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January / February 2017



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President's Letter

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! I hope all of you had enjoyable festive season celebrations.

We move into 2017 on the back of many new exhibitions which started at the end of last year. Of note is *Port Cities: Multicultural Emporiums of Asia, 1500 – 1900* on show at the Asian Civilisations Museum. This exhibition traces the cross-cultural influences on society as people migrated and goods and ideas circulated across Asia. In a way, the exhibition reflects the essence of our society, with many of our members coming from different cultural backgrounds. *Port Cities* ends on 19 February, so do catch it before then.

Another exhibition to visit is the 2016 Biennale, *An Atlas of Mirrors* with 58 commissioned works that explore the diverse histories of the region. Durriya Dohadwala, an FOM docent at the Singapore Art Museum, highlights some of this exhibition's installations on pages 16 and 17. The Biennale ends on 26 February.

Every year, a volunteer who has quietly and positively given time and skills to FOM is honoured with the Salome de Decker Volunteer Recognition Award. My congratulations to Ann Mehrman, the 2016 Salome de Decker Award recipient. Ann began coordinating the publication of the *FOMflash* newsletter in 2014, working diligently in the background regardless of where she was located in the world, to ensure that it reached our members on time. This award was a timely recognition of her contribution, coming as it did before her departure from Singapore in December 2016.



A welcome addition to our volunteer community is the group of newly-minted docents from the Peranakan Museum, the first of the trainees to graduate from the 2016/17 docent training programme. My congratulations to them for successfully completing the course. I look forward to welcoming more additions to our docent community in March.

In December, you elected the FOM Council for 2017 (see photo on the left). I would like to thank you for your trust in me and the other council members. I am delighted to have Melissa Yeow, Sarah Lev, Sue Ellen Kelso, Sadiyah Shahal and Gisella Harrold remain on the council to serve for another year. Three new council members, Sophia Kan, Susan Fong and Ilknur Yildiz, are joining the team this year. I look forward to working with the new team to achieve more in 2017. We aim to refresh FOM with new activities for the enjoyment of all members, and build an even stronger community of volunteers. I am proud to be leading FOM again. I look forward to doing my best to keep you all actively connected to the society.

The previous council worked hard to overcome many challenges and bring changes over the past year. I would like to express my gratitude to outgoing council members Elaine Cheong, Maren Kraemer-Dreyer, Shia Ai Lee, Anne Pinto-Rodrigues and Lim Yuen Ping, for their commitment and contributions to last year's council.

As we reflect on a successful 2016, we also mourn the passing of Yoko Kawaguchi, a Japanese docent who died of breast cancer on 26 November last year. My deepest condolences to her family and the Japanese community for the loss of a beloved wife, mother and friend. Yoko became a docent in 2005 and guided at NMS, ACM, SAM and TPM. In addition to guiding, Yoko was one of the JD coordinators and NMS representative. The Japanese docents remember her as a humble volunteer always ready to share her research knowledge with the docent community. She was a keen believer in the FOM cause and in her last days, Yoko requested that her family make a donation of \$5,000 to our society so that we can continue to pursue our mission. I am incredibly moved by her devotion and we shall always hold her dear in our memories.

Our Chinese friends will be celebrating the first day of the Lunar New Year on 28 January. May I wish them, 恭喜发财, 万事如意。

I would also like to wish all our members a great year ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clara Chan'.

Clara Chan
FOM President 2017

The Year of the Rooster

Rooster Symbolism in Chinese Art

By Patricia Bjaaland Welch

How did the common rooster become the sole bird to make it into the Chinese zodiac calendar? This goes back to the dawn of time – figuratively and literally.

Have roosters always crowed at the first sign of morning light? Apparently so. In Zoroastrianism, cocks were seen as a benign spirit that “crowed at dawn to herald a turning point in the cosmic struggle between darkness and light”.

The Chinese world view also encompassed the idea of a world of darkness and one of light – the two forces known in Chinese as *yin* (the dark, wet, feminine, lunar) and *yang* (the light, dry, masculine, solar). But rather than being in cosmic struggle, they were perceived as polarities, working in conjunction with one another. In Chinese folklore, as in many other cultures, the rooster's dawn cries were associated with the sun and that sun was often portrayed as a red disk enclosing some sort of bird – the most common being a two or three-legged crow, a ‘red bird of the south’ or a rooster.

