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Friends of the Museums Singapore

July / August 2017



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President's Letter

Dear Friends,

We have just crossed the half-way mark of 2017. Have you fulfilled any of your new year resolutions yet? Mine was to find time to catch up on my reading. I am currently into my fourth book of the year. It is *The Sympathizer* by Pulitzer Prize-winner Viet Thanh Nguyen. This book was highly recommended by two of our book groups.

We had a good turnout for our Public Information Meeting (PIM) in May with many sign-ups for the docent training programme in September. If you missed out on this event, it is not too late to enrol, as we will be holding another PIM on 31 August at the National Museum of Singapore.

The month of May also brought cheer to our volunteers as we celebrated their contributions at the Annual Volunteers Appreciation Morning. We gave out long-service pins to well-deserving volunteers, with Sabine Silverstein receiving her 20-year pin. Her sustained involvement in FOM is an inspiration to all. The day's beautiful moments are captured on pages 4 and 5.

My heartiest congratulations to Sylvia Khoo, this year's recipient of the Salome de Decker award. The award is presented each year to a volunteer who has quietly and positively given time and skills to FOM. Sylvia is highly regarded by the docent community for her exceptional guiding skills and willingness to share her wealth of knowledge with fellow docents. She embodies the ideals that this award represents – teamwork, respect for others, giving freely and growing through service.

With National Day just around the corner, our writers reminisce about places in Singapore that have undergone or will be undergoing changes because of redevelopment plans. Yulia Pak explores the history of Katong's seaside villas, well-known blogger and heritage enthusiast Jerome Lim pays tribute to the old Sungei Road market, while Rosie Wee takes a poignant look at her childhood home in Saunders Road.

The seventh edition of the family friendly *Imaginarium* at the Singapore Art Museum titled *To the Ends of the Earth*, explores new ways of seeing and experiencing the world around us through interactive artworks by nine contemporary artists. If you have not visited this exhibition, you can plan a family outing to SAM at 8Q for some fun before it ends on 27 August.

Those of you who are interested in Chinese symbolism may be captivated by the children's clothing and accessories on display at the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall's special exhibition, *Stitches of Love – Hidden Blessings in Children's Clothing and Accessories*. Follow our docent-led tours to learn about the symbolic meaning of the beautiful motifs on this traditional wear.

Finally, for those of you headed for a summer break, I would like to wish you a wonderful time. For those who prefer to stay and enjoy the many exhibitions and festivities in Singapore, remember to catch the breathtaking fireworks leading up to 9 August. Happy National Day to you all!



Clara Chan
FOM President 2017



A Different Type of Guiding

By Katherine Seow



Boar's-head tureen and underdish, China, 1760s, porcelain



Hong bowl, China, around 1785, porcelain

I signed up for this workshop thinking that people with a disability were those who needed a wheelchair. Later I realised that visually impaired and hearing-impaired persons are included. Questions zipped through my mind. I saw solutions for the hearing-impaired, but a museum visit was visual. How would it work when you couldn't see?

On Friday morning, the clock chimed 10:00 as I entered the Asian Civilisations Museum. Already breathless, I dashed down the circular staircase and met several wheelchair-bound elderly people queuing for the chair-lift to the Discovery Room. Slipping inside, I found two rows of chairs, with all seats in the second row taken. Two men in black sat in the front, left corner. I made for the right.

After instructions on handling a wheelchair and leading a visually impaired person, we were let loose. I joined Anna, an ACM guide, and Joshua, a dashing 20-year old first-time visitor. Joshua had taken the lift down to the basement, but was game to climb the stairs back up. Even with his cane, it took him some time to negotiate the circular staircase. I suspect he didn't 'understand' the pie-shaped steps till he had stepped on several. This made me realise that the pace of the tour would be slower than usual.

In the allocated 30 minutes, Anna 'showed' Joshua four exhibits, all from the Trade Gallery on the ground floor. These included the large ceramic jars, a boar's head soup tureen and platter, several *kendi* (pouring vessels with a spout but no handle) and a punch bowl. Anna mentioned that during a regular tour, she would have shown twice the number of artefacts within the allocated time span.

Back in our seminar room, lunch was waiting. Over food, Anna and I interviewed Joshua about the morning's experience. Joshua said he had followed Anna's description of the artefacts' colours because he was born with sight. We hadn't appreciated this point until we learned that someone born blind would be unable to grasp the concept of colour.

When sharing this guiding experience with the larger group, I asked if it was possible to give too much description. Everyone needed time to digest the information. Someone who was visually impaired probably translated what he heard into a mental construct. How could we docents help this process? Was it by asking questions so he could articulate

his thoughts? Did the questions give him the breathing space he needed for processing? Someone mentioned props. The idea was pounced on. Shape, size and thickness could be described, but the visitor was better off handling a mock-up and having the image take form.

Anna told us the story of a trader who had commissioned a ceramic bowl painted with a panoramic view of some *hongs* (trading houses). I felt that understanding why the trader desired this souvenir would make the object real for the disabled visitor. For me, bringing the artefacts to life boiled down to telling stories visitors could identify with.

I left the seminar excited about guiding a visually impaired group. Planning was needed to select the artefacts, write the script and decide on the museum route, but the satisfaction of showing someone who couldn't see how beautiful the objects were, would be ample reward.



Katherine Seow, Joshua Tseng and Anna Tweedie

Katherine Seow has been an FOM member since 2015 and graduated as a TPM docent this year. In her prior life, Katherine worked in an investment company before switching tracks to write on a freelance basis..

Photos courtesy of the author



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On the Cover: Sungei Road's thieves' market today, a pale shadow of what it looked like in its heyday when it was known as *Robinson Petang* (Afternoon Robinson). Photo by Jerome Lim.

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.

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Going Where FOM Has Never Been Before

By Yasmin Abdol Hamid (MHC and NMS Docent)

To top off all the treats that FOM's do-gooders received at the Volunteers Appreciation Morning (VAM) on 19 May, we had the privilege of being the *first* audience to witness the conferring of the Salome de Decker Award at a VAM event. In return, we played loud cheerleaders for this year's recipient, Sylvia Khoo, who was chosen from a pool of eight nominees as being the most dedicated, tireless and dutiful volunteer, one who prefers to work quietly behind the scenes.

The emcee and event organiser, Sadiyah Shahal, wanted us to guess the honouree's identity and gave clues such as, "She's been an active docent since 2008, guiding at the TPM, NMS, MHC and SYSNMH....her name starts with S." I'd like to believe the table I was at was the first to shout "Sylvia"! No prizes for us, but the stunning Salome de Decker sculpture went to Ms Khoo, who was overseas on the day, but had thoughtfully despatched her bubbly sister Christina to receive the award on her behalf. Christina also conveyed Sylvia's words, penned from London. She wrote that she was



Sylvia Khoo's sister, Christina, receiving the award on her behalf





surprised by the tribute, but grateful for her 10 years with FOM guiding in four museums, for the friendships forged and for the memories that have added colour and depth to her life.

For a new docent such as me, Sylvia's message was most inspiring and so was watching the long-service pin presentations to volunteers who had three, five, 10, 15 and even 20 years of guiding under their belts. Sabine Silberstein, honoured for her two decades as a volunteer, couldn't attend, but was celebrated for being the docent on crutches in 2000, when she plodded on despite recovering from knee surgery.

FOM President Clara Chan summed up that passion in her speech, thanking all volunteers for lending their skills, talent and humour to our organisation. We beamed with pride when she revealed sparkling statistics from April 2016 through March 2017: that FOM had guided 5,700 tours,

comprising 52,000 visitors, including 1,000 from special needs groups.

With all that positivity in mind, we happily tucked into the Tiffany Cafe's diverse spread of salmon sashimi, *kam heong* clams, outstanding sambal squid and more. By the time I hit the bread and butter pudding with a drizzle from the chocolate fountain, food had become less important as Sadiah rallied all FOM volunteers to make a beeline for the selfie booth for group photos. Armed with props and statement flags, we tested the limits of our handphone memory banks.

We left with door gifts of a cute FOM tote bag and with the best moments deep in our hearts. Thanks to Sadiah for making this such a wonderful get-together and to all volunteers, make sure you don't miss the next VAM.

All photos by Gisella Harrold

Asian Holiday Escapes

By Siobhán Cool

This summer, amid life's driving forces, and relentless pace, seek out the solitary corners and steal a quiet moment in each balmy haven.



A morning chorus of village animals' squawks and squeals reach me on this Goan veranda



Driftwood seat on Pulau Sipadan, Malaysian Borneo.



Resting spot at jetty's end, Kapalai Water Village Resort, Sabah.



Breakfast table at the Willingdon Sports Club, Mumbai.

Siobhán Cool lives in Singapore with her family and steals away whenever she can, to sketch passing scenes.

The Grand Old Market

By Shivani Kanwal Kulpati

View from Mt Wallich, painted in 1856 by Percy Carpenter, was the first painting visitors saw at the recently concluded *Port Cities* exhibition at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM). A true treasure of the Singapore Collection, the painting presents a vivid picture of what Singapore looked like not too long after its establishment as a colonial settlement.

A closer look at the painting helps identify some familiar architectural structures that are still standing strong. One can spot the spire of the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd in Queen Street, St Andrews Cathedral, the Courthouse, as well as the famous landmarks on Telok Ayer Street, such as the Tien Hock Keng Temple and the Al-Abrar Mosque overlooking Telok Ayer Bay. Across the erstwhile Telok Ayer Bay, standing near the water's edge, is the hard-to-miss octagonal structure known then as the Telok Ayer Market.

The history of Telok Ayer Market is fascinating. Although it has been rebuilt many times, it has withstood the test of time, emerging stronger at every turn. Originally built in 1823 as a wood and attap (thatch from palm fronds) structure, the market was at the water's edge, a highly suitable location for the loading and unloading of fresh produce directly off boats. In 1833, Government Superintendent of Public Works George D Coleman's design was used to rebuild the market as the previous structure had become unsafe.

The market continued in the same spot for the next 40 years, after which it had to be moved to the Collyer Quay area owing to land reclamation of the Telok Ayer Basin. The architect for the new market was Municipal Engineer James MacRitchie. It took four years to complete and the new building was unveiled in 1894. Interestingly, MacRitchie retained Coleman's design and kept the building's octagonal shape, but added a few features such as the clock tower with clocks facing all four directions.

A new material, pre-fabricated Victorian cast iron, replaced the wood of the older building. Cast iron had become increasingly popular in Western Europe after the industrial revolution. It was more economical and safer as there was no danger of its deteriorating because of the climate or of its catching fire. The cast iron for MacRitchie's



View of Singapore from Mount Wallich by Percy Carpenter, 1856, collection of the National Museum of Singapore, photo courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore

design was specially made by Walter MacFarlane & Company, a foundry in Glasgow, Scotland. The delicate metalwork on the structure makes it the largest Victorian cast iron filigree structure in Southeast Asia.

