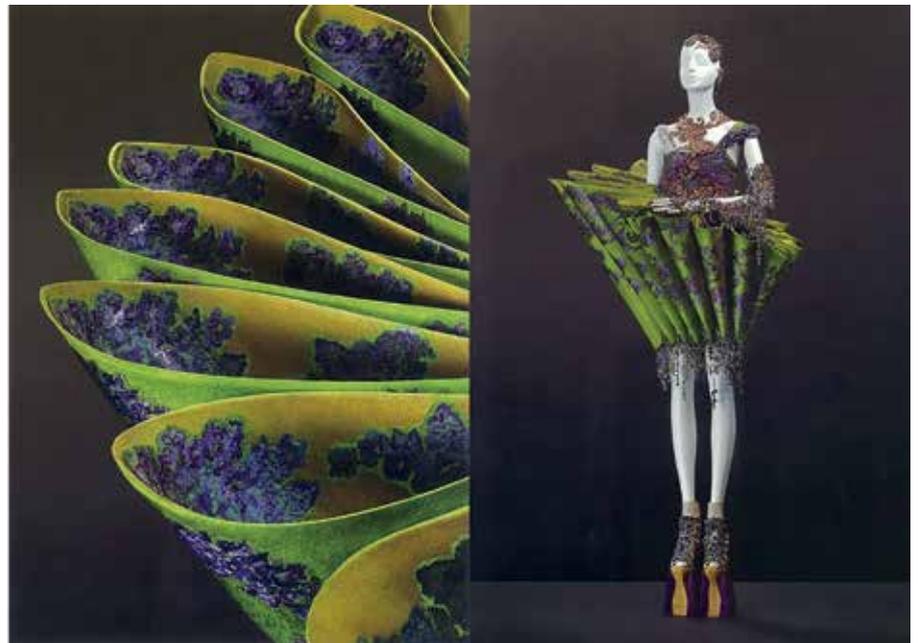
Blouse, Cotton voile with machine embroidery. Black silk skirt with satin embroidery, China, 1920's. On loan from the Chris Hall Collection. Image courtesy of the Asian Civilisations Museum

instrumental role in the overthrow of the Qing dynasty. You can add 'designer' to his list of accomplishments, since it is he who is credited with creating the *Zhongshan Zhuan*, or Mao suit.

One story says Sun Yat-sen based its design on the Japanese school cadet uniform, which in turn was based on the Prussian military academy tunic. He used the cadet jacket as a base and initially flipped up the collar. He then replaced the three inner pockets found on Western suits with

In the early and middle 1920s, a 'New Civilised Dress' emerged, and several examples are on display in the exhibition. Adapting another style appropriated from men, this time the Qing *changshan* robe and *magua* jacket, a civilised woman would wear a bright jacket with a decorative collar paired with a long black skirt in supple fabrics. Jackets became hip length, with three-quarter flared sleeves, and rounded hem. Further influenced by Western styles, the skirts gradually became shorter and the sleeves became elbow-length leading to the next evolutionary step in women's fashion, the *qipao*.

Our final Chinese influencer may be the most unlikely, Sun Yat-sen. Politician, physician and political philosopher, he is known as the "Father of the Nation" for his



Arab Princess, *One Thousand and Two Nights* collection, China, Beijing 2010, silk, jacquard fabric, copper appliques, silverspun thread, gold-spun thread, lametta. Collection of Guo Pei. Photography by Howl Collective.

four outer pockets and one inner pocket and paired the jacket with baggy pants. What possessed him to design his own uniform? Perhaps he was inspired by his father who at one point worked as both a tailor and a shoemaker.

Details of the Mao suit continued to act as a source of political influence. The four pockets came to represent the Four Confucian Virtues, the five front buttons standing for the five branches of the Chinese Republic's government, and the three cuff buttons for Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People. Even the shape of the breast pocket flaps has been likened to an upside-down mountain-shaped calligraphy brush rest.

A modified version with a stand-and-fall collar was worn in the 1920s and 1930s by civil servants in China and by the Chinese military until the Sino-Japanese War. Men and women wore it after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 until the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. Even today, it is not uncommon for Chinese leaders to wear a tailored version of the Mao suit for special occasions. That is quite an enduring influence.



Zhongshan Zhuan (Mao suit), Hongdu Company, China, Beijing, 1975, wool with synthetic lining. On loan from the Chris Hall Collection. Image courtesy of the Asian Civilisations Museum

Darlene D Kasten is an FOM docent with the Asian Civilisations Museum, Malay Heritage Centre and STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery.

China's Three Famous Sisters

The Soong Sisters

By Wang Li-Ching

Chinese New Year is a great time to share stories about family, and one of the most fascinating tales of 20th century China is that of the Soong sisters. The lives of these three beautiful, intelligent and independent-minded women were at the heart of power struggles in early Republican China because of the men they married – H H Kung, Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek.

The proud father of these three sisters was Charlie Soong. Born in the 1860s to a humble Hainanese family, Charlie was one of the young men who joined the Chinese diaspora late in the Qing era. He lived in Java first, then America. A chance encounter with a Methodist captain totally changed his path. Through the Methodist network, Charlie received an American education for seven years and returned to China as a preacher. He married another devout Christian, a Ms Ni who, unlike most of Han-Chinese girls of her time, did not yield to the foot-binding tradition and walked freely with normal feet. In conservative Chinese society, this unusual couple was able to provide their daughters with an unprecedented American education, one that other Chinese women could only dream of.



Fig 1. Ching-ling, Ai-ling (seated) and Mei-ling in 1917

Soong Ai-ling

Born in 1889, Ai-ling was the first of six children. After eight years of studying at Shanghai's best school for girls, the exclusive McTyeire Methodist School, she bade farewell to her parents and boarded a steamer to study at the Wesleyan College in Georgia, USA. When the ship reached San Francisco in 1904, she was not allowed to enter the US because of the renewal of the Chinese Exclusion Act that,



Fig 2. The Soong Sisters in Chongqing, circa 1940

with some exceptions, banned entry to all Chinese. After a long, three-week wait during which Ai-ling was transferred from ship to ship, the 14-year-old cabin-class passenger was eventually given permission to enter America.

Ching-ling and Mei-ling followed. They began at McTyeire then in 1908, both joined Ai-ling at Wesleyan. Ai-ling welcomed her younger sisters whole-heartedly (Ching-ling at 14 and Mei-ling 10), helped them settle in and tended to all their needs. Jung Chang, in her book titled *Big Sister, Little Sister, Red Sister* described the situation as, "It was here that she (Ai-ling) began to mother her two sisters, which she would continue to do even when they both became 'first ladies.'"

Described as a "serious and determined student who was clever with finances and business", Ai-ling completed her studies in 1909 and became the first Chinese woman to receive a college degree in America. She returned to China soon after graduation. By then, the missionary-turned-businessman Charlie was already a successful business leader with an extensive social network, through which he became a close friend and a long-time supporter of Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary movement. After the founding of the Republic of China in 1912, Ai-ling worked for Sun as his secretary. She resigned two years later to marry the rich, Yale-educated H H Kung (a future minister). The secretary position was filled by Ching-ling.

Soong Ching-ling

Sun had been Ching-ling's hero. She worked for him in Japan at a time when he was at a low point in his political career. Ching-ling had strong faith in the causes Sun was fighting for and fell for him. When she announced her romantic relationship with Sun to her parents, Charlie was shocked, angered and hurt, and so restricted her to confinement. The usually quiet and shy young woman



Fig 3. The Cairo Conference in 1943

unexpectedly “escaped from her room down a ladder positioned by a sympathetic maidservant” and eloped with Sun, who was 26 years her senior. Ching-ling became Madam Sun in Japan, at a wedding witnessed by a handful of Sun’s friends, but no family.