So roosters gained their protective reputations and became good luck talismans. When the Yingpan Cemetery along the Silk Road was excavated in the mid-1990s, archaeologists uncovered a young man's mummy (believed to date back to the Han Dynasty, 206 BCE-220 CE), with a silk embroidered pillow shaped like a crowing rooster under his head. Statues of white roosters were once placed on top of coffins to scare away evil spirits. Where do you think the Western custom of placing roosters on rooftop weathervanes comes from?

However, most of the earthenware statues of roosters found in Chinese tombs are there for a different reason. Preparing for a life after death meant not only being accompanied by your household servants (real or earthenware), but also having a good supply of food. All those clay granary jars and rows of earthenware pigs, dogs, sheep and chickens excavated from Chinese tombs were meant as (symbolic) future provisions for the tomb's inhabitant(s).

In early China (around 5000 BCE on) the main sources of meat were pigs, chickens, sheep and dogs. Pigs and chickens were the most common domesticated animals and hence important signs of a prosperous household. Look closely at the bottom of the traditional Kitchen God posters you see at Chinese New Year, and you will often find two small household animals – a rooster and a dog. Dogs were once sacrificed to ward off evil and were also the usual offering to the God of Wealth, so both animals were seen as good luck symbols that would protect a family and bring it good fortune.

Today, Chinese New Year posters are where one most often finds representations of roosters, although here they serve another purpose; they symbolize good luck because



19th century traditional Chinese New Year wood-block print

the pronunciation of the pictogram meaning chicken or rooster (*ji* 鸡 or *gongji* 公鸡) sounds like the one that means ‘lucky or auspicious’ (*ji* 吉). They are in short, lucky homophones, so a picture of a rooster can serve as a visual pun understood to represent good luck.

Roosters also became a popular symbol of the literati. A rooster's red comb was believed to resemble the red button atop a senior official's court hat, designating his rank. Just as the embroidered squares worn on the front and back of a court official's robe identified which grade (from 1-9) he belonged to as a public servant, so did the various colours of the buttons or knobs on his hat.

Other positive qualities attributed to roosters include ferocity and courage (their spurs recall military gear), benevolence (they protect their flocks of hens and chicks), and faithfulness (they call to the sun

every morning).

The motif of rooster and hen surrounded by chicks, symbolizing the pleasures of the simple (country) life as well as the hope that a family will be lucky, thus became a popular folk motif. The rooster as a familial good luck symbol migrated together with the Chinese to Southeast Asia, where it is found as a motif on women's kebaya and young children's clothing and accessories. Visit the Peranakan Museum and you'll discover a pair of beaded slippers for the baba of the house, decorated with roosters.



Detail of an embroidered rooster and sun on a child's collar, courtesy of the author

Translating the rooster's many attributes into predictions for the coming depends upon your own horoscope sign, but those lucky enough to have been born in a rooster year are generally said to be hard-working, courageous, confident and independent, if sometimes a bit boastful and plucky.

Patricia Bjaaland Welch is this year's Overall Co-Head of Docent Training and a frequent contributor to *PASSAGE* magazine.



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On the Cover: Titarubi, *History Repeats Itself*, 2016, image courtesy of the Singapore Art Museum.

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

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FOM member privileges include free admission to NHB museums (excluding special exhibitions); access to FOM programmes including docent training, lectures, study tours, volunteer opportunities; a subscription to the FOM magazine, *PASSAGE*, and discounts at selected retail outlets, theatres and restaurants. Membership in FOM ranges from \$25 (senior) - \$100 (family) depending on category of membership.