The design of the building, with its eight radial passageways, makes it well ventilated and the windowed roof – called the lantern – ensures that the interior space has lots of natural light. The changes that the building has undergone stopped only recently. It was declared a gazetted national monument in 1973. Love for the building was evident when in the 1980s it was taken down piece by piece to make way for tunnelling for the underground MRT line and then put back together. It underwent yet another renovation before reopening in 2014.



The market's clock tower, photo by the author

Today, this octagonal Victorian structure is hard to miss and stands out in all its grandeur amidst the steel and glass skyscrapers in the centre of the Central Business District. Since the 1970s it has been known by a different name – *Lau Pa Sat*, (Hokkien for 'Old Market'). It became a hawker centre and continues to serve delicious local fare along with some international food. Come lunchtime on weekdays, huge crowds descend to get a taste of the scrumptious and economically priced food served here. They don't mind the long queues at the popular stalls or that it's often hard to find seating during peak hours. In the evenings, one of the adjoining streets gets converted to a 'Satay Street' with tables laid out for patrons in the street, making for great al fresco dining.

It's not too far from the ACM, so the next time you are in the vicinity, do go and see this beautiful edifice, one with such an amazing history. Of course, tucking in to some delicious food is also recommended.



Telok Ayer Market as it looks today, photo by the author

Shivani Kanwal Kulpati is a docent at ACM and finds the old buildings of Singapore fascinating.

Parsis in Old Singapore

By Abha Dayal Kaul

One way to explore 'old Singapore' is by visiting the relatively new and rather dazzling Indian Heritage Centre (IHC) nestled in Little India's bustling streets. This gem of a museum highlights the impact of well-known Indian communities such as the Tamils and Sikhs, and also of a small, but highly influential group who were among the earliest merchants and entrepreneurs in 19th century Singapore – the Parsis.

A millennium ago, as the ancient Persian empire fell to the Arabs, those fleeing persecution in Iran's Pars province sailed east to make India's west coast home. They brought their Zoroastrian faith with them, adopted the local Gujarati garb and language, incorporated Hindu rituals and customs into their religion, and forged a distinctive identity and culture as the Parsis of India. Eventually, in colonial times, enterprising Parsis helped develop the port city of Mumbai, erstwhile Bombay, through their prowess in shipbuilding and trading. Proficient in English and ready to embrace western ways, Parsis became trusted agents of and brokers between Indian and European merchants in the 18th and 19th centuries. They emerged as prominent independent traders, engaged in exporting cotton and opium to China, while importing silk and porcelain to India and Europe.

At the IHC, these special stories are conveyed through rare artefacts such as the embellished silk *jhabalu* or children's tunics, embroidered *kor* borders for saris and ladies' garments, and a spectacular sterling silver *sace* or ceremonial tray complete with receptacles for various offerings, including eggs and betel nuts or *sireh*. Exquisite embroidery on the *jhabalu* and the *kor* borders attests to the vibrant India-China trade that Parsis were keen players in – Chinese needlework was admired and brought home for Parsi women and the local market. Combined with traditional Indian motifs to adorn clothing, it was handcrafted as *gara*, treasured Parsi heirlooms to this day.

Soon after modern Singapore was founded in 1819, its pivotal location in the Indo-Chinese trade brought affluent Parsi merchants here. The earliest Parsi to arrive in town is recorded as a certain Muncherjee, who reportedly fell ill and for whom a burial ground was purchased in 1828 at Mount Palmer. The little hill by the coast has since been levelled, the cemetery relocated, and the site remembered now through Central Business District street names, Parsi Road and Palmer Road. An 1843 Singapore town plan features this 'Parsee Burying Ground', next to which a Parsi Lodge also sprang up – both long gone.



Ceremonial silver sace tray

Nearby, Mistri Road reminds us of a Parsi pioneer duly honoured at the IHC. Navroji Mistri arrived on Singapore's shores in 1909 as a young engineer to help construct the Keppel wharves. He later worked with a Parsi friend's soda drinks company, Framroz, before setting up his own – the Phoenix Aerated Water Co, finding success selling sodas in Malaya and India.



Parsi pioneer Navroji Mistri

Exemplifying the philanthropic spirit of his community, Mistri donated a million dollars to build a children's wing at the Singapore General Hospital. While hospitalised there, he was pained to see poor mothers and children sleeping on corridor floors. At his Palmer Road soda water factory, he provided shelter for all races during the Japanese occupation, and in a grand letter, was commended for bravery by British Prime Minister Clement Atlee.



Finely embroidered Chinese kor border

Navroji Mistri died a millionaire bachelor in 1953, before the foundation was laid for the hospital's Mistri Wing. Singapore's 300-odd Parsis are justifiably proud of this special gentleman, whose life, work and times are celebrated through artefacts pertaining to him and his compatriots in attractive and informative displays in the IHC's excellent galleries.

Abha Kaul is an Indian history and culture enthusiast and FOM docent. Her husband is half Parsi.

Photos courtesy of the Indian Heritage Centre

The Prinsenhof Museum, Delft

From Porcelain to Delftware

By Anne Pinto-Rodrigues

The picturesque city of Delft, in the South Holland province of the Netherlands, is home to a remarkable Dutch monument – the stately Prinsenhof Museum. While the museum was officially established only in 1911, the building housing the museum was built in the early 15th century as a monastery. It later came to be known as the Prinsenhof (meaning the Prince's Court) in the 1570s, when it served as the residence of William I, Prince of Orange (1533-1584), who is revered as the 'Father of the Fatherland'. William I played a key role in the Dutch revolt against Spanish rule, which paved the way for the formation of the Dutch Republic in 1581. The building is iconic in that it also bears witness to the assassination of William I in 1584. The bullet holes from the murder are still well preserved in one of the walls of the building.



The entrance of the Forbidden Porcelain: Exclusively for the Emperor exhibition, at the Prinsenhof Museum

Delft was one of six key ports of the Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie / VOC) and the influence of the VOC is still very visible in the city. In the 17th century, as the Dutch dominated the trade with China, millions of pieces of finely-crafted, blue and white Chinese porcelain were imported into the Netherlands. The popularity of the imported porcelain among European royalty and the wealthy, motivated local pottery artisans in Delft to emulate Chinese porcelain.

This led to the creation of a close adaptation, which became famous in its own right as 'Delft blue' or 'delftware'. The main difference between Chinese porcelain and delftware was that the former was made from clay containing kaolin, which when fired took on a lustrous appearance; while the latter was produced from a local clay, coated with a tin glaze after firing to recreate the sheen of porcelain. The supply of porcelain to Europe was disrupted following the internal conflicts that ensued after the death of the Ming Emperor Wanli in 1620. It was at this time that the popularity of delftware surged. The permanent collection of the Prinsenhof Museum includes several displays where the imported porcelain is placed alongside early recreations made by Dutch potters.

Much of the imported Chinese porcelain came from the imperial kilns of Jingdezhen, located in Jiangxi province. The clay in this area was rich in kaolin and petuntse (another key ingredient, also known as porcelain stone), and the proximity to forests and a river meant a plentiful supply of wood and water for the kilns. The porcelain wares made for the emperor were of the highest quality possible and underwent rigorous scrutiny. Only those pieces that passed the evaluation would be sent to the royal court in Beijing, nearly 1,400 kilometres away.

Currently, the museum is hosting the exhibition *Forbidden Porcelain: Exclusively for the Emperor* on until 9 July 2017. This exhibition centres around the porcelain that was specially made for Chinese



An imported Chinese porcelain platter (R) from the early 17th century placed next to a similar-looking Delftware reproduction (L) from the mid-1600s. Photo courtesy of the Prinsenhof Museum

emperors by the imperial kilns of Jingdezhen, but was later discarded and destroyed, as it did not meet the high standards expected of imperial wares. For centuries, fragments of the rejected porcelain objects lay buried in the area around the imperial kilns in Jingdezhen. When the area's buildings were demolished in the 1980s, these fragments were excavated, studied and pieced back together. This is the first time these reassembled porcelain wares, originally made for the Chinese emperor, are being seen outside Asia.

The exhibition focuses on artefacts spanning the reign of the Ming dynasty (1368 to 1644) and includes vases, plates, ceremonial/religious ware used in temples, wine cups, bowls and interestingly, bird feeders and cricket boxes. In porcelain wares made for the emperor, the dragon motif was shown having five claws, while in products made for general consumption, the dragon motifs were three-clawed.

To this day, the cities of Delft and Jingdezhen continue to be centres of pottery production. Their centuries-old relationship is reflected in the twin/sister-city status they share.



A reassembled platter from the time of the Ming Emperor Chenghua (1464-1687) that was destroyed most likely because the dragon in the motif had six digits on the right upper limb, instead of the customary five digits used in wares made for the emperor. An artefact in the Forbidden Porcelain exhibition on loan from the Archaeological Institute, Jingdezhen, China

Special thanks to Ms Suzanne Kluver, Curator of Decorative Arts at the Prinsenhof Museum, for sharing her knowledge and time.

Anne Pinto-Rodrigues, an Amsterdam-based writer-blogger, recently visited the Prinsenhof Museum. Anne chronicles her experiences of interesting places and people on her blog No Roads Barred www.noroadbarred.wordpress.com

Unless otherwise noted, photos by the author

Imaginarium: To the Ends of the Earth

By Fiona Silva

*"What is this life if full of care, we have no time to stand and stare."
--- William Henry Davies*

How do we deal with loss and trauma? How do we break away from patterns of behaviour that prevent us from truly being ... happy? How much time do we spend thinking about these things at all? These are the subtle issues that confront us through Hiromi Tango's multi-layered artwork, *Lizard's Tail*, located in the ground floor gallery of SAM@8Q.

For some visitors to the exhibition, this might be quite unexpected as they enter the museum thinking that they are attending a fun and interactive 'children's exhibition'. And indeed, this is the seventh edition of the Singapore Art Museum's family-focused exhibition that began as the *Children's Season*. With the aim of capturing young audiences in mind, each edition has grown in content and depth, and has brought a steady increase in visitors to SAM for each successive season. In 2015, the exhibition was renamed *Imaginarium*, with a subtitle that encompassed its theme. Whilst visitors explored the depths of the oceans last year, this year we are invited to step into the shoes of 'explorers' and 'adventurers' and embark on a journey to take a closer look at the earth we live in; our surroundings, our environment – but even beyond the physical earth, we venture on to explore the landscape of dreams and ideas.