Soong Mei-ling

The homecoming of the jovial and glamorous Mei-ling, with her first-class honours in art and history from the prestigious Wellesley College in Massachusetts, brought a ray of sunshine in 1917. The fashionable and charming sisters posed for a photograph to celebrate the reunion (Fig 1). Mei-ling was the bachelorette of the town and attracted many admirers, including Chiang Kai-shek, a confidant of Sun’s inner circle and a rising leader of the Nationalist Party. After Sun’s death, Ching-ling was elected a member of the Nationalist Party’s Executive Committee. She gradually leaned towards Communism (which was permitted by the Nationalist Party at that time) and was infuriated by Chiang’s series of purges and expulsions of Communists from the Nationalist Party. Wishing to fully embrace her political views, she left for Moscow.

The disagreement between Ching-ling and Chiang became domestic in December 1927. Mei-ling, the youngest sister, became Madam Chiang in a high-profile “wedding of the year” in Shanghai, attended by more than 2,000 guests including family members, senior Chinese officials and foreign celebrities. The absence of Ching-ling was not unnoticed. While the Soong family members were at the core of Chiang’s Nationalist government, Ching-ling was a valuable figure for Chinese Communists – her charm, cosmopolitanism and most importantly, her political legacy as Madam Sun. Her active support of Communism undermined Chiang’s anti-Communist efforts and brought tremendous stress onto her sisters.

Their Roles in History

The Marco Polo Bridge Incident in July 1937 ignited patriotic sentiments in China. Facing the Japanese invasion, the Nationalists formed a coalition with the Communists under Chiang’s leadership. Ching-ling left behind past grudges and worked with her family. The Soong sisters visited military bases to raise the morale of soldiers, set up hospitals and trained nurses. Their active engagement in the country’s fate inspired all. (Fig 2)

Mei-ling went a step further in an era when women had limited influence on the international political scene. As Madam Chiang, Mei-ling was regarded as China’s First Lady and in 1942, she addressed both houses of the US Congress. In a powerful and impassioned speech, she conveyed the



Fig 4. Deng Xiao-ping, Mao Zedong and Soong Ching-ling, 1957

Chinese people’s bravery and perseverance in fighting the Japanese. She was greeted with prolonged applause and secured billions of dollars in international aid. The following year, she assisted Chiang during the Cairo Conference, where China was set to negotiate a leading role in international relations. (Fig 3)

While the world was celebrating the end of World War II, China was still at war. Renewed conflicts between the Nationalists and the Communists brought about a devastating civil war. The Communists under Mao Zedong won the final victory and established the People’s Republic of China while Chiang and the Nationalists retreated to Taiwan to form the Republic of China. The civil war caused a large-scale demographic movement in the late 1940s. Among the Soong sisters, Ai-ling left for America and lived a wealthy but discreet life, Ching-ling stayed on the mainland and Mei-ling joined her husband in Taiwan.

After the civil war, Ching-ling and Mei-ling remained in the public eye but their contact was cut off by the Cold War. Ching-ling was given several prominent but nominal titles in Communist China, greeting foreign leaders and appearing in conferences and ceremonies. (Fig 4) Mei-ling was the First Lady of Nationalist China until Chiang’s death, then retired in the US. Both maintained a serene façade and never betrayed the despair they had both felt after miscarriages because of assassination attempts targeted at the men they had married. They had no biological children.

During Ching-ling’s final illness, she sent a letter to Mei-ling through a mutual friend, hoping to see her one last time. Mei-ling replied and suggested her sister undergo treatment in the US. However, Ching-ling died alone and did not have the opportunity to reconcile with her family. Mei-ling lived to the grand old age of 105, surrounded by descendants of the Chiang and Soong families. The three sisters were often described as “one loved money, one loved power, and one loved her country.” Which of these would you choose?

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Wang Li-Ching is a docent at the ACM and is the Honorary Secretary of the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society.

All photos in the public domain

Music for Everyone

(More) Variations on a Theme

By Yvonne Sim

In 2019, Ang Song-Ming represented Singapore at the Venice Biennale with his work, *Music for Everyone, Variations on a Theme*. This internationally acclaimed exhibition returned home to be showcased at the National Museum of Singapore for about three weeks as an expanded redux, including three additional works from Ang's oeuvre.

For those who guided the exhibition, it was a low-key experience with a steady trickle of visitors. This could be partly because of its location, which is not what you would associate with contemporary art. How do you explain to a visitor to a history and heritage museum that contemporary art is about ideas and concepts and isn't just something visual? That the artwork is part of a larger social context, ideology, history and shifting norms? How do you get your visitors to look deeper and to understand? Let me count the ways...



Free concerts for all

First, the history

Ang was doing research on Singapore's music and its development at the National Archives when he came upon *Music for Everyone*, a series of free concerts organised by the Singapore government from 1971 to 1985. It was meant to promote music appreciation among the public, with a selection from a genre perceived as "meaningful music".

The idea of how music can be accessible to everyone from

the ground up, took root and creative juices began to fly – addressing the young and the not-so-young from all walks of life, from listening to making music, to appreciating music as food for the soul, or as some can choose to do – to critique it.

In response to this state directive, Ang obligingly created banners and posters promoting the concerts.

Enlarging on the idea of how music can be learned from young, across the board, the humble recorder takes centre-stage. It is an instrument we learned to play in school and were mostly glad to leave behind. Ang intentionally made it the highlight of the exhibition with a titular three-channel video called *Recorder Rewrite*.



A selection of meaningful music

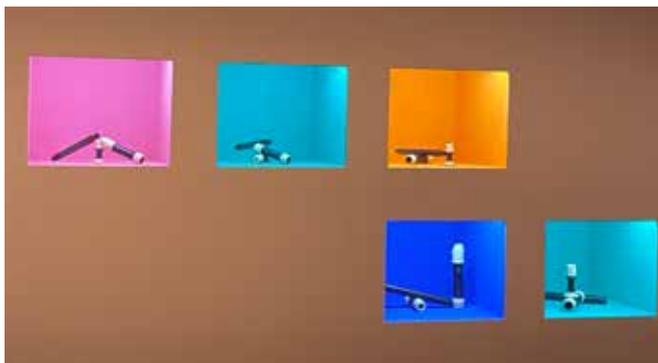


Playing the recorder my way, a new way, any way (also on the cover)

The video runs for about 15 minutes and features 20 primary school children, aged between eight and 12, playing their own music, based on improvisation and unconventional uses of the recorder. It was staged and shot at the Singapore Conference Centre, the venue of the original *Music for Everyone* concert series. At times, the sounds are dissonant and amateurish, the choreography uneven, but it is music and spontaneous play. All together it is something to be enjoyed and applauded for five days of hard work – from practice to rehearsal and then filming.

In addition to mashing up recorders, Ang did the same for music manuscripts. Slashed, rolled up, crumpled, tossed and reworked – novel ways to engage with music.

Now what else can you do with a recorder? (See image below)



Recorders silenced and sculpted into works of art



A prescription for pent-up emotions?

One of my favourite works in this exhibition is called *You and I*, which has a selection of handwritten letters Ang received from friends and strangers all over the world between 2009 and 2018. Earlier, he had sent out an open invitation for people to write about what they were feeling at a certain period of time. In reply, he mailed them a personalised CD with songs to match what they wrote.