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FOM Leadership

By Sadiah



Clara Chan with Ann Mehrman, this year's Salome de Decker Award recipient



Anne thanking members for the award



Merry Cooper holding her lucky draw prize, with Clara Chan



To show our appreciation to the FOM leaders, President Clara Chan, together with council members, hosted this year's Leadership Dinner at the Yantra Restaurant by Hemant Oberoi. Over forty FOM Leaders as well as schedulers and training co-heads enjoyed the breathtaking ambience and exquisite taste of northern Indian cuisine. The three-course dinner was ushered in with the *bhatti jhinga* (chargrilled prawns), so elegantly presented that eating them seemed wrong, but simply irresistible. The main course was a full spread of tender lamb curry, chicken tikka in butter gravy, okra, *palak paneer* and Hyderbadi dhal, served with fluffy freshly baked *naan* and weightless *mutter pulao* rice. Susan Fong, a special guest, shared her feelings, "Food is good, ambience is fantastic and the people are incredible. I simply love it!" But the authentic Maharaja cuisine proved to be too spicy for some. "It was good, a little bit too spicy, but lovely!" pronounced Kayoko Udagawa (Japanese Docent Coordinator). Chef Oberoi magically tweaked the spiciness and overawed everyone. Millie Phuah summed it up in a single word, "Memorable!" And you can take her word for it, she is FOM's coordinator for the Indian Heritage Centre.

The highlight of the event was the presentation of the prestigious Salome de Decker Award, given to a volunteer who has worked quietly behind the scenes and contributed greatly to FOM.

Annual Dinner 2016

Shahal

This year, the award was presented to Ann Mehrman for her dedication in running FOMflash so efficiently, from wherever she was. Ann was extremely grateful and yet humbled by this recognition, "I am so honoured to receive this award and to be honoured by the FOM women who nominated and voted for me. I am glad I was able to help, but I truly don't feel worthy of this award." We at FOM think otherwise as everyone in FOM knows what Ann has done. Clara thanked Ann for her selfless dedication. The cheers and applause became a bittersweet moment when it was announced that Ann was moving back to the United States. A timely award indeed as we all know "Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they just have the heart." (Elizabeth Andrew)

The special and memorable evening was topped with sweet and succulent desserts – creamy *rasmalai* and saffron *phirni*. Wide smiles were seen as everyone left with goodie bags containing a beautifully beaded batik tissue box cover made by a social enterprise to support the disadvantaged, and a box of Belgian chocolates – a small gesture of our true appreciation. As Clara said in her speech "any words of appreciation are not adequate to make up for the time, effort, talent and skills you give to FOM". FOM volunteer leaders – you are simply priceless!



Chinese New Year Food

By Lim Chey Cheng

All over the world festivals are celebrated with food. Its importance to the Chinese goes beyond basic survival, as reflected in the saying “民以食为天” (*mín yǐ shí wéi tiān*), which translates as “to the people, food is heaven”. Given the long history of the Chinese and that their cuisine is among the best in the world, Chinese festivals are marked with a wide variety of food, with each festival having its own special and distinctive range. This is especially so for Chinese New Year, the most important festival.

Chinese people believe that eating foods with auspicious-sounding names or appearance at the beginning of a new year will bring good luck and help fulfill one's wishes throughout the year. They match food names with homophones and homonyms that express hopes such as those for a long life or many descendants. These are mainly in Mandarin, but each dialect group has its own specialties based on their dialect's pronunciation.

The most important meal for the festival is the New Year's Eve reunion dinner. Many families have a 'steamboat' (hotpot) as the central dish. The family sits around it in a circle, symbolizing their reunion. This is called 围炉 *wéi lú* meaning to surround the stove. Fresh ingredients, including pork, chicken, seafood and vegetables, are cooked in the pot. Most of these have names that are homophones, for example, chicken 鸡 *jī*, is a homophone of another word 吉 *jí* meaning 'lucky or auspicious', Chinese cabbage 白菜 *bái cài* sounds like 百财 *bǎi cái*, a hundred wealth, and lettuce 生菜 *shēng cài* is like 生财 – to grow wealth. Noodles, which should not be cut, are included for longevity, prawns for good luck because of their red colour and the Cantonese name *ha* representing laughter. For all Chinese, a whole fish, usually steamed, is de rigueur. Fish 鱼 *yú* sounds like surplus 余 *yú*. A standard New Year wish is 年年有余 *Nián Nián Yǒu Yú*, which means to have surplus every year.

The fish is not fully consumed; some is left for the next day (New Year's Day), to symbolize having a surplus. In southern China, some people eat only the middle part of the fish, leaving the head and tail for the



Dried rice cake, *nián gāo* (northern version)

next day, to symbolize completeness. Some families have two fish, but eat only one, keeping the other as surplus.