Enter the reptile. Have you ever seen a lizard shed its tail? And then like magic, it grows back again! Hiromi Tango's bright, multi-media installation consists of several woolen sculptures, mirrors with neon lights, photographs and a video installation documenting a past performance relating to this work that she did in Derby, Western Australia. All these elements set the scene for us, the explorer, to



Getting up close and personal with Hiromi Tango's Lizard's Tail

ponder this unique ability of the lizard to self-amputate its tail when faced with danger. For the artist, the lizard represents resilience and adaptability, an amazing story of survival. Wouldn't it be amazing if we could also shed a part of ourselves – a habit or a hurt – and then move on with life? But then it keeps happening again and again and in this way the tail turns into a metaphor for a hurt we nurse or a lingering fear. While teardrop-shaped bulbs of LED-light pulsate within the soft tail-like structures suspended from the ceilings, a neon sign in the background emanates a gentle reminder: "more time more". Do we give ourselves time to heal?

While this artwork explores the potential of art-making for healing and draws the young visitor in to engage in ideas of expressing emotions, being empathetic and allowing for time to aid in the healing process, it also invites more mature audiences to contemplate the neuroscientific process of healing. I must admit I have become slightly obsessed with this idea now (ask any of my friends whom I have bored over the dinner table these last weeks with my lizard tail metaphor). But this just goes to show that *Imaginarium* is no longer merely a 'children's exhibition'.

Each of the featured nine artworks, by contemporary artists from the Asia-Pacific region, are similarly multi-layered and enticing, while all are unique in nature. And each calls out to us to take time to discover and engage. Bounpaul Phothuyzan's story of tragedy and resilience in Laos, for example, a neighbouring country that most of us don't have a visual landmark to relate to, but whose artists are slowly gaining visibility through SAM's recent exhibitions. Two hanging planters filled with harmless green ferns greet us and slowly we discover that these are two 'upcycled' cluster



Taking time to spot the mushrooms. These little curious visitors are captivated by the Calvin Pang's miniature mushroom sculptures



Wanderland by Mary Bernadette Lee, is a feast to the eyes with its fascinating print-illustrated textiles depicting elements of the rainforest



Unchalee Anantawat's manifestation of one of the landscapes of her dreams through her Floating Mountain installation invites the visitor to think about what their dreams look like and what they might represent

bombs that were retrieved and disarmed in Laos. Cluster bombs are large shells that contain hundreds of smaller bomblets and are designed to detonate upon impact with the ground or just above it. These are known to be deadlier than landmines.

Estimates indicate that from 1964 to 1973, the United States dropped cluster bombs containing over 270 million bomblets over Laos in 580,000 bombing missions, the equivalent of one plane-load every eight minutes,



Each artwork is accompanied by a supporting hands-on that visitors young and old are invited to participate in, such as this comic book activity sheet accompanying Eko Nugroho's My Wonderful Dream

24 hours a day, for nine years! Of these, approximately 80 million failed to detonate and less than 1% of these have been discovered and cleared to date. The high-grade aluminium shells of these disarmed weapons are sold and used throughout the country as planters, as stilt supports for houses, as woks and even smelted down to make spoons. Undiscovered millions more still lie hidden throughout the land, a fatal threat to civilians, especially children. Thus, Bounpaul's artwork, *The Lie of the Land* reveals to us the shocking and tragic history of Laos and the ingenuity and resilience of the people today, but it also tells us about their uncertain future on a day-to-day basis. When I showed them this artwork, I asked my children to take some time to be grateful for the ground that they walk on – for the safety of our surroundings that we too often take for granted.

While the visitor then ascends the staircase to the upper galleries, those who look carefully, spot several clusters of mushrooms – mostly brown, but some bright with spots on them. Singaporean artist Calvin Pang's *Where am I* is a delightful discovery for the children, encouraging them to slow down and to observe their surroundings more keenly – to see the magic in discovering subtle beauty in ordinary surroundings. As they giggle with glee with every mushroom cluster they encounter, they enter an artwork that basically looks like a wooden floor. Upon examination, the floor is studded with little droplets that look like dew-drops, but each is in fact a photograph embedded in the floor and encased in resin. On their hands and bare feet, the explorers discover that these are images of Singapore (598 images to

be exact) taken by artist Nippan Oranniwesna. From under the floorboards, if you put your ear to the ground, sounds emerge of the surroundings and conversations between people. *Another Island*, invites the visitor to engage intimately with it, to spot familiar places and to listen to the stories of people sharing about this island that is their home.

Even with these subtle artworks, *Imaginarium* is not for want of pure wonder. Mary Bernadette Lee's *Wanderland* is a spectacular artwork consisting of hanging cotton textile sculptures with print illustrations applied on them of the artist's own paintings. Inspired by her own experiences and memories of being in nature, this mesmerising, immersive installation once again invites intimacy as the explorer touches and gently pulls at the spring-suspended birds and swishes past the delicate teepee tents. *Wanderland* truly brings out the child in all of us as we immerse ourselves in this tropical paradise. And we if we take the time, we slowly discover the intangible medium that is such an integral part of the magic of this artwork – the shadows on the walls.

Similarly, as we enter the domain of dreams, Unchalee Anantawat's brightly coloured dream landscape, *Floating Mountain* is such a vibrant artwork that we might just miss the powerful shadows that it casts on the walls. What do your dreams look like? What happens when we dream? And where would we be today if we didn't have dreamers?



These young 'explorers' use the foldable binoculars that are part of the Imaginarium Activity Pack to take a closer look at Eko Nugroho's artwork

If you haven't already been, I'd say take the time to visit *Imaginarium*. Yes, bring your kids – and bring your friends and parents too. And make sure you factor in enough time to take it all in. *Imaginarium* runs till 27 August 2017 at SAM @8Q.

Fiona Silva was inspired to train as a docent at SAM in 2015 after wandering through several seasons of the *Imaginarium* at 8Q with her children. She currently guides at SAM, STPI and Gillman Barracks.

All photographs courtesy of the Singapore Art Museum

Memories of 8 Saunders Road

By Rosie Wee

The old house stands forlorn yet hopeful, like a museum artefact waiting for a docent to tell its story.

Number 8 Saunders Road is the terrace house that my late grandfather bought over a hundred years ago. It has witnessed stormy weather, cool periods of respite, surreptitious acts and whimsical moments. Life there was perplexing yet intriguing, like a splash of colour in a murky pond when sunbeams kiss it. My late mother grew up in that house. Until she passed away in August 2016, my 88-year-old, cancer-stricken, second aunt was its lone resident.

One evening, I was in the dining room with my aunt when I heard what sounded like footsteps on the floorboards above, adding to the poignancy of the echoing room as if the spirits of yesteryear were urging me to give voice to its stories. Unlike other houses that underwent extensive renovations, this house retains the vestigial remains of an era peopled by family members once upon a time. Each section of the house has its defining moments.

The house has a porch sheltered by an upper floor extension that has wooden floorboards. The architect had surreptitiously installed a chink in the floorboard right above the entrance to the house's main door. The chink can be closed by sliding a woodblock over it and serves the purpose of allowing the residents a 'preview' of their visitors even before they enter the sitting room. The ringing of the doorbell would send feet scuttling toward the chink and inquisitive eyes would scrutinise the clueless visitors below.



The front façade of the house



The chink in the floorboard that allowed us to look down from above and see who was arriving

Within the sitting room there is an elevated decorative segment carved into the wall. Although meant to add aesthetic value to the wall, it actually served a more sinister purpose. A person sitting on the staircase next to the carving in the wall would have an elevated view of the visitors and even be able to eavesdrop on their conversations. What architectural ingenuity! It was there that my mother and her siblings would view and assess visitors, especially those they had taken a fancy to.

The kitchen at the back of the house was a hive of activity in those days. This was where food was prepared for a family of ten children (the offspring of two wives), my grandfather and his sister-in-law, whom I addressed as *chimp poh*. Inevitably there were squabbles among siblings and jealous wives vying for my grandfather's attention. The cacophony would subside into muted silence when the patriarch was around. The same wives could also switch from being belligerent foes to gambling *kakis* (pals) within a short span. Together with my *chimp poh*, they would wait for grandfather to retire to his room before slipping into the kitchen to play their card games.

It was also within the kitchen area that my two grandmothers set up an improvised altar to pray to their ancestors during the Hungry Ghost Month, the seventh month of the Chinese almanac. Included in their list of spirits invited to feast on their offerings of food was a *nonya*, a Peranakan lady who had died when in her early 30s. Grandmother learned that she had been in love with

Grandfather when they were colleagues. When she passed on, Grandfather attended her wake and became seriously ill soon after, so Grandmother felt compelled to appease her spirit by making offerings, which became a yearly affair.

The toilet on the ground floor, at the far end of the house, resonates with stories my mother used to tell. My grandfather, the family patriarch, was a traditional, puritanical father who forbade his daughters from taking up activities he considered unbecoming of ladies. My fun-loving mother took a fancy to dancing. She actually enrolled in a dance class and was awarded a certificate. Besides dancing my mother would occasionally go gallivanting with her neighbours. This was done in stealth and her partner in crime was my second aunt. My mother would use the toilet to change into her fancy clothes then slip out through the back door. Upon her return, my aunt would let her in and hand her the home clothes.

One day, my grandfather was in this toilet doing his 'business' when he heard screams from my mother. As it was inconvenient to rush out, he pulled his whistle from his pocket and blew loudly. The neighbours came running with poles and sticks, expecting to beat up the intruder only to realise that the 'thief' was actually a pesky cockroach that had sent my mother into a frenzy. In later years, she screamed for my father whenever a cockroach flew in. My father would smash the creature then say to it, "Tonight, you must haunt this woman. She is the one who wanted you dead!" Between the kitchen and the toilet is a long, unsheltered passageway. On rainy nights, those who occupied the ground floor had to use an umbrella to reach it.



The back toilet where surreptitious behaviours took place

The back door of the house led to an alley. Without fail, around noon-time an old lady used to stand at a distance from the house and begin ranting and swearing at invisible enemies. Apparently her son had been hanged by the Japanese at that precise time of the day and she had lost her

reason. It was also in this alley that my sister, cousin and I would play hopscotch when we visited our grandparents. Badminton was a popular game among the neighbourhood children. By stringing a net across the alley, they transformed it into an improvised badminton court.

Itinerant hawkers would hawk their wares along this alley. Among them was my mother and her sisters' favourite hawker, the *tok tok* boy, a street peddler who used a woodblock and stick to announce his arrival. Upon taking orders he would carry bowls of finger-licking *mee pok tar* (dried noodles) from a stall in the Singapore Chinese Girls' School, to the house.

The house has two levels. My mother and her sisters occupied the upper level rooms while their brothers occupied the ground floor. As there were five daughters in the family, my mother had to share a room with two of her sisters. It was in this room that they would gather to share secrets, to gossip and occasionally to bicker.

In 1960, cabarets started sprouting up in Singapore. Those with limited budgets and whose preference was for a more relaxed and less rowdy atmosphere, usually opted for discotheques and nightclubs. In those days, my vivacious and pretty third aunt had a string of boyfriends to choose from and was occasionally taken to these night-spots for a swinging time. One evening she came back and told us about a hilarious incident she had experienced with her then boyfriend.