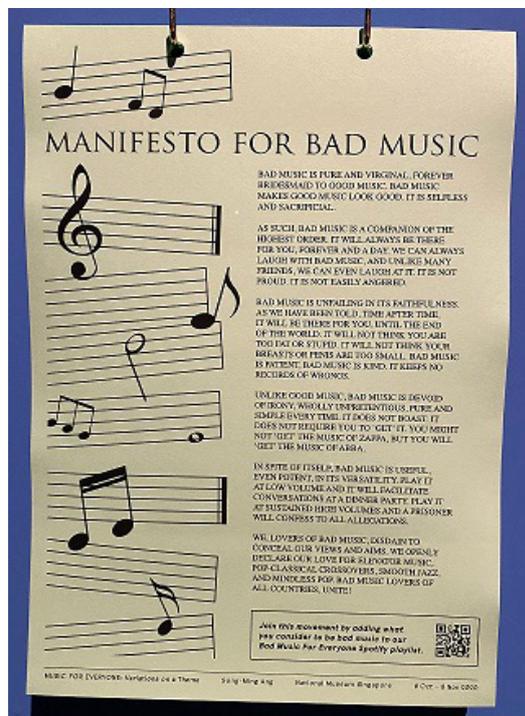
A segment that will tickle your funny bone is *Manifesto for Bad Music*, something that Ang had presented at the third Singapore Biennale in 2011. It was cheekily added to this exhibition and we, the audience, and everyone with a Spotify music app, are invited to contribute to Ang's playlist at *Bad Music for Everyone*. Last I checked, among the tunes featured are *China Wine*, *Barbie Girl* and *Gangnam Style*.

I did not receive any sign-ups for the tours during my scheduled slots. So faced the possibility of having no audience for the next two hours, I tried my luck with the walk-ins. Since this was the school holiday season and *Doraemon* was a crowd-puller, I got lucky. I had one group of tertiary students and another with two young ladies, as well as a somewhat hesitant gentleman who looked as if he would rather have been somewhere else.



Letter from a two-year old (with a little help from Ma and Pa)

At the end of the tour, the young ladies lingered to read the correspondence and listened earnestly to the music selection. I saw the gentleman visibly relax as he gradually took in and understood the variations on the theme of *Music for Everyone*, even for the uninitiated. There was the hint of a contented smile as I met his eyes. Just like that, the disparate components of a musical theme culminated in a harmonious crescendo as tribute to this luminous artist with a song to his name.



Everyone's entitled to bad music

Yvonne Sim loves good food, street art and looking at beautiful things. She guides at Gillman Barracks, the ACM and at Kreta Ayer, Chinatown.

All photos by the author

History from Memories

By Tu Jie Min

With the benefit of hindsight, national histories can always be chronicled in ways that illuminate the contextual underpinnings of societies. With the flux of historical complexities, it is often convenient to accept the broad strokes of dominant historical narratives before we confront the inevitable tension between collective and independent memories of the past. At *Wishful Images: When Microhistories Take Form*, artworks composed by five different artists in contrasting mediums initiate a careful dialogue that interrogates the unrealised historical, aesthetic and political possibilities obscured beneath dominant historical accounts of the Cold War in Asia. The curation here invites us to rediscover the past through the artists' lenses, accepting their bold attempts to repurpose history as an avenue to rethink our existing expectations of the past and better reorient our hopes for the future.

Individuals in History



Afro-American black people who participated in the memorial held for Reverend Martin Luther King and the Kennedy brothers [JFK & RFK] 1970-71, Okinawa photograph



Automobiles belonging to the US military, burned out in the the Koza riot 1970, Okinawa photograph

Central to the exhibition are moments from the Okinawan Koza Riots, the Lusaka conference and the Vietnam War. These years mark the post-war developmental phase in Asia, when new states birthed from the de-colonisation impetus struggled to balance sovereign independence with the shadows of neo-imperialism, colonial capitalism and burgeoning economic nationalism. Here, each artwork in the exhibition serves as a critical reminder and response to omissions by the generalisations of macro-historical accounts.

The exhibition's primary inquiry concerns Okinawa's

historicity. Conspicuously absent from official histories and public recognition is the occurrence of the Koza Riots and their aftermath in Okinawa. A vehicle collision between an American-owned automobile and a native Okinawan in December 1970 ignited the flames of the people's fury, one that had been seething during the 25 years of American occupation of the Ryukyu Islands. The pent-up frustrations and anger ultimately found their outlet in the form of a spontaneous riot in the camp town of Koza, near the Kadena Air Force Base. For the first time, an intimate glimpse into the struggles of individuals residing in Okinawa between the late 1960s and early 1970s is offered through the works produced by Kuniyoshi Kazuo and Aya Rodríguez-Izumi's collaboration with her parents.

Especially pronounced in the photographs shot by the Okinawan photojournalist Kuniyoshi Kazuo is the evidence of the people's resistance against a repressive state apparatus. Muted by its monochromatic manifestations, the violence of the Koza Riots inadvertently revealed the afflictions that drove the people to take to the streets in protest. When contrasted against the burned-out car bodies, the images of local Okinawans and African-American military personnel marching together to reject the normalisation of structural violence towards minority populations, evoke the uncomfortable tension between a people's spiritual strength and their physical vulnerabilities. Parallel with Kazuo's historical sensibilities, Rodríguez-Izumi's collaborative production of *Okinawa Tragedy: Echoes from the Last Battle of WWII*, with her Okinawan mother Noriko and her American father José Rodríguez, signifies a personal endeavour to retain public access to micro-historical accounts of Okinawa's historicity.

Also silent from Okinawa's history are the victims of the politicised culture surrounding American-Okinawan miscegenation. The prevalence of miscegenation in Okinawa resulted from the American military's extended presence in the Ryukyu Islands and the 1945 privatisation of the sex industry in the Okinawan jurisdiction.

Moreover, the American military's extraterritorial status also complicated matters. These stemmed from a history of contentious sexual encounters between American military personnel and local Okinawans. Socially and economically excluded by the local community, mothers and mixed-race children in Okinawa found themselves unable to speak out against the victimisation both from the top-down violence of American



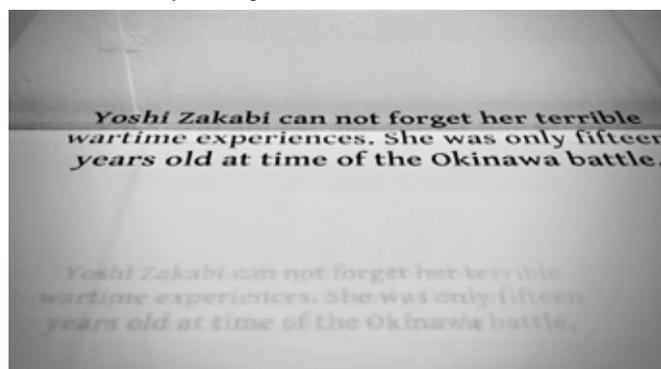
Two jukebox ladies 1970, Okinawa photograph

imperialism or the discrimination from ethnonationalism. In retrospect, how can our understanding of history be claimed as sufficient without paying attention to the wounds of individuals silenced against the backdrop of national and international histories?

Responses to History

Threaded through the exhibition is the question of how our attention to history, especially with the benefit of hindsight, can satisfy the ethical needs of each and every period of study. A brief answer to this question can be found in the conscientious choice of medium, apparatus and the subjects of Kao Chung-Li and Nguyễn Trinh Thi's single-channel videos.

The examination of Kao's *My Mentor, Chen Ying-Zhen* in particular requires close attention to the material considerations that Kao had while balancing the art of film production and the political history of image-making. The subject focus of Kao's film centres around the socialist thinker and writer Chen Ying-Zhen in post-war Taiwan. Following the 1949 political split, the then Kuomintang government was strongly pro-American and appealed to the ideals of democratic capitalism. The obvious ideological differences explain why Chen's historical perspective of post-war Taiwan's history diverges from mainstream narratives.



Okinawa's Tragedy: Echoes From the Last Battle of WWII 2020, New York installation, reproduction of prints, audio and text narrators: Aya Rodríguez-Izumi, José Rodríguez and Noriko Rodríguez



My Mentor, Chen Ying-Zhen 2010, Taiwan 27 minutes, video

However, what is significant is the presence of two concurrent deliveries in Kao's project. Within the film there is an earnest homage to Chen delivered through the intimate display of Chen's humble and illuminating presence to

those in his personal sphere. In terms of composition, the film's production relied on the technologies of 8mm film and *kamishibai* slideshow projectors. Considering the availability of modern video-making technologies during the time of Kao's making of *My Mentor, Chen Ying-Zhen*, the reason for his choice of medium and his approach towards film production warrants a story of its own.