Another 'must have' is the New Year cake 年糕 *nián gāo* – not strictly a cake but a pudding because it is steamed. Made with glutinous rice flour, the northern Chinese version is eaten as a fried or boiled savoury dish with other ingredients, whereas the southern version has sugar and is very sweet and sticky. This is the dish offered to the Kitchen God to sweeten his report about the family to the God of Heaven at the end of each year. The word 糕 *gāo* is homophonous with 高 *gāo*, meaning high or to rise, so *nián gāo* connotes a rising year, presumably for all good things. The Fochow version of this sweet pudding contains strips of yam and peanuts. Sweet *nián gāo* is eaten as a snack.

The ubiquitous mandarin orange is for decoration as well

as consumption.

Its name 橘子 *jú zi* is likened to 吉 *jí* which means lucky or auspicious. Another lucky fruit is the pomelo 柚 *yòu* which sounds like 余 *yú* or surplus.



Dumplings, *jiǎo zi*

People from northern China eat dumplings 饺子 *jiǎo zi*, filled with meat and cabbage and shaped like ingots. This tradition symbolizes the changing of years, because *jiǎo* also means change. The dumpling's ingot shape symbolizes wealth and treasure. In some places, people even put a clean coin inside, to enable the lucky person who eats it to become wealthier. This custom is prevalent amongst mainland Chinese, but not Singaporeans.

On the first day, or the first morning of the New Year, many people eat only vegetarian food as a Buddhist tradition and for cleansing. Southern Chinese, including



Black moss, *fā cài*

Singaporeans, also eat a sweet rice dumpling soup 汤圆 *tāng yuán*. The round rice balls denote, and the name sounds like 团圆 *tuán yuán* or reunion.

Each dialect group has its own 'must have' foods. One of the strangest is black moss 发菜 *fā cài* which is most popular among Cantonese people. *Fā cài* (Cantonese *fatt choy*) sounds just like 发财 *fā cái* (*fatt choy*) which means becoming wealthy. The Cantonese like to cook it with dried oysters, *ho xi*, making a dish *ho xi fatt choy* which means (to have) good things and be wealthy.



Mandarins and olives

Amongst other specialties, the Teochews have a dish of fried leek 蒜 *sng* (Teochew), *suàn* (Mandarin).



Fried leek, *suàn*

When young, I learned a Teochew rhyme which translates as “Eat leek and have money to keep”. We also eat a raw fish salad 鱼生 *yú shēng* served sashimi-style, with shredded raw radish and carrots, together with strips of dried radish. Each morsel of raw fish, along with the strips of vegetables, is dipped either into sweet plum sauce or salted fermented bean paste, fried in sesame oil. It is not mixed and tossed like the more popular version, which is not traditional but is a Singaporean dish created in the mid-1970s by four local restaurant chefs, based on the original Teochew version. This type of raw fish salad and the tossing *lo hei* (Cantonese for 捞起) associated with it, is only eaten in Singapore and Malaysia.

A less widely practised custom amongst Teochew families such as my in-laws, is that of eating boiled cockles on New Year’s Eve and strewing the floor with the cockle shells. Again there is a rhyme playing on the word for cockles, which also means money. It probably has its roots in the historical use of shells as currency. Cleaning up the floor after dinner must have been quite a task!



Radish and carrot for Teochew raw fish



Teochew raw fish, *yú shēng*

Many snacks are also eaten throughout the fifteen days of celebration. The snacks traditionally eaten in China differ from those in Singapore, Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries. In China, guests are served sweets, dried and candied fruit, nuts and seeds. The Chinese names for all kinds of seeds 种子 *zhǒng zǐ* have the word 子 *zǐ* meaning child, as a suffix. Thus melon seeds 瓜子 *guā zǐ* and lotus seeds 莲子 *lián zǐ* are prime favourites for their connotations of having many children and *lián* implies continuity as in 连 *lián*. Peanuts, dried red dates, walnuts and ginkgo nuts are standard fare, each with its own symbolic meaning. Candied fruits are supposed to sweeten the coming year.



Candied fruits in a Tray of Togetherness

Usually eight varieties (eight is a lucky number) are served in a round or eight-sided box called the ‘Eight Treasure Box’ 八宝盒 *bā bǎo hé*. It is also known as the ‘Tray of Togetherness’ 全盒 *quán hé*.



Cookies galore

A unique custom in my parents’ county in China was to serve raw green olives to guests.