The dance floor was packed, the atmosphere sultry, music from the band was blasting away and the singer was belting out "Come on, Let's Twist". Bottoms started gyrating. And then it happened. Her boyfriend was twisting so vigorously that his dentures popped out and landed on the floor. Stopping abruptly to pick up the unsavoury object would have drawn attention and caused embarrassment. So this quick-thinking guy twisted his way across the dance floor, deftly picked it up and popped it back with such alacrity that none except his dancing partner saw. He would have carried on twisting had it not been for my aunt, who could not hold her laughter back any longer.

Docents who guide at the National Gallery have been told not to bypass significant parts of the building because their historical implications should not be overlooked. Similarly, like a whiff of fresh air in an increasingly stale atmosphere, I hope that 8 Saunders Road has been brought to life through my painting of words and scrapbook of images.

Rosie Wee guides at the National Museum of Singapore and the National Gallery Singapore. A retired Head of the English Department in a secondary school, she enjoys reading, writing, painting, travelling and guiding at the museums.

Photos courtesy of the author



The wall decoration that served a dual purpose

Katong Seaside Villas: Gone with the Wind

By Yulia Pak

There are very few places in modern Singapore where the old-world charm of the colonial past in its most romantic form still lingers in the salty air, as it does in beautiful Katong, along the east coast. While the heritage-rich city centre is busy and may feel overdeveloped, the old seaside part of Katong with its splendid heritage villas, still has echoes of the quiet and prosperous lives of Singapore's wealthy in the late 19th to the early 20th century. The idea for this article came about when I moved to a condo in Amber Road and realised that my clubhouse building dated back to the early 1900s, when it was built as an annex to the much more imposing, seaside mansion of the Elias family. The mansion itself is long gone, but its story inspired me to research the history of Katong and share the stories of the two beautiful seaside villas still standing along East Coast Road, but no longer by the seashore. Their very existence, repurposed functions and carefully restored appearances are the result of the joint efforts of the National Heritage Board, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and private investors. I imagine their first owners would be very surprised to see their century-old mansions not only carefully preserved, but housing new functions.

Not-so-humble beginnings

In the 19th century, just as in other areas of colonial Singapore, most of the large land plots were given over to plantations. Some landowners built immense mansions with direct access to the beach for their families to enjoy sea breezes at weekends. At the turn of the century, this prestige holiday home area started to attract hoteliers. Most majestic of all was the Sea View Hotel, built in 1906 by Jewish entrepreneur and philanthropist Manasseh Meyer on his



The majestic colonial bungalow of the old Sea View Hotel was Katong's landmark in the early 1900s. A condominium now stands on its site in Meyer Road. Photo courtesy of Joo Chiat, A Living Legacy by L Kong and TC Chang

land (now Meyer Road), later taken over by the Sarkies Brothers, owners of Raffles Hotel. By the early 1920s, Katong was a well-established weekend seaside retreat, away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

In the 1920s and 30s, this quiet and beautiful area started to attract new, well-heeled residents. Many of the Eurasian elite of the time sold their houses in the overcrowded and polluted town centre to build family residences between present-day Meyer Road and Mountbatten Road, from Katong Park to Siglap. Wealthy Straits Chinese families followed suit. Just as today, the new residents were attracted by the good schools, recreational clubs and churches that were being built to meet the growing demand. Many of these institutions, including St Patrick's Boys' School and the CHIJ Katong Convent Girls' School, both built in the early 1930s, still serve the Katong community, adding to the precinct's unique historical charm.



The Karikal Mahal during the long hiatus following the closure of the Grand Hotel. Photo courtesy of The Straits Times



Restored ornate façade of the Karikal Mahal at 25 Still Road once again awes visitors and passers-by. Photo courtesy of The Straits Times

Winds of change

Although most of the grand mansions of Katong survived the Japanese occupation, many did not survive the post-war re-development and the rapid post-independence urban transformation.



The Pavilion and the Big House of the Elias estate in Amber Road were once right by the sea until reclamation began. Photo courtesy of the URA

The most drastic changes to the area's profile occurred in the early 1960s with the beginning of the large-scale East Coast land reclamation project. New housing and commercial development projects such as the Marine Parade Housing and Development Board estate and town centre were completed by the mid-1970s and contributed to the change in both the landscape and demographics of the area. The East Coast Park and the East Coast Parkway were completed in 1981 and by then, many of the *grandes dames* of Katong had already made way for new developments. The few survivors now found themselves sitting 500-700 metres away from the coastline, surrounded by busy roads and high-rise buildings. The villas lost their attraction for their owners, so many stood completely abandoned and had nothing to look forward to in the future. Or so it seemed...

From opulent oriental palace to international school

In 1917, when Katong was still a quiet holiday resort destination, the wealthy cattle merchant Moona Kadir Sultan, bought a large parcel of seaside land to build the family residence he had always dreamed of. The Indian gentleman was known to have had several wives, which was not at all uncommon for that time, so the mansion had to be large enough. The imposing mansion, whose architecture was inspired by Indian, Italianate and Victorian architectural styles, was so opulent that most colonial-style mansions in the vicinity paled in comparison. The estate consisted of four houses complete with a beautiful garden, fountains and an artificial lake. Moona Kadir Sultan named his mansion *Karikal Mahal*, (Karikal Palace) after his home town.

In 1947, the estate, previously occupied by the Japanese, was bought by a local company and converted into the 20-room Grand Hotel, with fairly minor interventions in the building's exterior. The Katong area development plans of the 1970s took their toll on the estate. In 1973, the famous Karikal Palace gardens were split from the main mansion by the newly constructed Still Road. However, the Grand Hotel



The Pavilion, restored to its former glory with support and guidance from the URA, has become a clubhouse overlooking the condominium's pool.

operated on the remaining plot for decades longer before gradually sinking into the budget category and eventually going out of business in 2000. But the Karikal Palace's history has unexpectedly continued. Following a reported \$5 million repurposing project completed in 2016, the buildings now house two pre-school institutions. This required a complete makeover of the interiors, but the impressive ornate exteriors of the conservation building at 25 Still Road were carefully preserved and repainted. The makeover project made the headlines not only because of the costs involved, but also as a positive example of successful heritage management. And of course, just as 100 years ago, Katong residents are glad to have a new school in their area.

The story of a Shanghai plaster mansion

At the turn of the 20th century there were few personalities as prominent in Singapore's Jewish community as Joseph Aaron Elias. A successful, Calcutta-born entrepreneur with diverse business interests, he also held the office of Justice of the Peace in Singapore. Elias, who never married, was one of Singapore's first horse-racing and motoring enthusiasts, frequently seen driving his open-top sports car around the city. It was no surprise when he decided to build a seaside mansion that had to be both palatial and modern. The main house was demolished long ago, but its annex, built in 1900 and called The Pavilion, has survived and is quite a mansion in its own right. The two-storey, neo-classical building with colourful, nautically themed stained-glass panels was a true jewel of Katong's old seaside. In line with the latest design fashions of 1900, the walls were clad in noble-looking Shanghai plaster, a grey stucco that rarely adorned the walls of residential buildings and was reserved for the most important civic institutions in Singapore, such as the National Gallery's façade and the Family Justice Courts.

Thankfully, the bungalow survived the war, the bombing of Amber Road and the transformation of the Katong area. Acquired by a developer in 2002, the new owner had the foresight to voluntarily conserve the majestic building in 2004 and make it the central element of a condominium project. Outstanding conservation efforts, recognised by the 2008 Architecture Heritage Award, restored The Pavilion to its former glory. As the clubhouse at 43 Amber Road, it is still a Katong landmark. Over a century since it was built, the building again hosts parties and receptions just like the ones I can easily imagine its first owner, Joe Elias, enjoyed holding in the early 1900s.



Carefully restored stained glass panels, depicting nautical and Middle-Eastern scenes, point to the Baghdadi Jewish origins of the Elias family. Ornate cast-iron balustrades at the verandas got new glass walls to comply with modern safety requirements.

Yulia Pak is an urban planning and built heritage professional who is taking a career break to pursue the MA Arts Management degree at LASALLE College of the Arts and to guide at the Singapore Art Museum.

Colour photos on this page by the author

The Death Knell for the Thieves of Sungei Road

By Jerome Lim

The once bustling flea market, known to older folks as *Robinson Petang* or Afternoon Robinson's (after the famous department store), or simply as Sungei Road, will soon be like much of the old Singapore that has come to pass, a distant memory. After 10 July, the little that is left of it will be no more. That is when the last of Singapore's free-hawking zones, where the market operates, will be permanently closed.

The market, now reduced to a display of used and discarded items, has seen much better times. Resembling a shanty town in its heyday, the streets filled with a chaos of makeshift shacks, temporary stalls and dilapidated-looking shophouses, *Robinson Petang* had a reputation that spread far and wide. It was not just for the all-too-familiar 'aroma' that the nearby Rochor Canal blessed the area with, but also the variety of goods on offer. Known also as the Thieves Market – for reasons that may be quite obvious – it was the place to go to get one's hands on any item imaginable. The range of goods included both pre-loved as well as unused items, many of which were rarely found elsewhere.

My parents were regular shoppers at the flea market. One of the things I remember them heading to the market for at the end of the 1960s was a range of huge glass bottles. My mother found great joy in decorating these with mosaic



An aerial view of an area in a constant state of change. Shophouses once occupied the area where the fields are.
Photo by Jerome Lim

tiles or macramé, and found uses for them as flower vases or as gifts. Other items that were on offer at the flea market included antiques – or junk, depending on how one looked at them: electrical goods, surplus army items, and old clothes sold by weight. There were also brand-new clothes, those that in today's world are the ones diverted to factory outlet stores. Fake goods could also be found in abundance. A joke we often made was to cast suspicion on the authenticity of a branded item being shown-off by a friend, by suggesting that it had been acquired from Sungei Road.

The bazaar has a long history and had its beginnings in the antiques trade, which developed in the area in the 1930s.



A motorcycle repair shop in the 1980s. The area was also known for its motor repair and spares parts trade. Photo courtesy of Michael P Fong



Marketplace along Rochor Canal and Sungei Road. Photo courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board



Sungei Road Thieves Market in the 1970s, with Jalan Besar in the background. There were shops selling electrical cables (foreground right), a blacksmith's shop selling dustbins, buckets and washtubs and a shop that sold second-hand goods. Photo courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore



Sungei Road in the 1980s, photo courtesy of Michael P Fong

Following the end of the war, second-hand goods traders began to add their presence, giving the area its shanty town-like appearance. The thieves market of today and the area it occupies bear little resemblance to the Sungei Road of old. Resettlement and redevelopment, which began in the 1970s, have taken their toll and spelled the end for numerous trades once associated with the area. In fact, many of the market's traders were moved through the 1970s and 1980s. In August 1982, an exercise intended to put an end to the bazaar for good, left only 31 licensed rag-and-bone traders to ply the trade.