Jalan Jati (Teak Road) 2012, Singapore, 23 minutes, film

The understanding of war, in line with Kao's historical sensibilities, extends beyond the experiences defined by the wars in Korea and Vietnam. When the wars ended at the frontiers, the conflicts continued and morphed into a sort of cultural cold war in Asia. According to Kao, the visual culture and image-distributing industry that developed in post-war Taiwan cannot be thought of as a politically neutral legacy. When capitalism became the main thrust of America's containment policy, the industrial forces that invigorated the age of mechanical image-production beyond American shores represented a rebranded form of American political ambition. In this sense, the pervasive foreign presence moved beyond territorial occupation and conquest into the depths of the local culture and aesthetic.

Closer to home, Lucy Davis' woodblock collages and the animation *Jalan Jati* present another perspective of how a study of material history offers a glimpse into the stories archived in them. Removed from the political intensity seen in the other artists' responses, in her attempt to trace the environmental history of Singapore, the focus of Davis' medium conveys a different kind of historical agency.

The cultural theorist Homi K Bhabha contends that the concept of 'the people' is problematic in relation to their role in the histories of fluctuating modern states. The key tension between individuals and the grand scheme of history, Bhabha notes, is that "the people are not simply historical events or parts of a patriotic body politic. They are also a complex rhetorical strategy of social reference where the claim to be representative provokes a crisis within the process of signification and discursive address". In light of Bhabha's view, to be truly attentive to history demands that we pay similar attention to both micro-historical and macro-historical accounts since both perspectives enhance the ways we understand history. The curatorial choices of micro-historical presentations in *Wishful Images: When Microhistories Take Form* offers a timely opportunity for us to engage our imaginations with the possibility of revising our existing understanding of post-war Asia's histories.

¹ Shimabuku, Annmaria M. *Introduction. Alegal*. Fordham University Press, 2019. p.2-3

² Ibid.

³ Shimabuku, Annmaria M. *Japan in the 1950s: Symbolic Victims. Alegal*. Fordham University Press, 2019

Tu Jie Min is an undergraduate studying philosophy at the National University of Singapore. She is interested in how history is represented in art and everyday life.

Armour to Art: The Evolution of Etching

By Darlene D Kasten

The advent of printmaking in 14th century Europe revolutionised the communication of visual information. For the first time, complex imagery could be reproduced in quantity and disseminated far and wide. The finest quality prints were created by engraving images on metal plates, a method that allowed for exquisite detail. But engraving could only be executed by a few highly skilled and trained metal craftsmen, making it expensive and of limited use. Instead, most printmakers used the woodcut method with images rendered in outlines and simplified hatching using closely drawn parallel lines to create shading. While woodcuts could be made without the special skills and tools of engravers, images carved into wood could not match the detail or delicacy of engraving on metal.

But there was a technology being employed widely in another craft that was to make fine imagery on metal less expensive and more broadly available. At the time, armourers were decorating their custom-created suits of armour with beautiful, detailed artwork without the help of engravers. They used a chemical process called etching, a technique in which lines are incised into metal with acid. Without requiring a highly skilled engraver, etching opened the door for all manner of artists to make prints from metal, simultaneously allowing the hand of the artist to be seen directly in the finished work.

To make an etching, an artist prepares a metal plate by covering its surface with a layer of acid-resistant wax or a resin called a ground. The artist then scratches through the ground with an etching stylus or needle to expose the metal beneath. When the design is complete, the plate is immersed in acid, which eats away or “bites” the exposed areas of metal to a depth that depends on time and acid strength to create incised lines. The artist then removes the ground with a solvent, revealing the etched lines on the surface of the metal. Ink applied to the cleaned plate settles into the etched lines and is then transferred to paper by being run through a press, allowing multiple images to be created from a single plate.



The etchings on armour and paper have been attributed to Daniel Hopper, ca. 1510–20. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Etching was first used as a printmaking technique in the mid-1490s by the Augsburg printmaker and armour decorator Daniel Hopper. Augsburg, Germany, had long



Landscape with a Double Spruce, Albrecht Altdorfer, ca. 1521–22. Etching. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

been known for its armourers and the etched decoration of steel and iron. Collaboration among the city’s close network of craftsmen and artists led to Hopper’s use of etching to document his designs and compositions on paper to easily share them with other armour craftsmen. With that generous act, etching moved out of the armour workshops and into the printmakers’ and artists’ studios.

Printmakers embraced etching to produce some of the most original images of the Renaissance, the period of arts rebirth and renewal in Western Europe from the 14th to the 17th century. The first etchers tested and refined the technique as it moved from Germany to the Netherlands, Italy and France.

About 1520, the practice of etching in Germany entered a second phase. While their counterparts in the Netherlands had begun to use copper plates, mainly owing to iron’s propensity to rust, German etchers such as Albrecht Altdorfer largely stuck with iron. Nevertheless, Altdorfer advanced the art by producing the first independent printed landscapes. However, many other early German masters did move to copper plate as German



Resurrection, Parmigianino (Girolamo Francesco Maria Mazzola), ca. 1527–1530. Etching with drypoint. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

artists embraced etching over engraving as a primary printmaking technique.

By the mid-1550s, the market for prints was growing in the Netherlands. The wealthy port of Antwerp, with its intellectual, art-loving public and its access to shipping, became a magnet for ambitious publishers, talented painters and skilled printmakers. Two general categories of etchers emerged, professional etchers who produced prints after the designs of other artists and painter-etchers, such as Pieter Bruegel and Frans Floris, who executed their own remarkable, freely sketched etchings.

The first Italian artist to fully exploit the possibilities of etching was fresco painter and master draftsman Francesco Parmigianino. Born in Parma, from 1527 to 1530 he lived in Bologna where he became deeply involved in printmaking, creating immensely influential small-scale etchings widely admired for their technical skill and exquisite figural compositions. Likewise, in the wealthy cities of Venice and Verona, painters and skillful draftsmen produced prints from carefully executed etchings drawn in a free and fluid manner.

Etching arrived on the scene in France about 1540. Artists and craftsmen of all backgrounds took up the technique, from sculptors and architects to enamel painters and illuminators. In Paris, the architect and draftsmen Jacques Androuet du Cerceau, began producing etchings devoted to ornamental and architectural subjects, while at the nearby chateau of Fontainebleau, a new courtly style emerged in the rooms and galleries of the palace, one that would have a profound effect on the course of French art.

The pioneering efforts of these early Renaissance printmakers paved the way for subsequent generations of artists for whom etching became a vital means of expression. The first and perhaps greatest master of pure etching was Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69). Rembrandt experimented with ink and paper to produce noticeable differences from one plate-pressing to another, a revolutionary technique that ultimately made a lasting impact on the art form. Rembrandt was also the first artist to fully exploit the potential of drypoint, in which a sharp steel needle is used to incise lines directly into the metal plate.



Clement de Jonghe, printseller, *Rembrandt van Rijn, 1651, Etching / drypoint, Rijksmuseum*

In the 18th century, Venetian artists such as Giovanni Battista Tiepolo used etching to create whimsical atmospheric effects while Spanish artist Francisco de Goya conveyed a more horrific scene in the etching series *Los desastres de la guerra*. Goya cloaked his lines in haunting shadows using aquatint, a chemical process that creates tones of watercolour-like gradations by varying the exposure time of different areas of a metal plate.

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, soft-ground etching became current. This technique involves drawing with a pencil on a sheet of paper placed on a copperplate



The Offering, Trenton Doyle Hancock, 2010, Etching, aquatint, spit bite aquatint, sulphurtint and STPI handmade paper, Produced at STPI – Creative Workshop & Gallery, Singapore, © Trenton Doyle Hancock / STPI, Photo courtesy of the Artist and STPI

coated with a soft, sticky ground yielding results similar to pencil or chalk drawings. It was used to great effect for exquisite landscapes by the English artist Thomas Gainsborough.