The cookies and other baked pastries found in abundance here are local inventions that the Peranakans adapted from British, Dutch and Malay versions and are not found elsewhere. The Peranakans must have drawn inspiration from Christmas cookies as well as traditional Malay pastries.

Another food which has no roots in China is abalone 鲍鱼 *bào yú* popular for its name sounding like 保余 *bǎo yú* (guaranteed surplus) and its status as a high-priced item. A few others have origins only in localised parts of China, but have morphed into over-priced local versions. Among them are *bak kwa* (grilled pork slices) and the so-called “treasure pots” 盆菜 *pén cài* or *poon choy* (literally vegetable pot/basin) which used to be a humble Hakka



Abalone, *bào yú*



Advertisement for *pén cài*

by high-end restaurants not long ago, *pén cài* with deluxe ingredients such as abalone, shark’s fin and dried scallop, now cost hundreds of dollars in restaurants during the New Year period.

The festivities end on the night of the 15th day, known as 元宵节 *yuán xiāo jié* or lantern festival (different from the Mooncake Lantern Festival) with a feast of the same kinds of foods. The northern Chinese eat a sweet dumpling 元宵 *yuán xiāo*, similar to the *tāng yuán* of the first day.

With each passing year, the varieties of foods sold during this period have increased owing to the imagination, creativity and commercialisation of entrepreneurs. Many of them, sold in Chinatown, are new-fangled inventions and not traditional. As these gain popularity, people come to believe they are traditional Chinese New Year foods, but they are not. Eventually, they become the new traditions.

Lim Chey Cheng guides at several museums and is the coordinator of Explore Singapore! She is a traditionalist at heart.

Photos by the author

Birdcages of Asia

By Siobhán Cool

Keeping caged songbirds is an Asian tradition that goes back centuries, appealing to a wide spectrum of hobbyists, from emperors to the common man. To create the perfect home, old customs often required a bird *in-situ* so artisans created ornately carved cages in a futile attempt to complement nature's beauty. Whilst many bird enthusiasts source their songbirds from licensed breeders, there remains a disturbing Southeast Asian black market of wild-caught songbirds, as humans covet the jewels of the jungles.



During a walk at dawn around Hoan Kiem Lake in Hanoi, I spotted these covered cages beside a troupe of local women performing morning exercises. Afterwards, they tended to their birds, who were hoisted into the trees to share their songs through the coming day.

In Macau, while visiting a museum that was once a Mandarin's home, I paused to admire a quiet corner of the second-storey where once a favourite songbird would have warbled its message to the courtyard below.



When in Hong Kong for work, I never fail to visit the Yuen Po Bird Market on a Sunday. I wander around the little hilltop so I can feast my eyes on the many exquisite birds, all in one place. Before too long, I am overcome with remorse and despair at the birds' cramped plight and head away with my newly purchased, but empty cage, to the chagrin and bemusement of the bird-sellers.

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

A Walk in the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve

By Anne Pinto-Rodrigues



The Rock Path is a hiker's delight



The highest point in Singapore, the Bukit Timah Summit (163.63 metres), lies within the nature reserve



The verdant canopy of the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve

Nature lovers in Singapore don't have to go very far to enjoy a stroll in the woods. Barely 12 kilometres from the busy city centre lies the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve (BTNR), a 400-acre tract of lush primary rainforest. After nearly two years of trail repairs and slope stabilisation work, the reserve reopened to the public on 22 October 2016.

One of the first forest reserves to be established in Singapore, the BTNR is a biodiversity hotspot, housing nearly 40% of Singapore's indigenous flora and fauna. It was initially earmarked as a reserve in 1883, on the recommendation of Nathaniel Cantley, the then Superintendent of the Singapore Botanic Gardens (1880–1888).

Today, native mammals such as the long-tailed macaques and the tree-hugging Malayan Colugo, as well as a variety of bird, reptile and insect species, thrive in this largest surviving piece of primary rainforest.

The recent closure of the reserve has allowed the tropical forest to rejuvenate without the disturbance of the 400,000 people that visit each year. Species such as the Malayan porcupine and the slow loris, rarely seen in Singapore, were observed by researchers in the BTNR for the first time, an indicator of the forest's health and vitality.

The remarkable flora of the reserve is believed to include more tree species than the entire continent of North America. On 18 October 2011, the BTNR was declared Singapore's second ASEAN Heritage Park (Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve being the first).