The remnants of the bazaar are now centred on Larut Road and Pitt Street, which were designated a free-hawking zone in the year 2000. It is the only such zone in Singapore, where only Singapore citizens or permanent residents are allowed to operate. The market is at its busiest during the weekends and in more recent times, there have been between 145 and 200 traders operating, only 21 of whom have licences.

In 2012, the Association for the Recycling of the Second-Hand Goods, representing the market's traders, was informed of the decision to close the free-hawking zone so that the area could be redeveloped. Despite appeals lodged by the association, and attempts to find an alternative site, the decision made by the authorities to limit flea-market operations to non-permanent venues such as street bazaars and trade fairs, sounded the death knell for the market as we know it.

A factor prompting this decision was the disamenity the market creates. This includes obstruction caused by items



The flea market attracts both young and old. Photo by Jerome Lim

stored in open areas. Although usually covered with tarpaulin sheets, water collects on these items, which increases the risk of mosquito breeding – something the authorities are always uncomfortable with. The traders who still hold a permit are being given assistance to be relocated.

This move will result in a decentralisation of the trade, as it will not be to a single site. As of May 2017, several have already moved to locations such as the Golden Mile Food Centre and Chinatown Market, paying a subsidised rent of about \$400 a month.

It does appear that although the actual redevelopment may still be some years away, preliminary work will be done to prepare the ground for that eventuality and this will see the disappearance of the area's remaining roads, including Pitt Street and Larut Road (another street, Pasar Lane, has already been expunged).

An MRT station is scheduled to open on an adjacent site later this year. This, along with what the future holds – a mixed-use, high-rise development based on the Urban Redevelopment Authority's Master Plan – will transform the area. Once an area of colourful and character-filled streets, it will be yet another bland neighbourhood. There are already too many of these in modern Singapore.

Jerome Lim blogs on *The Long and Winding Road* (www.thelongandwindingroad.wordpress.com) about his impressions and experiences of life.

Singapore's Grande Dame - Raffles Hotel

By Clem McMurray

Raffles Hotel in Singapore has a history few hotels can match, a history that began in 1887 when the Armenian Sarkies brothers announced they were going to open a new hotel in Beach Road and name it after Sir Stamford Raffles. In 1822, Stamford Raffles had planned residences for European merchants along Beach Road and by 1825, 20 luxurious homes had been built there. Among the homes erected along that stretch of road was a family's beach house – a 10-bedroom bungalow constructed in the 1830s. The Sarkies brothers purchased it many years later, and this family home became Raffles Hotel, opening in December 1887. In those days, the sea came right up to and over Beach Road at high tide, when it sometimes lapped at the entrance to the hotel's lobby.

At the time the hotel opened it was considered one of the most modern buildings in Singapore. The current main building of the hotel was completed in 1889 and a year later, in 1890, two new wings were opened. Each one was two storeys high and each floor contained 22 guest suites. The Tiffin Rooms opened in 1892 and in 1894 the Palm Court Wing opened after the Sarkies brothers leased an adjacent building and completed renovations. Ten years after the original opening, Raffles Hotel had 75 guest rooms. The new main building was completed in 1899 and Raffles Hotel was the first in the



The façade of Raffles Hotel Singapore as it looks today, courtesy of Raffles Hotel

region to have electric fans and electric lights. In 1902 the last tiger to be shot in Singapore was killed under the old billiard room, which at that time was an elevated structure. By 1904, Raffles Hotel was the venue for numerous social events and welcomed international travellers.

In the early 1900s, a typical Raffles breakfast consisted of oatmeal porridge, fish, mutton chops, devilled fowl, cold beef, salad, boiled eggs, cheese, toast, tea or coffee and also Benedictine. The Singapore Sling was invented in 1915 by barman Ngiam Tong Boon because at the time it wasn't acceptable for ladies to be seen drinking alcohol in public.

Ngiam created a pink cocktail that looked like a fruit punch, with gin, juices and several liqueurs. To say the Singapore Sling proved a winner would be a gross understatement because today it is claimed that over 500 of them are created every day and served in the renowned Long Bar.

A Raffles Hotel Post Office was also opened in the early 1900s, providing hotel guests and residents in the surrounding area with postal services right up to the late 1920s. The Great Depression, which began in 1929 and ended in the 1930s, had an enormous impact on Singapore and the Raffles did not go unscathed. After Arshak, the last of the four Sarkies brothers, died in 1931, Raffles Hotel went into receivership. By 1933 a new public company called Raffles Hotel Ltd had been formed and Teddy Troller, a Swiss, was appointed general manager. The hotel was back in business.

When Japanese bombers attacked at the start of World War II, the hotel's band played



Old advertisement for the hotel using Kipling's words



Junks off Beach Road, photo courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore



Raffles Hotel in the 1900s, Arshak C Galstaun Collection, courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore

on in the ballroom behind blackout curtains and it is said that when they arrived, Japanese soldiers encountered guests dancing one final waltz. General Arthur Percival surrendered Singapore to the Japanese on 15 February 1942 and with the occupation imminent, the staff buried the hotel's silver in the Palm Court's garden. During the occupation (from 15 February 1942 to 22 August 1945), the Raffles was renamed *Syonan Ryokan*, incorporating *syonan* (Light of the South – the Japanese name for Singapore) and *ryokan*, the Japanese name for a traditional inn.

Hotel records show that high-ranking officers of Japan's occupation army lived there for the duration of the war and had their needs attended to by many of the existing staff. When the war ended in 1945, the silver was dug up and Raffles Hotel soon reopened for business. It was reported that after the surrender, up to 300 Japanese officers committed suicide in the hotel using hand grenades, although this has not been confirmed and many sources dispute this number. When Japan surrendered and Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten accepted the return of Singapore to British control, Raffles Hotel became a temporary transit camp for war prisoners released under the military administration. The hotel at that time was just a shadow of her past glory.

Raffles Hotel went through some very shaky periods as tourism in Singapore had slumped and thousands of rooms in the more modern hotels were empty. As a consequence, plans for



The Long Bar at Raffles Hotel, as it used to be, image courtesy of Raffles Hotel

renovating the buildings were scrapped. In 1983, there were discussions about demolishing the Raffles since the land it occupied was extremely valuable. These discussions were finally overridden by the hotel's management; the decision was made to restore it. This was a very expensive (\$27.3 million) rebuild. The meticulously restored Raffles Hotel celebrated its centenary year in 1986, one year early, in order to coincide with the Chinese Year of the Tiger. For this event, on the first day of the year, a live tiger was photographed sitting on top of the hotel's billiard table.

In 1987, the hotel's centenary year, the Singapore government designated Raffles Hotel a National Monument.

The hotel was closed for two years in 1989 with the objective of restoring the elegant look of the 1910s and 20s and re-establishing Raffles Hotel's position as an internationally recognised grand hotel. This was achieved. Between 1989 and 2007, the hotel celebrated many events, among them the re-establishing of the Bras Basah Wing. This wing houses 18 of what have been described as "the most commodious state rooms in the East", which extend to guests a welcome that is replete with much of the hotel's historical charm. In 1998 a suite was commemorated in honour of James A Michener, a Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist. He had a life-long love of travel and of Raffles Hotel. In 2007, the Raffles celebrated its 120th birthday in splendid style with an unforgettable Gala Reception on Sunday, 16 September. The centre stage for the reception took place in the hotel's grand lobby, with Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew gracing the event as its guest-of-honour.

Raffles Hotel is more than a landmark, it is a significant part of Singapore's history. In February 2017 another careful restoration of the hotel began, starting with the famous Long Bar, the Long Bar's Steakhouse, Raffles Courtyard, Ah Teng's Bakery, the retail arcade and the banquet facilities. The restoration's second phase will involve some of the hotel's suites. During the restoration's third phase, beginning at the end of 2017, the hotel will be fully closed. A grand reopening is planned for the middle of 2018.



Ngiam Tong Boon, courtesy of Raffles Hotel

Clem McMurray is an Australian who has spent a considerable amount of time in Asia and loves Asian history.

First Glimpse of Ancient Maps of Asia

By Krystina Lyon

Previous visits in 1997 and 2011 to the Lobkowicz Collections in Prague stayed with me and I hoped that one day I would be able to share the delights of this princely family's museum with the Friends of the Museums (FOM) in Singapore. When the opportunity presented itself to write for *PASSAGE* magazine, I was delighted to illustrate some recently acquired knowledge of the Silk Road from our FOM Study Group with some of the maps and watercolours held in the famous Lobkowicz Library, thus establishing a link that would be relevant to members of FOM.

The Lobkowicz Collections comprise the oldest private collection of Medieval and Renaissance works of art and ceramics in the Czech Republic. It is significant as it provides a window onto the cultural and socio-economic history of Central Europe over a period of six centuries. The treasures in this noble family's collection include master paintings from artists such as Brueghel, Canaletto, Cranach, and Rubens; books, musical archives, instruments and autographed manuscripts by Beethoven, Mozart and Gluck; examples of religious and decorative arts such as ceramics, arms, armour and furniture, all housed within some of the most beautiful private Baroque castles and Renaissance palaces in Central Europe.

My own connection with the descendants of the Lobkowicz family started in 1976 when I studied for a BA at Wellesley College near Boston. As a foreign student, I was given a 'host family' to help ease me into American life and that family comprised Martin and Brooks Lobkowicz and their children Martin Jr, John, Margaret and William. Thus started a friendship that has lasted to this day.

Following the 'Velvet Revolution' of 1989 in the Czech Republic, the first freely elected government allowed restitution and the Lobkowicz family was given back its properties and the valuables that had been confiscated 50 years earlier when they were forced into exile by the Nazis. Subsequently, all of their valuables were controlled by the Communist regime. They have spent years since then trying to track down lost pieces, restore where possible and share this unique collection of Czech heritage with the public. William Jr and his wife Alexandra, together with the rest of the family, have overseen this huge task through both fundraising and commercial enterprises.

In recent correspondence with the Library and Archives Curator, Soňa Černocká, I asked if there were any maps of countries that bordered the Silk Road. I was grateful to be given access to the wonderful maps and one watercolour included in this article. Before we look closely at these delightful maps and watercolours, it might be useful to summarise where the origin of the term 'Silk Road' came from. German explorer and geographer Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen coined the term 'Silk Road' in the 19th century. He was describing a huge network of ancient trade routes from Xi'an in China to Constantinople around the time of China's Han Dynasty. The routes had been used more or less during the period between 130 BCE and 1453 CE when they were closed owing to the Ottoman Empire's boycott of trade with the West. By the 16th century, maritime routes became the preferred way to trade commodities as they were more economical than the land routes of the Silk Road.