Primary among the 20th century artists who delved into etching was Pablo Picasso, who made it a vehicle for his cubist, classical and surrealist sensibilities. In trademark fashion, he pushed the boundaries of the medium, experimenting with the different possibilities and effects that it had to offer. Picasso's etchings highlighted his masterful use of line and shadow, which are not as dominant in his other mediums.



Weeping Woman 1, Pablo Picasso, July 1, 1937. Drypoint, aquatint and etching, with scraping on copper in black on ivory laid paper. The Art Institute of Chicago

Here in 21st century Singapore, etching is still practised in the working, art printmaking studio at the STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery. An example on display along STPI's permanent education wall is *The Offering* by American mixed-media artist Trenton Doyle Hancock. During his 2010 STPI residency, Hancock drew inspiration from Singapore's theme park, Haw Par Villa, to produce his exhibited work using a mix of Renaissance and innovative etching methods. He also added a colourful touch to his work with another printmaking technique, screen printing. But that is a story for another day.

Darlene D Kasten is an FOM docent at STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery, the Asian Civilisations Museum and the Malay Heritage Centre.

All photos in the public domain except where noted.



Bingo Winners interpret the Son of Man by Rene Magritte



Cecile Collineau receiving her 16-year pin

Virtual

A Creative Way to

By

Here's the recipe for a special magical brew: in a large cauldron, mix together a pinch of Zoom and a spoonful of creative ideas: mix in a few witch's hats, devil's horns and spooky masks; add a participative online bingo scavenger hunt; sprinkle with a couple of speeches; congratulate a special person and invite a VIP. Next, ensure that the Wi-Fi is nice and steady and the microphones muted. Cook for about an hour and 15 minutes, then ask the participants to partake of the mystical beverage. Suddenly the charm starts working and voilà, that's how you create a virtual Volunteer Appreciation Meeting (VAM), full of laughter, joy and warmth. By the end of the session, your guests will all be under the spell of FOM.

A highlight in the year for FOM is the VAM, a time for our president to show her gratitude and nurture our sense of community. This year was a little bit different as FOM volunteers gathered on Zoom on 28 October 2020. To stay with the spirit of that week, since 31 October was just around the corner, guests were asked to dress up in their spookiest Halloween costumes and tune in on Zoom at precisely 2:00 pm.

Our mistress of ceremonies, Christine the Taromancer, bewitched us all and kept up an energetic pace. After a few minutes, the 68 participants were separated into teams and mysteriously ushered into breakout rooms of eight players (I'm discovering new Zoom functions every day). Our team leader explained the rules of the Bingo game. Alas, in our room, a bad witch had spooked our screen share. But it didn't matter; we laughed and carried on with our scavenger hunt tasks, which included a zombie personification, the re-enactment of a shipwreck and the gathering of murder weapons (one of us brandished a stiletto; my children wondered why they saw me running back to my bedroom with a kitchen knife).

Garima Lalwani, the president of FOM, gave a warm speech to thank all the volunteers. She reminded us that



Laura Socha receiving her five-year pin virtually



Tim Clark with his five-year pin



Manisha Sanadhya, Ramya Narayanan and Aparna Balasubramaniam receiving three-year pins



Mary Rajkumar receiving her 15-year pin



Kwan Min Yee (top left-hand corner) receiving her one-year certificate with friends, virtually



Priya Seshadri and Olesya Belyanina receiving their three-year pins



Party screenshot courtesy of Charlotte Dawson

VAM 2020: Appreciate our Volunteers

Cécile Collineau

her first concern was the safety of our docents and visitors. Her other priority was for FOM to remain relevant to all its members. It is nothing short of amazing that 102 new docents, including 25 Japanese docents, have joined the community. Despite the Circuit Breaker, FOM managed to provide 2,337 tours to 20,000 visitors. Garima praised FOM volunteers for their adaptability to the new situation. In her eyes, FOM volunteers have always been generous, but this year more than ever, they gave their time, their skills and their imaginations.

The Salome de Decker award, given each year to a volunteer who “quietly and positively contributes to FOM”, was presented to Roopa Dewan who gave a wonderful acceptance speech, describing how FOM has enriched all our lives. During these troubled times FOM has, “taken us into a mental journey and allowed us to travel far and beyond.”

Chang Hwee Nee, CEO of the National Heritage Board, joined us later and congratulated us, saying, “FOM has shown itself to be resilient and innovative”. NHB is considering ways of working in the new normal, one of which is to expand digital volunteering opportunities in guiding for example, either live or remote, or participate in research or fact-checking for digital content. She did stress, however, that virtual tours must not replace physical tours – it’s just that new technology will allow us to reach more people.

Garima then re-took control of the Zoom screen and showed us photos of the many volunteers who had come by the FOM office the previous week to collect their badges and certificates. “Whether you’ve volunteered for one year or 25 years, we’re all very appreciative.”

The afternoon ended with the award for the most creative costume. Hilary White won with her imitation of the infamous Tiger King, which was completely spot on and a great nod to contemporary pop culture. I wonder who will dress up as a Merlion next year?

Cecile Collineau recently moved to Jakarta. Even while based overseas, she will continue to renew her FOM membership.



Simone Lee receiving her three-year pin virtually



Roopa Dewan receiving the Salome de Decker award



Maureen Hellspong receiving her 25-year certificate



Clara Chan with her 10-year certificate



Best Costume winner, Hilary White as the tiger king

FOM Members Care

March is FOM's Month for the Environment

By Darlene D Kasten

A *Healthy Planet* is one of three missions that FOM Members Care focuses on. It takes centre stage every March. Last year, in the final days before Singapore's Circuit Breaker, FOM Members Care took on Singapore's most visible environmental challenge, haze. We hit the streets in Tiong Bahru to administer surveys for an NUS-sponsored study on sustainable palm oil use in local restaurants and hawker centres. Findings from that activity will help the charity *PM haze* formulate street-level strategies to combat haze pollution in Singapore. We are continuing the tradition by organising two new environmental events for March 2021.

The first is a tree-planting activity, partnering with Singapore's Friends of the Trees, part of the One Million Trees movement, a nationwide effort to transform Singapore into a City in Nature. Launched by the government in April 2020, the goal is to plant a million trees across Singapore over 10 years, bringing the number of trees here to more than eight million to improve the urban environment and also Singapore's resilience towards climate change.

Our second event is participation in a National Parks Dragonfly Watch, a citizen science initiative to involve the community in collecting valuable information about dragonflies and damselflies in our parks, gardens and



reserves. With the data collected from surveys done in various parks around Singapore, NParks can start piecing together information about where our dragonflies and damselflies are found and in what numbers. This information will contribute towards better park management and conservation measures.

Check out our webpage and join our Facebook group for details of these events as well as other FOM Members Care events to show you care about preserving the heritage of Singapore, its history and culture, our friends and neighbours, our environment and the health of our planet.

Darlene D Kasten is a coordinator with FOM Members Care.

Patron of Heritage Award for FOM

At a digital event held on 24 November 2020, Friends of the Museums (FOM) was awarded the Patron of Heritage Award (POHA) by the National Heritage Board (NHB). Initially scheduled for 8 May 2020 at the National Museum of Singapore, the event was moved to the second half of the year and eventually online out of consideration for the safety of everyone involved. The award celebrates FOM's valuable contribution towards building a vibrant art, heritage and culture scene in Singapore.

The NHB worked with Pan-United, a Singaporean concrete innovation company, to design and create the trophy, which is made of a special translucent concrete called PanU illumine. The award designer and team leader from Pan-



Garima sharing the experience with some FOM members

United was Janelle Loh. According to the artist, the design was inspired by the wonder of crystals that glitter and sparkle upon catching the light. Their concept was that, "the buildings of tomorrow are shaped through new possibilities in concrete that make it smart and sustainable". The trophy mixes the science of concrete with art.

POHA was inaugurated by the NHB in 2006 to recognise both individuals and organisations that give generously to Singapore's heritage causes. Including FOM, 88 patrons were recognised for their contributions in 2019. Congratulations to all FOM volunteers and members.