A walk in the BTNR is always full of surprises, thanks to its incredibly rich plant and animal life.

Anne Pinto-Rodrigues is a nature enthusiast who writes about her various nature experiences on her blog *No Roads Barred* (<https://noroadbarred.wordpress.com>).

Photos by the author



A Banded Woodpecker (*Chrysophlegma miniaceum*) busy at work in the reserve. This medium-sized woodpecker is identifiable by its distinctive crest, red wings and upper body.



Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*) spotted in the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve. This bird is identifiable by its long, racket-shaped outer tail feathers.

Bible and Betel – the Dangerous Charm of the Batavian Mestizas

By Anne Champendal

When visiting the *Port Cities* exhibition at the Asian Civilisations Museum, try to spot these two similar boxes. Made of ivory and gold in the 18th century, they could both be locked to protect two very different treasures – a Bible and betel. These two exquisite artefacts tell the story of the hybrid culture of the Eurasian mestizas in Batavia during colonial times and the ambiguous feelings they provoked among the European men who crossed their paths.

When the Dutch East India Company (VOC) founded Batavia in the first part of the 17th century, there were virtually no women in the town. The native inhabitants had been expelled and until the opening of the Suez Canal 250 years later in 1869, very few European women travelled to the East Indies. Gender imbalance often leads to social instability, so to make up for the lack of women, the VOC started to import brides for its servants and soldiers from various parts of Asia. Many were slaves; others were free Indo-Portuguese mestizas from India, or native Indonesians.

Thus, a mixed-blood community of multiple origins emerged, one that was very useful to the economic interests of the Netherlands. The boys were usually integrated into the VOC militia and the girls became brides for new generations of European men employed by the VOC. Since very few European women were living in Batavia, the mestizas who married important merchants and officers were among the highest-ranking women in town and enjoyed a freedom that amazed European travellers. Since under Dutch law, a wife could inherit her late husband's wealth, many of them became extremely rich. In the mid-18th century, in his book *Voyage d'Innigo the Biervillas*, Saunier de Beaumont wrote that the Batavian ladies could go around freely and that they were more respected than anywhere else in the world. He even noted that a wife could send an abusive husband to jail if it suited her. Whether this was true or not, it clearly shows a cultural clash between the European patriarchal idea of what the social position of a woman should be and the freedom granted to the mestizas in the Dutch East Indies.



MESTIESSCHE VROUW.
In staatje na de Kerk gaande.

A mestizo woman in state after attending church. Print from *Jacob Haafner, Reize in eenen Palanquin, Amsterdam, 1808, vol 2, p 392*



Bible box, ivory with gold mounts, 18th century, Dutch colonial, Sri Lanka or Batavia. Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum

But the confrontation between the two cultures and genders was even deeper. Ancient sources often describe the mestizas as amazingly beautiful and attractive. Yet, they had Asian habits that horrified most European visitors. They wore *bajus* (tunics) that could be transparent,

thus revealing parts of their anatomy. In 1685, French explorer François Leguat doubted the mestizas' Christianity because of the immodest way they were dressed. But even worse was probably their habit of chewing betel, sometimes even in church. To the Europeans, betel was associated with sexual desires and so the Eurasian mestizas were often described as lascivious and adulterous, scandalous behaviours that were only made possible by their power and freedom.

In this 19th century print by J Haafner (on the left), an elegant mestiza is walking along a street followed by a slave holding a parasol. Behind them, a female servant carries a betel box and a spittoon under her left arm. We are told that they are coming back from church and indeed, in her right hand the servant also holds a



Betel box, ivory and gold fittings, circa 1780, Batavia, town mark of Batavia, maker's mark, FK, letter K. Private Collector (on loan from Mr Jan Veenendaal)

Bible. This remarkable image is a perfect illustration of this attraction-repulsion feeling. The Batavian mestizas had a charm almost impossible to resist, but this attractiveness was perceived as a dangerous siren's song by many Europeans, who believed that it could lead them to nothing less than their own spiritual death.

Anne Champendal is an FOM docent at the Asian Civilisations Museum.

Fujian in Japan

By Helen Fung Khoo

Serendipity follows the Asian Civilisations Museum's guest curator Peter Lee. When he was in Japan setting up the Peranakan exhibition for the Fukuoka Art Museum, its director was also the main Japanese expert on Obaku Zen and personally accompanied Peter to Manpuku Temple to meet the monks. It was this kind of relationship that made it possible for the ACM to borrow four of Manpuku-ji's artefacts. These had never before left Japan.