1. In this first atlas of China to be printed in Europe (including a general map of China, 15 maps of individual Chinese provinces and a map of Japan and Korea) we can see Xi'an, the great trading centre that was at the start of the Silk Road; and which is credited as being the birthplace of the silk-production that fuelled the trade from China to all points to the west.



1. General map of China Empire, hand-coloured copperplate. *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, printed in Amsterdam by heirs Johannes Janssonius, ca 1664. III Da 4, The Lobkowicz Library and Archives, Nelahozeves Castle, Czech Republic.



2. India Orientalis, hand-coloured copperplate. Gerhard Mercator, Atlas sive Cosmographicae Meditationes, printed in Amsterdam 1611. III Ca 13, The Lobkowicz Library and Archives, Nelahozeves Castle, Czech Republic.

2. This is another World Atlas published in 1611 by the descendants of the famous cartographer, Gerhard Mercator (1512-1594).

There are approximately 150 beautifully hand-coloured copperplates that show various parts of the world, including some clearly demarcated Asian countries along the Silk Road. This map includes three famous trading countries: China, India and Persia. Products traded along this route included textiles such as silk and cotton, gems such as jade, gold and lapis lazuli, tea and of course, spices. These trade routes also helped spread ideas and religion and were a veritable super-highway of exchange and interaction. The Chinese invention of paper and printing helped spread these ideas and contributed to the flowering of writing, reading and learning that made its way to Western Europe.

3. This marvelous watercolour is a view of the trading centre of Constantinople. The city was at the crossroads between Europe and Asia and was considered the western-most point of the trade routes that started in Xi'an in China. It was here that Mediterranean trade was funnelled eastward to all the stops in China. It was a hugely important commercial centre and had an insatiable appetite for luxury products from both West and East.

During the sacking of the city in 1204, the conquering crusader Robert de Clari wrote:

"It (Constantinople) was so rich, and there were so many rich vessels of gold and silver and cloth of gold and so many rich jewels, that it was a fair marvel...Not since the world was made, was there ever seen or won so great a treasure or so noble or so rich, not in the time of Alexander nor in the time of Charlemagne...Nor do I think...that in the forty richest cities of the world there had been so much wealth as was found in Constantinople."



3. View of Constantinople, watercolour on paper, 17th century. III/2 G 115, The Lobkowicz Library and Archives, Nelahozeves Castle, Czech Republic.

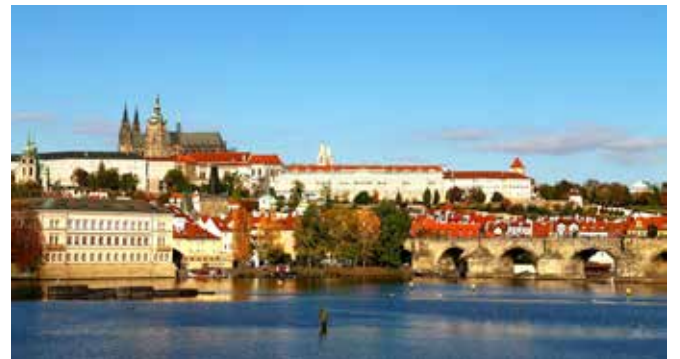
4. In this map one can make out the Lop Desert, which may be the Taklamakan Desert, and Tasken (present day Tashkent in Uzbekistan) is clearly visible in the centre. Likewise, Samarchand (or Samarkand) can be seen. Both locations had numerous caravanserai, large inns where travelling merchants could find shelter and food for themselves, their caravans and their camels. They were positioned roughly a day's travel by camel apart from each other and dotted the network of trade routes that comprised the Silk Road.

Another point of interest is Bactriana (between the two information boxes at the bottom left). This was the original site of the double-humped Bactrian camel, the most popular form of transport along the Silk Road for centuries and without which there would not have been thriving trade routes.



4. Tartaria, hand-coloured copperplate. Gerhard Mercator, Atlas sive Cosmographicae Meditationes, printed in Amsterdam 1611. III Ca 13, The Lobkowicz Library and Archives, Nelahozeves Castle, Czech Republic.

I have tried to share some of the more Asia-centric treasures within the Lobkowicz Collections by using the maps and the watercolour to highlight some interesting Silk Road history. The Lobkowicz Collections include three castles and one palace in the Czech Republic, but the majority of their superb collections are gathered in the Lobkowicz Palace in Prague and the Nelahozeves Castle, a Renaissance estate about 35 kilometres from Prague. The 16th century Baroque Lobkowicz Palace in Prague is open to the public all year and the Nelahozeves Castle is open from March to October.



The Lobkowicz Palace is the building at the far right of the photo above, within the Prague Castle complex

Krystina Lyon has lived in Asia for 30 years. She has a BA from Wellesley College, USA and has been an FOM docent for six years.

All images courtesy of the Lobkowicz Library and Archives

French-speaking Docents Enjoy Cultural Exchanges

By Tania Léger

What happens when volunteer guides travel through Asia and meet like-minded docents in other countries? Let's follow the story of a special type of cultural exchange to find out. It all started when Brigitte Crosnier-Bernard, a French national living in Kuala Lumpur (KL), moved from there to Jakarta. While living in KL, Brigitte had been an active volunteer guide at the Muzium Negara (National Museum) with Museum Volunteers of Malaysia. As soon as she arrived in Jakarta, Brigitte naturally went to look for opportunities to use her guiding skills in her new host country. This is when she joined the Indonesian Heritage Society (IHS) where she became the head of the French-speaking section.

The French-speaking guides at IHS started discussing the specificities of guiding at different museums in Southeast Asia and especially the similar skills and mindsets needed for that kind of volunteer guiding work. As the ladies were sharing their experiences, one mentioned that she knew about Friends of the Museums (FOM) in Singapore and that the three associations – the IHS in Jakarta, Museum Volunteers (MV) in Kuala Lumpur and FOM in Singapore – had a lot in common. A few emails later, the bridges were connected and through Valérie Guibert, who was leading the group of French-speaking docents at the ACM, Singapore, joined in the conversation with Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur.

The idea was to create a French-speaking platform to exchange information and research, share tips about guiding, tell each other stories and talk about topics of common interest. To reach that goal, each country would take turns hosting the other groups. During those visits, the host



Docents from Singapore, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur at the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum

country volunteers would organise museum visits followed by group discussions.

Since the Jakarta docents had come up with the idea of the cultural exchange, they volunteered to host the first visit in Jakarta in early 2015. They proudly introduced their guests to the Museum Nasional Indonesia (National Museum) and arranged visits to various parts of the former Batavia. During that first trip, the groups also presented the associations they belonged to, the museums they were guiding at and the specificities of each of them. The ladies shared their views about what the cultural exchange could represent and following the meeting, the three groups were set up to take turns hosting two-to-three-day visits to their respective countries and meeting twice a year.

Following that successful first cultural exchange in Indonesia, ACM's French-speaking docents invited the group to Singapore later that year. They guided them through the ACM, SAM and the newly opened National Gallery, before going on a Heritage Walk around the Padang. During that trip, the visiting guides from Jakarta and KL were impressed by how the FOM docents used short sentences to link two artefacts in their tours. The guests were happy to take this linking technique back to their museums. Kuala Lumpur completed the first cycle in early 2016, with the Muzium Negara at the centre of the initial cultural exchange in Malaysia.

In December 2016, it was the turn of the Jakarta team to host again. Things became more challenging this time because the group had already spent two days visiting Jakarta the previous year, and organising a second visit to Batavia would be repetitive. However, since volunteer guides never shy away from new research opportunities, the problem was quickly



French-speaking group at Borobudur, December 2016

resolved with the idea of organising this second visit to Indonesia around the area of Yogyakarta. The French-speaking IHS guides invested countless hours in creating a seamless visit. They even went to Yogyakarta a few weeks before the trip to do a mock on-site test of the programme.

The three-day trip to Yogyakarta started at the Amanjiwo Hotel with its breath-taking view over Borobudur. The following day, the Jakarta team gave us a detailed tour of Borobudur and we felt a profound admiration for the bas-reliefs of the *Jataka* tales depicting the lives of the Buddha. We later visited Prambanan and the temples of Candi Sewu, Candi Pawon and Candi Mendut. On day 3, we explored the Yogyakarta market and the *Taman Sari* (Royal Bath) before visiting a *Wayang Kulit* workshop where we learned all about the traditions behind this ancient Indonesian art of shadow play. We did get somewhat confused by the influences of nature worship, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam in Indonesia, but after an unexpected visit to the *Gereja Ayam*, a huge chicken-shaped church dedicated to all religions, we were able to reconcile them all.

The fifth cultural exchange took place in Singapore in April 2017. Although smaller than Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur, Singapore is densely packed with museums, making it possible for the team to organise a second visit to the city without having to return to the same places. During our previous cultural exchanges in Indonesia and Malaysia, we realised that we had all heard about Sir Stamford Raffles, but each of us knew him from a different perspective. Therefore, the theme of this second visit to Singapore was 'In Search of Sir Stamford Raffles'. The visit started at Fort Canning Hill where we explored the site of Raffles' house and tried to imagine the view people would have had from there in the 1820s. Both the sea and the Singapore River are hard to spot nowadays, but all the historical events that took place at Fort Canning were a wonderful way to introduce our visitors to Singapore's history.

Making our way down to the National Museum of Singapore (NMS), we went more in depth into Singapore history during colonial times. Lunch at Janice Wong's in NMS proved to be a delight for sight and taste and prepared us for a busy afternoon. Starting with the somewhat controversial topic of "Raffles versus Farquhar – who did what?", we visited the *William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings* in the Goh Seng Choo Gallery, after which



Cultural Exchange Group at Fort Canning, April 2017, photo by Jordane Lienard

we saw some of the animals and plants brought to life in the *Story of the Forest* located in NMS' Glass Rotunda. Those two exhibitions gave us a pretty good idea of the flora and fauna when Raffles and Farquhar were travelling around the region. Continuing on our natural history path and looking for some remains of the original Raffles Museum, we visited the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum at the National University of Singapore, where we learned some surprising things about the strategies employed by males in the animal world to woo the female counterpart.

Day 2 started at the Malay Heritage Centre in a tour that retraced the history of Sultan Hussein Shah and the different ethnic groups who came to settle in the area of Kampong Gelam after 1819. That afternoon, we visited St Andrew's Cathedral and walked to Empress Place where we discovered the two



Wayang Kulit Workshop, Yogyakarta

different worlds that had existed on opposite sides of the river in colonial Singapore. We finished this two-day visit by cruising down the Singapore River to see how much it had changed since Raffles' arrival. We are now looking forward to the sixth cultural exchange; this one will complete the second round. The Kuala Lumpur team will be hosting it in Penang in November this year.