Garima holding the silvery POHA Award

FOM's Public Information Meeting and Open Morning Events

Zooming into Action

By Charlotte Dawson

So many things have been disrupted this 'Year of COVID-19' but two of FOM's larger public information sessions rose to the challenge. We took to Zoom and participation reached unprecedented levels for both.

In normal years, our Public Information Meeting (PIM) is an event in May that introduces our docent training programmes to interested participants. Each museum's or heritage institution's docent team has a table set up and eager volunteers ready to share their enthusiasm for guiding. The programme co-heads have an opportunity to take centre stage and tell all our visitors about their museum, enticing them to take on the docent training with their team.

This year we realised that COVID-19 would completely disrupt our docent training, ultimately postponing it an entire year. Ever hopeful, we had already moved the PIM to August thinking it may be possible to continue docent training with a delayed start. The date was set in our diaries for 31 August ... but what would we do if there was no docent training?

The team flew into action, adapting and recreating content for our members. *Asian Arts & History for Museum Enthusiasts* was born. PIM 2020 focused on this exciting new workshop. The organising team of Laura Socha, Aditi Kaul and myself, stepped into action, planning the workshop, marketing it, and preparing a revised PIM to share it with our members. The workshop was a first-time, unique collaboration between all of the FOM docent communities, and the PIM would be as well. This was an exciting new twist ... and so was using Zoom to give the meeting a platform and audience.

Our PIM was attended by 180 people – a record number – from FOM members to the general public. The coordinators from the 11 museums, heritage institutions and heritage trails each shared the highlights of their institution. Laura, Aditi and Charlotte shared the details about the exciting new *Asian Arts & History for Museum Enthusiasts Workshop* and



even trialled the 'Breakout Rooms' feature on Zoom with all our participants. The success of PIM led to new FOM memberships and over 150 registrations for the workshop.

This was just the beginning. Three weeks later, our FOM Membership team and the activities coordinators brought us our first ever virtual Open Morning (OM). Spearheaded by Christine Zeng, the OM introduced all our activities and programmes to FOM members new and old, as well as those interested in joining FOM. We shared how FOM has adapted to the times, starting with the early success of our Monday Morning Lockdown Lectures through the Circuit Breaker. These gave way to some amazing armchair travels organised by the Study Tours team. The video of the museum highlights created at the PIM was shared. The PIM team gave a quick final shout-out about Asian Arts and History, and we heard about a variety of FOM activities such as the film study group, book groups, study groups, the textile enthusiasts group, FOM Cares, and more. The OM concluded with a fantastic first online Monday Morning Lecture, *From the Coromandel Coast to the Straits: Revisiting our Tamil Heritage* by Aparna Balasubramaniam.

Having a virtual platform for PIM and OM made the events available to a much wider audience. Both had amazing attendance, including friends joining in from as far away as Australia, Europe and North America. While it is not the easiest task to switch a live event to Zoom, our FOM teams worked hard to create something different and accessible. It was so successful it begs the question: will we Zoom into action again for our next PIM or OM?

Charlotte Dawson is one of the Overall Co-Heads of Docent Training and a dedicated member of the Asian Arts and History workshop team.



Study Group

Join us in January to study Asian Cities: Historical, Modern and Mythical. Study Group plans to learn about historical cities – why they were important and how they transformed over time. We also hope to learn about modern cities, how they are planned, and the infrastructure that keeps them liveable. We might also study a few mythical cities and their place in Hindu, Buddhist or Chinese mythology. Enjoy a little armchair travel as the study group delves into Asian cities. Topics might include Angkor Wat, Seoul, a capital and economic powerhouse, planned cities in Asia, or urban planning in Singapore. More information and suggested topics can be found on the FOM Asian Study Group webpage.



This study group will be conducted on the Zoom platform. An organisational meeting will be held on Wednesday 13 January. There will be eight meetings from 27 January to 24 March, with two presentations per meeting. The study group will not meet on 10 February owing to the Lunar New Year break.

Please note, all participants are expected to present on a topic.

However, if we have more than 16 sign-ups, a lottery will be held to determine presenters and auditors. Auditors will be expected to pay the same study group fee and to attend all sessions.

Registration opens on the FOM website on Wednesday 30 December at 9:00 am. Fee: \$25.



Textile Enthusiasts Group

All events will be conducted via Zoom unless announced otherwise. The Zoom link will be sent to registrants the evening prior to the programme.

Programme: Chinese Wayang of Singapore

Speaker: Jeffrey Eng and Laura Yung

Date: Friday 15 January

Time: 10:00 am arrival for 10:15 start

Chinese opera is known as *wayang* in Singapore. Jeffrey Eng is the proprietor of Eng Tiang Huat Chinese Cultural Shop. Join Jeffrey and TEG member Laura Yung, for a peek into Singapore's cultural past and an overview of Chinese *wayang*, especially the amazing costumes.

Jeffrey Eng became involved in his family's business at the age of 10 and is passionate about conserving the crafts of *wayang* costumes, accessories, musical instruments and textiles.

FOM member **Laura Yung's** interest in Cantonese opera started while watching performances with her grandmother. She credits her command of the Cantonese language to listening to and reading opera lyrics.



Programme: The World of Modest Fashion

Date: Friday 26 February

Time: 10:00 am arrival for 10:15 start

Modest fashion, hijabi fashion or Islamic fashion, the Islamic fashion industry is expected to hit US\$370 million by 2021, with big names in fashion jumping onto the bandwagon. What exactly is modest or hijabi fashion? Join docent Sadiyah Shahal as she explains its basics and why it is expected to grow.

Singaporean Sadiyah Shahal joined FOM in 2014 and now guides at the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall and the Malay Heritage Centre. After graduating from NUS, Sadiyah's career was in television until she switched professions, obtaining a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education.



The new session of the Textile Study Group begins on 22 January 2021. Registration for the limited spots was opened to TEG members at 2:00 pm on Monday 28 December 2020. Details are available on the TEG page on the FOM website.

Explore Singapore!

Owing to the COVID-19 limits imposed on gatherings, ES! tours are for members only and limited to 17 participants.



Waterloo Street: Singapore's Multicultural Microcosm

Thursday 7 January
10:00 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$35

Located within the heart of the city, Waterloo Street represents multicultural Singapore at its best. Once a part of the colonial "European Town", this is one of the very few

areas outside the city's conservation districts that retains some of its original architecture, along with buildings representing various periods of the urban fabric of 20th century Singapore.



Of Swordfish and a Sabre – Myths and Misfits of Redhill

Thursday 21 January
10:00 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$35

Glass bottles, horses, vermicelli, swordfish and a sacred sabre.

How do they feature in the collective memories of people of Redhill, or Bukit Merah, today one of Singapore's largest public housing estates? At the sites of three local temples - one intact, one recently refurbished and one destroyed without a trace, each dating back over a century, our community heritage guide will reflect on Redhill's struggles between reclamation and relevance.



Tiong Bahru Heritage Walk

Thursday 4 February
10:00 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$30

Today the district of Tiong Bahru is a trendy, hipster enclave. But in the

1930s it was one of the first areas to be redeveloped by the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT). Let Explore Singapore! take you on a guided walking tour, listen to the stories of the past, and discover many different facets of early Singapore. Discover what is both above and below the ground, all in this one small area.



City Trees Walk

Thursday 18 February
10:00 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$25

Singapore is known as a City in a Garden. The government's Garden City vision was officially

formulated in 1967. The aim was to turn Singapore into a city with abundant greenery and a clean environment for all to enjoy and today we see the results of that vision all around us. During this tour you will learn to appreciate the work behind planning and maintaining the treescape along the riverbank and around the Esplanade Park.