The artefacts tell the remarkable story of Chan Buddhism's branching off to Japan in the mid 17th century, to start Japan's smallest Zen sect, Obaku Zen, after the Rinzai and Soto Sects. The men bringing Obaku Zen to Japan were monks from Fuqing, Fujian's Wan Fu Si (Unlimited Fortune) Temple. In the *Port Cities* exhibition, the famous Zen Master, Yinyuan Longqi, is not featured, but his disciple, Duzhan Xingying (独湛性莹) is.

When the Fujian monks arrived in Nagasaki, a large group of Chinese traders from Fujian had already settled in the port city. As an indication of their size, they had built three temples, which the newly arrived monks were tasked to look after. In fact, it was the Fujian diaspora that had prompted the monks to come over to care for their needs. The Fujian monks had come at a propitious time as the Tokugawa regime was encouraging Buddhism to flourish by granting the Obaku monks a piece of land south of Kyoto, where they built their temple, also named Wan Fu Si (Manpuku-ji), in 1661. A thousand years separate the first Wan Fu Si in Fuqing, Fujian, built in the Tang Dynasty, and the newer Manpuku-ji built in Japan in the Ming style.

Not only was the architecture Chinese, many of the practices from Fujian were retained: chanting in the Fujian dialect, the use of Chinese musical instruments, vegetarian meals or devotional cuisine prepared in traditional style and the tea ceremony prepared with tea leaves, *sencha*, instead of powdered tea or *matcha*. These features became



Duzhan Xingying (1628 - 1706)

the hallmarks of Obaku Zen Buddhism. Daoist deities have also been incorporated into the pantheon of deities, for example, the Goddess of the Sea, Mazu, a Fujian native.

Duzhan Xingying served as Manpuku-ji's fourth abbot. His life and works are represented in the exhibition by a portrait of him on a scroll, painted by Fujiwara Tanenobu, with a colophon by Eppo Doshō, one of his disciples. The three other artefacts are paintings and calligraphy by Duzhan. There is a devotional scroll triptych of Amitabha, with Avalokiteshvara and Mahasthamaprapta, a didactic poem composed by Duzhan and written in running script, and a New Year greeting letter from Duzhan to his Zen master, Yinyuan Longqi, conveying his good wishes on the master's early retirement.

Early retirement came unexpectedly to Duzhan. He was to live another fourteen years in Manpuku-ji, before his death at the age of 79. He lived well, cultivating the arts of the literati, painting and calligraphy. He was devoted to Amitabha and his two accompanying bodhisattvas and was deeply filial to his parents in the Confucian way. We do not know why he retired so early. A version in Chinese says that Duzhan took the blame for the misbehaviour of two of his disciples. In the 17th century, two young, curious monks visiting a geisha house in broad daylight with the express purpose of admiring the entertainers, must have

seemed more serious than it is in our times. Before leaving, the monks were reputed to have said to the geishas, "Your parents must be very proud of you!"

Helen Fung Khoo joined the ACM when it opened in 2003 and served as a Volunteer Greeter. She received her docent's badge in 2008 and has been guiding since then. Her focus is on matters Asian, in particular on China and Southeast Asia. She is proud to be an octogenarian.

Where Land Meets Sea:

Encountering the Colourful Chaos of the Port Cities

By Vidya Schalk

The Asian Civilisation Museum's current exhibition, *Port Cities: Multicultural Emporiums of Asia, 1500-1900*, explores how the region's port cities and the people in them formed both networks and connections that resulted in the movement not only of goods and services, but also the people who lived in them.

For centuries, the waters between India and China were plied by Indian, Arab, Southeast Asian and Chinese traders transporting vast amounts of cargo through hundreds of miles. They were joined by the Europeans at the close of the 15th century when Vasco da Gama sailed around the Cape of Good Hope to India, leading the way for the eventual founding of the great European trading houses – the East India Company (EIC) in 1600, the Dutch who founded their East India Company (VOC) in 1602, the Danish in 1616, the Portuguese in 1616, the French in 1664 and so on, and the waters between India and China became very busy indeed!