Our cultural exchanges started with three groups of French-speaking docents who wanted to share their guiding experience. Two years into this project, we have come to realise that the exchanges provided much more than we imagined when they first began. In addition to learning from our hosts about their home countries – from the different influences of Raffles, to the variations in the *keris* for instance – we shared incredible moments of laughter and built friendships and connections that will last a lifetime.

Tania Léger is a cross-cultural trainer. She has been living in Asia for the past 15 years and is a docent at the National Museum of Singapore and the Asian Civilisations Museum..



Gereja Ayam - a prayer house dedicated to all religions

Unless otherwise noted, photos by the author

Rickshaw Noodles: Food that Has Fed Many Generations

By Diana Loo Pye Fung

As part of Singapore's oriental charms, scenes of rickshaws on the streets are often seen on Singapore's postcards of yesteryear. Rickshaws first appeared here in 1880, then were banned in 1947. The only ones remaining today are those used to provide tourists with the experience of a trishaw ride in Chinatown. However, a part of the rickshaw pullers' heritage has been well-preserved. The 'rickshaw noodle', once the staple food of rickshaw pullers or coolies (unskilled labourers) is still around today. This is no surprise given Singapore's food-loving culture.

The rickshaw noodle, commonly known in Hokkien as *kan chia mee*, was a common dish not only for rickshaw coolies, but also for other coolies working in the ports and as well as on construction sites. It consists of a bowl of yellow noodles in a clear broth of pork, dried shrimp and green vegetables, topped with some fried shallots and pounded garlic. In the old days, when a rickshaw coolie earned an average of a dollar a day, the modest, piping hot bowl of noodle soup cost just five to ten cents a bowl. It was economical and a quick 'fix', providing energy and sustenance, exactly what a coolie needed.

This *Kan Chia Mee* stall at Maxwell Food Centre traces its heritage back to 1943, when Madam Soh Pho Tee's mother started to sell the signature dish in the back alley of China Street. The street, locally known as *Kiao Keng Kao* in Hokkien (Gambling Den) was a favourite haunt when I was growing up in the 1970s. It was where we found the best local Chinese food. My father used to tell us how in his youth, he and his family frequented the hawker stall run by Madam Soh's mother.



The name of the stall translates as 'China Street's Hawker Food, Rickshaw Noodles'



Madam Soh's mother founded the street hawker business in 1943 in China Street, photo courtesy of Madam Soh Pho Tee

Madam Soh told me that her mother had been widowed when she was in her early thirties. This humble business was what helped her bring up her family of six children. In 1978, Madam Soh continued the business in the Maxwell Food Centre, which was where the street hawkers of China and Nanking Streets had been asked to move to. The same trade provided the means

for her to raise her three children. Amazingly, this humble dish has been feeding many generations, from before our grandfathers' time. Local people are happy that the heritage dish has not been lost through the years and many, like me, are happy to introduce it to our children and visitors.

This heritage family business of more than 70 years, already has a succession plan in place: Madam Soh is handing it over to her daughter, who is "partnering" with her mother-in-law.

They confirmed that patrons can be assured that it will be the same good old *kan chia mee*. Madam Soh said that she will continue until she "can no longer do it because this is the only thing she knows".

Stall details:

中国街熟食 (Zhong Guo Jie Shu Shi or China Street Hawker Food)

Address: 1 Kadayannallur Street, #01-87 Maxwell Food Centre

Opening Hours: from 6:00 am to 1:00 pm (daily except on Friday)

Diana Loo is Singaporean and recently graduated as an NMS docent.

Unless otherwise noted, photos by the author



Madam Soh, who was instrumental in preserving this heritage dish



A bowl of rickshaw noodles

Curio's First Event – FOM Foodies

By Gisella Harrold

In April 2017 FOM launched *Curio*, an exciting new programme intended to give a platform to FOM members' interests, such as theatre performances, photography classes or the 'Foodies'.

The 'FOM Foodies' programme filled within a day and 20 people set out on the inaugural FOM Foodies' lunch on the 6 April. The restaurant we chose is a much-loved Singaporean institution, the Prima Tower, located in the area of Keppel harbour, which is dominated by one of the busiest container ports in the world.

Here you will find Singapore's oldest revolving restaurant and interestingly, it is at the top of a grain silo belonging to the Prima Group. The Prima Group was founded by Mr Cheng Tsang Man in 1961 and is today one of the largest flour millers, but offers a large range of other products, from milled flour to readymade food mixes (check out the local brand for Singapore Chicken Rice at the supermarkets).

The restaurant itself was established in 1977 and getting up to the top floor is not only an adventure, using lifts and escalators, but it takes you right back to the 1980s. You will see a fish tank and red carpet and of course the highlight is a stunning view onto the harbour, Sentosa and the Masjid Temenggong Daeng Ibrahim.

Prima Tower specialises in Beijing cuisine and is famous for its Beijing Duck. A classic Imperial Court dish, it was

mentioned in a cookbook by Hu Shihui, a court therapist and dietitian during the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). The name is a misnomer, because it is believed to have originated in Nanjing and only 'moved' to Beijing with the Ming dynasty.



Half of the Foodies group

The work-intensive method of cooking is the reason that not many people attempt to cook it at home. After the duck is plucked, air is carefully pumped between the skin and the meat, to ensure extra crispiness. During the drying process, it's coated with multiple layers of maltose syrup, which is also the reason why the duck is so glossy. After this, it is traditionally roasted in an oven or over a wood fire.

We ate it the traditional way. The skin was carefully removed from the duck and served wrapped in a thin pancake, with spring onions, sweet sauce and cucumber. The meat was carved and served at the end of the meal with a choice of either rice or noodles. The restaurant is also well-known for its *dim sum* and other classic dishes such as chicken with dried chillies, scallops, sliced fish and vegetables.

Since this was an FOM event, we shared some Foodie Fun Facts with the group, about the origin of revolving restaurants in ancient Rome and the life of the Prima Group's founder.

Interested in joining the 'FOM Foodies'? Sign up to the waitlist on www.fom.sg under Activities/Curio, we will get in touch with you as soon as we have enough interested members to start a new group.

In the next issue of *PASSAGE* we will have an article on our May adventure, a trip to another much-loved local restaurant, where during our lunch, the owner called to welcome us.

All photos by the author



The roasted duck



The duck being carved



View from Prima Tower.

Recipe for Bliss - Malacca Here We Come!

By Katherine Seow

Take five docents who love things Peranakan, add a congenial driver with an MPV and head for Malacca – our reward for making it through the docent training at the Peranakan Museum (TPM) turned into the best trip experience ever.

Malacca means Peranakan culture, food and shopping, in whichever order you prefer. Upon our arrival, we headed to the Straits Chinese Jewellery Museum in Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock to feast our eyes on nonya 'bling'.



Kueh Pie Tee (*Peranakan hors d'oeuvres*). Fill the cup and eat it up

Originally known as Heeren Street, the road that locals called 'Millionaire's Row', was renamed in honour of the fifth-generation Chinese businessman who set up the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and is recognised as one of the founding fathers of modern-day Malaysia. With more jewellery on display than at TPM, our eyes grew big and bright as we wandered around 'oohing' and 'aahing'.

After the visual feast, we boarded our MPV for authentic Peranakan cuisine at Restoran Aunty Lee's. Arriving at two o'clock, we were ushered to a table, but still had to wait for our food at this popular local eatery. Our one gripe after a fabulous lunch was that we'd ordered too much and hadn't left room for more dessert.

Our next stop was the Baba & Nonya Heritage Museum. Although only a three-minute walk from our first museum visit, getting there via a lunch stop was more satisfying for all. As we walked around the beautifully restored shophouse, the sense this building had been someone's home was very strong. I could imagine young nonyas peeping through the latticed doors of the inner hall to catch glimpses of visitors. On the second level, we stepped out of the main bedroom at the front of the house and passed a table with *cherki* cards. Five ladies sat down. None of us knew how to play, but we did our part for an Instagram moment.

On our way into the city, the driver had taken us past Bukit Cina, the ancestral burial ground of Malacca's Chinese



Roofless St Paul's Church, but its red brick walls stand tall

community. Sultan Mansur Shah, who ruled Malacca from 1459 to 1477, supposedly gave the land to the Chinese for their use. In 1511, power passed from the Malay sultans to the Portuguese. The first of the colonial powers to govern Malacca consolidated their hold by building a fortress around a natural hill by the sea, now called St Paul's Hill.

The next morning, we puffed our way up this hill for a fabulous view of the city and visited the ruins of the oldest church in Malaysia and Southeast Asia. When the Dutch defeated the Portuguese in 1641, the Catholic church was re-consecrated for use by the Dutch Reformed congregation. On our way down, we passed graves belonging to the Dutch community of that day.

During the Napoleonic Wars, control of Malacca passed from the Dutch to the British. The latter, expecting to return Malacca to the Dutch after the War, decided to demolish the fort while they had the opportunity. Stamford Raffles, the founder of Singapore, intervened and insisted that a single gate of the once impregnable Portuguese-built *A Famosa* be left standing. Ironically, the Dutch and British later switched assets and Malacca ended up in Britain's hands while the Dutch took Indonesia. Today, remnants of the fort's walls dot the historical city centre and the banks of the Malacca River, reminding locals and visitors of Malacca's rich heritage.

History, culture, food and shopping – Malacca we will return!



Porta de Santiago, the remaining gate of A Famosa Fort



All hands on deck for cherki

Katherine Seow has been an FOM member since 2015 and graduated as a TPM docent this year.

Photos courtesy of the author

Singapore Art gallery guide

Your magazine to all arts in and around Singapore

www.sagg.info

Photo © Felix Hug (Eyes on Asia)

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Explore Singapore!

So you think you know Singapore? Can you identify what you see in these photos and where they are located? Explore Singapore! has taken FOM members to all of these places during the past year. Come with us and explore the rich fabric of life in this fascinating city. Look out for our next tours starting in August.



1. How many of these animals make up a set?



2. It takes six months to clean this. Where is it?



3. The Hanging Gardens of.....?



4. Where is this mural?



5. Which festival are these used for?



6. Is this a cooking demonstration?



7. Is this poisonous?

Explore Singapore!



8. What is this and where is it?



9. What is this?



10. This is the crest of a king. Which country did he come from and why is it in Singapore?

Check how you scored. Turn to page 30 for the answers.

If you scored:

8 or more – Excellent and congratulations! You can say that you know Singapore well.

6 – 7 – Good! You've seen quite a lot, but there is lots more to explore.

5 or less – There are many places and activities for you to discover. Join our Explore Singapore! programmes and get to know Singapore better.

Look out for our first tour after the mid-year break. It will be to the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple on 17 August.

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Japanese Docents

Digital Arts Create New Relationships

When people visit a museum, many feel a sense of familiarity with the exhibitions, but they may find it boring if they continue to see the same exhibits. However, if people can have a different experience each time, even in the same museum, they are likely to continue visiting. This is akin to having different experiences with someone who is important to you.