Exploring Balestier Road – A Heritage Trail off the Beaten Track

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

Many people have explored Chinatown, Kampong Gelam and Joo Chiat. But few would have heard of Balestier Road, much less know it as a heritage trail. Few people know about its rich history. Singaporeans know it as a place to shop for home renovation materials and good food. An eclectic mix of traditional shops: old style bakeries, a metalsmith, karaoke lounges and night clubs of a bygone era are being replaced by spas, massage salons, budget hotels and modern condominiums. On this heritage walk you will discover another facet of Singapore and its history.



Ethnobotany Garden Tour

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

Tucked away into a corner of our World Heritage Botanic Gardens is a special Ethnobotany Garden, which opened in June 2018. It features 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. Join us on this specially organised tour and gain an understanding of another aspect of the region's history, its plants and their historical, economic and anthropological roles.

Monday Morning Lectures

Currently all Monday Morning Lectures (MML) are held online. Please download the ZOOM app in order to attend. Lectures are open to FOM members only. Visit the Community Events page on the FOM website to sign up, [registration opens one week before the event](#). The lectures will begin promptly at 11:00 am.



11 January • Korean Traditional Folk Painting, Minhwa Art
Speaker: Sissy Huyn Park

Korean folk painting, *minhwa*, has diverse genres. To understand this art, one needs to understand Korean history. From the epoch of the Goryeo dynasty and Buddhism, through the rule of the Joseon dynasty

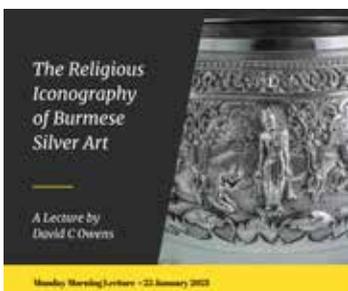
and Confusion philosophy, to the era of the Korean empire, *minhwa* art saw two periods of renaissance; the Korea wave is the current movement.



18 January • Asia's Future in the Post-Pandemic World
Speaker: Parag Khanna

Geopolitical tensions, the trade war and the COVID-19 pandemic have

combined to push the world towards greater regionalisation, at the expense of globalisation. While the pandemic originated in Asia, it will also be the first region to recover and has the highest potential for renewed growth. What do the US election and shifting Western policies around technology and supply chains mean for Asia? Which sectors will generate the most momentum for investors looking to capitalise on Asia's enormous demographic and economic weight? And in what direction will Asia's collective rise take the global system?



25 January • The Religious Iconography of Burmese Silver Art
Speaker: David C Owens

Burmese silverwork from the 19th to the early 20th century is embellished with Buddhist and Hindu religious art. The

original sources of these allegorical decorative narratives are the Theravada Buddhist canon and the epic Ramayana poem from the Hindu tradition. Buddhist narratives include episodes from the life of the Buddha and Therigatha poetry by the 'Elder Nuns'. This presentation reveals and deciphers the alluring and high-fidelity religious iconography, which is distinctive to Burmese silver art.



1 February • Imperial Creatures: Colonialism, Animals and History in Singapore
Speaker: Timothy P Barnard

Imperialism was one of the most fundamental

forces in the creation of modern Singapore. This talk will focus on how the history of animals during the colonial era helped provide new perspectives into the past of this nation-state. Tales of dogs, monkeys, tigers, horses and bullocks as they trotted, scampered and roamed through colonial society can unlock unique insights into this past, and help us better understand the Singapore we call home.



8 February • The Ox in Chinese History and Art
Speaker: Patricia Bjaaland Welch

Meet the Chinese zodiac calendar's heavy lifter, the ox. Join us as we welcome

in the Year of the Ox with an MML on the many roles oxen have played in Chinese art and history, from sacrificial animal to a symbol of the bucolic life of those who have turned their backs on society.

15 February • NO LECTURE OWING TO THE CHINESE NEW YEAR PUBLIC HOLIDAY

Happy Chinese New Year to all who celebrate.



22 February • Zheng He and Indian Ocean Connections
Speaker: Tansen Sen

This presentation examines several facets of the Ming admiral Zheng He's (1371–1433) seven expeditions across the Indian Ocean between 1405 and 1433. The presence of the powerful Ming not only introduced

an unprecedented militaristic aspect to the Indian Ocean region, but also led to the emergence of state-directed commercial activity extending from China to the coast of Africa. The expeditions also stimulated the movement of people and animals and might have facilitated the entry of European commercial enterprises into the Indian Ocean region during the second half of the 15th century.

Clan Associations

By Darly Furlong

Clan associations were an integral part of Singapore's formative years. In the early 1900s, you could sail from Fujian without a job or an abode and upon arrival in Singapore visit your clan association to get assistance with both. The Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan (SHHK) was established in 1840 at the Thian Hock Keng temple grounds, to cater to the needs of the new Hokkien-speaking migrants. The clan has always supported several social causes, especially education. They started the Tao Nan School in 1906 and donated land to construct Nanyang Technological University in 1955.

To this day, the clan association continues to do good work in the field of education and in November 2020, made a significant donation to the Singapore Institute of Technology to build their new campus.

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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www.ntu.edu.sg

Japanese Docents

The Globalisation of Japanese Culture – Manga and Anime

When you hear the words “Japanese culture”, *manga* (Japanese comics) and *anime* (Japanese animation) might not be the first components that come to mind. However, they are certainly among the main influences that occupy a central position in Japanese culture, alongside others such as the kimono and sushi. In recent years, the popularity of both *manga* and *anime* has greatly increased, as they are translated into English and other languages around the world. Singapore is no exception.

Last month, there was a *Doraemon’s Time-Travelling Adventures* exhibition at the National Museum of Singapore. Photo opportunities with Doraemon were available and were among the highlights of this event. As you may know, Doraemon is one of the most popular characters from Japanese *manga* and the series has sold over 100 million copies around the world. It has also been adapted into a successful *anime*, which has been translated into 12 different languages.

All around the world *anime* is being accepted as an art form – the very famous Studio Ghibli *anime* movie *Spirited Away* (2001), filmed by the famous *anime* creator Hayao Miyazaki, won an Academy Award. In May 2019, the British Museum in London held the largest ever *manga*



exhibition outside Japan. If you are interested in Japanese *manga*, I highly recommend that you browse through them at the library or at Kinokuniya, Singapore’s the largest bookstore. I promise that you will discover a previously unknown new world.

Maki Mashita, JD Coordinator 1

FOM Maskerade



Grab your markers, your glue, glitter and style!
Find inspiration from nature, lit, museums ... to compile.

Use a face mask, maybe an FOM one, or make your own.
Decorate it! Dazzle us all with your talents unknown.

Get the creative juices flowing, the sky’s the limit!
The FOM Maskerade Contest - you must enter submissions to win it!

Contest runs:
1 December to 15 January
Winners announced in Passage

Submit Photos of your Mask* to:

 #FOMaskerade
 FOMaskerade@gmail.com
*unlimited submissions allowed

 Friends of the Museums Singapore

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Raffles Hotel Arcade, Singapore 188719
6475 6941

@ emgallery.sg f emgallery www.em.gallery

Museum Information and Exhibitions

Please check individual museum websites for latest information on guided tours by FOM docents.

Asian Civilisations Museum

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

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

FOM guided tours:
Mon to Fri 11:00 am, 2:00 pm and 3:30 pm, Fri 7:00 pm (English)
Mon to Fri 10:30 am and every second Saturday 1:30 pm (Japanese)
First Wed of the month 11.30am (Korean)
Second Thursday of the month 11:30 (Spanish)
Third Thursday of the month 11:30 (French)

Understanding Asia through Singapore

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

Dawn Ng: Perfect Stranger (through 28 Feb)

Perfect Stranger is a narrative time capsule spanning a vast sea of paper washed in a gradient of words and colour. Each sheet emits phosphorescence arising from a synthesis of shades unique to, and reflective of its script.

This verbose body of work stems from a distilled collection of texts drawn from a daily Q&A project with a stranger, an Israeli psychologist Zehavit Efrati living in Singapore, in 2016. Every day over the course of a year, the psychologist asked the artist a question, and the artist responded. This exchange between two women grew into an intimate documentary of time, space, and self. Static yet glimmering, the installation is visually emblematic of the irony and balance in binaries and dualities – between the monumental and mundane, stillness and change, materiality and ephemerality, was and is, hello and goodbye.

thINK: Chinese Calligraphy, Connoisseurship and Collecting (through 25 Apr)

The act of remembering involves both storing and retrieving. Adopting an archival approach, the exhibition displays historical objects from the Ming and Qing periods within an intimate, contemporary setting. *thINK* (read "think ink") seeks to not only present, but to evoke personal responses, to provoke dialogues between the past and present, through time and space. Get acquainted with the art of the brush and reflect on issues such as how we communicate, and what we choose to hold dear.

Gillman Barracks

9 Lock Road, Singapore 108937
www.gillmanbarracks.com

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

Opening hours: Tues to Sun – Refer to individual gallery pages on-line for opening hours
Closed Mondays & Public Holidays

FOM guided tours:
Sat 4:00 pm: Art & History Tour
Sat 5:00 pm: History and Heritage Tour
To register please visit www.fom-gillman-barracks.eventbrite.com

NTU CCA

Trinh T. Minh-ha. Films. (through Feb 2021)

This exhibition features works by the world-renowned independent filmmaker, writer, composer, and post-colonial theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha, as well as a new commission by the NTU CCA Singapore. The spatial display of the films evokes Trinh's 2001 exhibition at the Secession in Vienna, one of the first instances where full-length films were presented in an art gallery context. Taking this specific cue, which also involved Trinh's writings and publications, five films were



selected to be in the exhibition hall, enquiring about modes of viewing the cinematic, and how to inhabit the physical and temporal spaces in between her works.

Indian Heritage Centre

5 Campbell Lane, Singapore 209924
www.indianheritage.org.sg

Open Tuesday to Sunday & public holidays. Closed on Mondays.
Tues to Thurs 10:00 am to 7:00 pm, Fri & Sat 10:00 am to 8:00 pm
Sundays & public holidays 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

FOM guided tours: Tues-Fri 12:00 pm for the permanent galleries
11:00 am on Wed and Fri for the special exhibitions
Tamil tours (FOM) 11:30am on the first Friday of each month for the special exhibition

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

Malay Heritage Centre

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

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

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

National Museum of Singapore

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

Opening hours:
Daily 10:00 am – 7:00 pm

FOM guided tours:
Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm (English)
Mon to Fri 10:30 am and every first Saturday 1:30 pm (Japanese)

The National Museum of Singapore is the nation's oldest museum that seeks to inspire with stories of Singapore and the world. Its history dates back to 1849, when it opened on Stamford Road as the Raffles Library and Museum.

#NeverBeforeSG (through 31 Jan)

#NEVERBEFORESG addresses the impact of COVID-19 in Singapore and serves as a visual documentation seen through the eyes of 87 creatives. The series of artworks capture the state of mind of the nation and its people and is charted in the different phases since the announcement of the Circuit Breaker (distancing) measures in Singapore. The artworks and creative expressions share thought-provoking reflections and the myriad of mutual emotions that unveil



Museum Information and Exhibitions

hopes, fears and anxieties experienced during these challenging times. See these heart-warming and thought-provoking creative works at <https://neverbefore.sg>.

NUS Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts

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



Free admission

Opening hours:

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

Monday: Visits by appointment for schools/faculties only.

Wishful Images: When Microhistories Take Form (through 25 Dec)

Five artists – Lucy Davis, Kao Chung-Li, Kuniyoshi Kazuo, Nguyễn Trinh Thi and Aya Rodriguez-Izumi – whose artistic practices question the governmentality between the lived and the non-living, explore the impact of contemporary geopolitical realities recapitulated under the Asian Cold War through a re-historicisation of the past into the present. *Wishful Images* resembles a collective attempt to relate lesser-known historical events through the persistent efforts of artists, recounted and re-articulated in various forms and mediums. Taking its cue from Ernst Bloch's concept of wishful images, the exhibition examines a constellation of unrealised possibilities, in which history, images, and politics triangulate.

Wartime Artists of Vietnam: Drawings and Posters from the Ambassador Dato' N. Parameswaran Collection (through 26 Jun)

This remarkable collection of 1,208 wartime artworks is one of the largest known private collection of its kind outside of Vietnam. Collected during Ambassador Dato' N. Parameswaran's tenure as Malaysia's Ambassador to Vietnam from 1990 to 1993 and built chiefly around artists associated to North Vietnam, *Wartime Artists of Vietnam* is the fourth in a series of shows drawing from this collection, which has been on long-term loan to the NUS Museum since 2015 to exhibit, research and facilitate teaching.

NUS Baba House

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

English heritage tours: Tues - Fri, 10:00 am; Mandarin Heritage Tour: First Monday of each month 10:00 am;
Self-Guided Visits: Every Sat, 1.30 pm/2.15 pm/3.15 pm/4.00 pm
To register, please visit babahouse.nus.edu.sg/visit/plan-your-visit
For enquiries, please email babahouse@nus.edu.sg

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

The Peranakan Museum

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

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



Singapore Art Museum

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



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

Time Passes (through 21 Feb)

On view at City Hall Wing, Level 3, Singtel Special Exhibition Gallery B, National Gallery Singapore

Time Passes is conceived as a corridor of time that reflects on the passage of our days as we navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. The works of 13 local artists presented in the exhibition, most of which are new commissions or adaptations of existing works, touch on modes of caring, living and relating, especially in a time that begets difficulties and uncertainties. The exhibition is part of *Proposals for Novel Ways of Being*, an initiative by Singapore Art Museum and National Gallery Singapore in partnership with 10 other local art institutions, independent art spaces and art collectives.

STPI Creative Workshop and Gallery

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



Opening hours:

Mon to Fri: 10:00 am – 7:00 pm, Sat: 9:00 am – 6:00 pm, Sun: 10:00 am – 5:00 pm
Closed Public Holidays

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

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

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

Heman Chong: Peace, Prosperity And Friendship With All Nations (20 Feb – 18 Apr)

From the Brexit coin, the backdoors of embassies, the spy novel, and the Straits Times to the QR codes of Singapore's COVID-19 SafeEntry system, the artworks in the exhibition bring together a constellation of conceptual gestures based upon everyday encounters and autobiographical objects that chronicle the complex political and cultural landscape of our present moment.

Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall

12 Tai Gin Road, Singapore 327874
Tel: 6256 7377
www.wanqingyuan.org.sg



Opening hours:

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

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

FOM Special exhibition guided tours: 10:30 am 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.

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Annual Membership Form

Mail to: FOM – Membership Secretary
61 Stamford Road, # 02-06 Stamford Court, Singapore 178892

Family Name: _____

Given Name: _____

Date of Birth: / / Nationality: _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____ Tel: _____

Handphone: _____ (RENEWALS ONLY)
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Email: _____

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- JOINT MEMBERSHIP \$100
Include Spouse/Partner details on a separate sheet.
- FAMILY MEMBERSHIP
2 Adults + 5 Children \$120
Include Family details on a separate sheet.
- YOUNG FRIENDS MEMBERSHIP \$30
Applicants under 21. Include proof of age.
- SENIOR CITIZEN MEMBERSHIP \$30
Applicant must be 60+. Include proof of age.
- JOINT SENIORS MEMBERSHIP \$50
Both Applicants must be 60+. Include proof of age.
Include Spouse/Partner details on a separate sheet.
- DONATION (optional)

Cash Payment: Membership Fee: \$ _____ Donation: \$ _____

Credit Card Payment: Visa MC: Card #: _____ Exp Date: _____

Cheque Payment: Bank Name: _____ Cheque #: _____ Amount \$: _____

Cheque should be made out to FOM.

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signature & date

signature spouse/ partner/ joint family & date

To find out more contact us at 6337.3685, info@fom.sg or at: www.fom.sg