On 6 December 2016, the National Museum of Singapore opened a new exhibition produced by teamLab from Japan. It was inspired by William Farquhar and based on the collection of natural history watercolour paintings done by Chinese painters about two centuries ago. *The Story of the Forest* features Singapore's and the region's native flowers, plants and animals inside a glass dome. When one enters, the dome is transformed into a fascinating digital artwork, a 15-metre-tall installation. A bridge spans the dome and a 170-metre-long forested pathway leads from it to the dome's base. When walking along the path, the visitor can experience changing weather and different times of the day as he interacts with the animals. Looking at the dome-shaped ceiling, a viewer can enjoy the effect of an infinite universe as he sees the blooming and wilting of flowers over the passing of time.

The encounter with these plants, flowers and animals is different each time as it depends on the movement of the



Story of the Forest, © teamLab



Story of the Forest, © teamLab

viewers present when they interact with the display. In other words, the viewers become a part of the artwork through this process. Together with other viewers who happen to be there, the individual interactions with the display create a new, collective artwork.

Stepping into the base of the dome, the viewer reaches the end of the forest display. Nevertheless, he can still have the digital experience of shooting stars and budding trees coming from the dome's ceiling. Tree-planting is an important part of Singapore's Garden City efforts. Through the dome display, the viewer can feel relaxed and also reflect on the country's history, this region and its people.

Digital art can improve human relationships within communities. As a viewer enjoys the simple interaction he has with the display, he also learns to appreciate the presence of other viewers. Despite being strangers, their varied interactions with the display all contribute toward a beautiful artwork. When city dwellers can begin interacting with each other like the viewers of a digital artwork, people may learn to see the each other's strengths. New relationships can be formed and people can find new ways to live peacefully together.

Noriko Morisako, Japanese Docent

ANSWERS to ES! Quiz:

- 1: This set of 12 zodiac animals is outside the San Qing Gong Temple (Taoist Temple Tour)
- 2: Facade of Esplanade Theatres on the Bay (Esplanade Tour)
- 3: Tour of Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum
- 4: HDB Hub (Kampongs in the Sky – Toa Payoh Tour)
- 5: Deepavali Festival (Little India Walk)
- 6: No, it is a *kolam* drawing demonstration (Painted Prayers – Kolam Talk)
- 7: The nutmeg and mace are common spices used in cooking (Healing Garden Tour)
- 8: Permanent *wayang* (street opera) stage in the Goh Chor Tua Pek Kong Temple (Balestier Walk)
- 9: Sundial on Abdul Gafoor Mosque (Mosques Tour)
- 10: Portugal. He donated money to build St Joseph's Church in Victoria Street (Historical Churches Tour)

Curio - Smartphone Photography Workshop

By Gisella Harrold

Instagram, Snapchat, Boomerang, Snapseed, PhotoCollage...confused? Today there are many programmes for smartphones so a workshop was a very useful way to learn about them. FOM Curio recently organised a smartphone workshop led by award-winning travel photographer Lester Ledesma. During the workshop, he gave a quick rundown on the basics of photography and then explained some of the latest applications. PhotoCollage is a great programme to quickly turn your snapshots into a collage. This is very easily done, since the programme provides you with many layouts. Snapseed was my favourite; it has so many features that it almost warrants its own workshop. You can saturate or change the contrast of your photo, take out the blemishes with the healing tool, change the white balance or just highlight the photo which you accidentally took against the light. You can see that this is a very useful application and a must for all photography buffs. Boomerang, on the other hand, is just a fun application, on that turns still photos into five-second clips, repeating a move over and over, while Instagram is a platform like Facebook, used to communicate with your photos. During this session, we learned the importance of



hashtags, another way of communicating with the world. Check out #FOMCURIO

We will be using our new skills throughout the summer. If you are interested in joining the next photography workshop with Lester Ledesma, please register your interest at www.fom.sg under 'Activities' and look for Curio.

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Opening hours:

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

FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm, Fri 7:00 pm (English)
Tues to Fri 10:30 am and every second Saturday 1:30 pm (Japanese)

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. The new and refreshed permanent galleries are arranged along broad themes that highlight cross-cultural connections, rather than being segmented by geography or culture.

The ACM connects the cultures of Asia across two broad themes: trade and the exchange of ideas, and faith and belief. Beginning with the ninth century Tang shipwreck, the galleries explore Southeast Asia as a trading hub. Chinese porcelain, Southeast Asian ceramics, Indian textiles and furniture are showcased along with the Asian luxuries that were in demand in the global market. Asia was also a source as well as a crossroads of faith and belief and the ACM galleries display works of art showing the development of ancient Indian faiths and the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism across Asia. Christianity and Islam in Asia reveal the Asian origin and evolution of these global faiths.

Joseon Korea: Court Treasures and City Life (Through 23 July)

FOM Guided Tours:

Mon to Fri 10:30 am and 12:30 pm (English)

Intrigued by sets and costumes from Korean historical dramas and films? Then you will want to see actual furniture, fashion, and decorative arts from Korea's Joseon era (1392–1897). Spanning some 500 years, Joseon was Korea's last dynasty, and the legacy of its courtly culture and vibrant city life lives on in South Korea today. Treasures from the National Museum of Korea, the National Palace Museum of Korea, and the Deagu National Museum will be displayed for the first time in Singapore.

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 online for opening hours
Closed Mondays & Public Holidays

FOM guided tours:

Sat 4:00 pm: Art & History Tour

Sat 5:00 pm: History and Heritage Tour

To register please visit www.fom-gillman-barracks.eventbrite.com

China. The Arts – The People

Photographs and Films from the 1980s and 1990s By Ulrike Ottinger (Through 13 August)

The exhibition by acclaimed filmmaker Ulrike Ottinger is the first large scale exhibition by the award-winning filmmaker and artist in Asia. The selection of works focus on Ottinger's research and travels in China during the 1980s and 1990s, comprising four films and more than one hundred photographs. The photographs, created throughout her career and largely in parallel with the production of her films, will be unfolded along the artist's leitmotifs.



The exhibition is accompanied by an intensive public programme. The programmed talks and screenings will reflect on the notion of the documentary, the intersection of documentary and fiction, and the potential that artistic production can have for anthropology, cultural studies and history.

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

11:00 am for the main galleries

2:00 pm 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.

Once Upon a Time in Little India (Through 21 July)

Once Upon a Time in Little India tells the story of Singapore's Little India through historical and contemporary lenses and draws parallels with diasporic settlements across the globe. Recreating moments past and present, this exhibition presents an appealing and arresting mix of historical artefacts and contemporary art installations. This exhibition is a parallel project of the Singapore Biennale 2016.

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, Tues to Thurs 1:30 pm, Sat 2:00 pm
(Please call ahead to confirm the availability of a docent.)

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

National Museum of Singapore

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

Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am – 7:00 pm

FOM guided tours:

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

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

The Singapore History Gallery

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



Museum Information and Exhibitions

Desire and Danger

Discover the fine line between desire and danger at this stimulating new exhibition in the Goh Seng Choo Gallery. Featuring creatures that arouse appetites and instill fear, and exotic plants sought for their ability to induce pleasure or pain, this selection of drawings from the William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings explores the complex and sometimes uneasy relationship between man and nature.

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.

Ng Eng Teng: 1+1=1

Through the motifs of spacing and difference, this exhibition features works by the artist Ng Eng Teng produced between 1958 and 2001. The title of the exhibition takes as its point of reference a series of sculptures developed by the artist during the 1990s. While the series *1+1=1* has not been seen as characteristic of Ng Eng Teng's practice, here it is proposed as an alternative point of entry into the artist's body of works.

"There are too many episodes of people coming here..."

(Through Aug)

This exhibition builds on the previous exhibition's interest towards the textuality of exhibitions, bringing in materials by artists Charles Lim, Dennis Tan and Zai Kuning as a means to rewrite and open up newer points of departure.

NUS Baba House

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

Now conceived as a heritage house facilitating research, appreciation and the 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.

Visits by appointment only. Free-of-charge tours five times a week.
Email babahouse@nus.edu.sg to reserve spaces.

The Peranakan Museum

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



Opening hours:

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

FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm (English), Tues to Fri 10:30 am (Japanese), every second Wednesday of the month 10:45 am (French).

This intimate museum possesses one of the finest and most comprehensive collections of Peranakan objects. Galleries on three floors illustrate the cultural traditions and the distinctive visual arts of the Peranakans.

SAM@8Q

8 Queen Street, Singapore 188535
Tel: 6332 3222
www.singaporeartmuseum.sg



Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am – 7:00 pm, Fri 10:00 am – 9:00 pm

FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm, Fri 7:00 pm (English), Tues to Fri 10:30 am (Japanese)

Imaginarium: To the Ends of the Earth (Through 27 August)

How much do you know about the planet we inhabit? The Singapore Art Museum welcomes you back to the 7th edition of our family focused exhibition. Taking a closer look at the surroundings and environments we reside in, we see how people, flora, and fauna, adapt to their ever-changing surroundings. With the technological progress that we have made, we now have better insight into far-flung locations, and are better connected than before, but are we really any closer to appreciating earth's many marvels? Through inspiring and engaging artworks, *Imaginarium 2017* introduces explorers to new ways of seeing and experiencing the world around us.

STPI

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

Closed Sundays & Public Holidays

FOM guided tours: Tues and Thurs, 11:30 am, Sat 2:00 pm

Please refer to STPI's website at www.stpi.com.sg for STPI's public programmes.

STPI Annual Special Exhibition: David Hockney: A Matter of Perspective (Through 9 September)

STPI Gallery continues its 15th anniversary celebrations with David Hockney. The exhibition of 36 carefully selected works drawn mostly from Singapore's National Collection presents how Britain's most celebrated living artist continues to push the boundaries of print techniques, investigating the one intrigue which defines his entire prolific career: perspectives.

Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall

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



Opening hours:

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

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

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

Stitches of Love: Hidden Blessings in Children's Clothing and Accessories (through March 2018)

A collaboration between Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall and the Memorial Museum of Generalissimo Sun Yat Sen's Mansion in Guangzhou, this special exhibition showcases children's clothing and accessories from the late Qing to early Republican period. It reviews the wide range of images rich in symbolic meanings that were employed to bestow good fortune, longevity, male progeny, health, wealth and career success. The collection on display includes clothing, hats, ear muffs, bibs and shoes that feature a variety of motifs derived from the natural world, history, literature and folklore.

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



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keep alive the **HISTORY**

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museum guide

Thursday, 31 August 2017
10:00 - 12:30
Gallery Theatre
National Museum Singapore
93 Stamford Road
Singapore 178897

NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED - JUST JOIN US!

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For more info contact us at:
Tel/Fax: 6337 3685
Email: office@fom.sg

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