Opening the exhibition is a magnificent painting of Singapore by Percy Carpenter showing Singapore just 37 years after it became a settlement. The influence of Calcutta on the layout and architecture of Singapore was significant as Singapore was then governed from Calcutta. The panoramic view stretches from Pearl's Hill to Tanjong Rhu and shows a busy harbour with many ships anchored offshore. The diversity of races that trade had brought together created one of the most interesting and curious towns of the Far East. The harbour throbbed with swarms of canoes loaded with eggs, vegetables, fruit and birds. It was a

microcosm of Asia. The diversity of the population – Malays, Indians, Chinese and Arabs – was particularly striking to



Cotton inner robes from the Coromandel Coast, 17th or 18th century. Tailored in Japan, Edo Period. Matsuzakoya Collection, Japan

travellers and this is reflected in the wonderful garments on display in the exhibition. They range from the *garo* worn by Parsi women, to a *sarong*, *baju panjang*, *bisht*, linen suit, *angarkha*, *kebaya*, double ikat European dress, *dhoti* and even a kimono.

People were an important part of the port cities' diversity. It took a certain amount of courage and sense of adventure for them to leave the familiar behind to start a new life in a new country. Five very different personalities – Munshi Abdullah from Malacca; Franz Muller of the Dutch East India Company; Duzhan Xingying from Fujian province in China; Cornelia van Nijenroode; the daughter of a wealthy Dutch merchant; and a Japanese geisha from Hirado, Japan – each tell their story through pictures and artefacts, reflecting the movement of such people 400 years ago.

Another series of textiles on display is a case study of how cross-cultural trade and influences affect people's lives, in this case; how various government policies and changing fashions influenced the age. For example, Britain's monopolistic policies in such textile manufacturing countries as India had devastating consequences for centuries-old textile manufacturing and associated cottage industries such as artisan weaving and hand-spinning. At the same time, Europe's rapid industrialisation led to changes in consumption patterns that created more changes, which affected labour, production and distribution practices. Such changes created massive social upheavals, enriching some populations while exploiting others.

An exhibition of artefacts from Batavia, once the Asian



Wooden chair, Batavia, 18th century. Gereja Sion (Portuguese Zion Church), Jakarta



Matsura Scroll depicting foreigners detained in Hirado. Japan 18th century. Ink on Paper. Matsura Historical Museum, Hirado, Japan



Hollands Bruidsfeest te Batavia (*Dutch wedding feast in Batavia*) Jan Brandes, Batavia 1779-1785). Watercolour on paper



Peter Knoll, *Cornelia van Nijenroode and their daughters. Jacob Coeman, Batavia, 1665. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam*

headquarters of the Dutch East India Company reflects the eclectic mix of replicating and copying and cross-pollination and integration of styles that resulted in unique and hybrid forms. A lively painting by Jan Brandes shows a Dutch wedding feast in Batavia during the late 18th century, with people in the various hybrid outfits then worn. The appreciation of beautiful objects by the wealthy can be seen in the artefacts they collected – an intricate double pipe-case, a Bible box, a large ivory cabinet from Sri Lanka, exquisite silver items from China, gorgeous betel boxes and caskets from various Indonesian regions, and colourful ceramics from China and Japan. And an impressive line-up of elegant and opulent-looking chairs shows the wide range of trade items created, transported and acquired by those living in the various port cities in the region.

The sense of fashion (or the lack thereof) is the most enjoyable part of this exhibition and is truly eye-opening. Sumptuary laws that dictated how one should dress were ignored or scoffed at by the people of the port cities. They improvised, they experimented, they defied notions of convention and they consumed objects and material goods that were not just local, but anything that came their way. Port city residents were a lively, colourful mix who had minds of their own, with an idiosyncratic sense of fashion, language and architecture. They were true non-conformists.

A parade of such non-conformist dressers can be seen in the Matsura scrolls. These are a unique archival collection that date back to the 17th century, set up by a Matsura clan lord in Japan. They depict both male and female foreigners of all age groups and nationalities including Dutch, British, Portuguese Macanese, Goan Kaffir, Moors, Spaniards from Luzon, Thais, Batavians and Chinese. The artists went to extraordinary lengths to label each person, noting their country of origin, age, the weapons they carried, and most painstakingly, an attention to detail regarding the amazing assortment of colourful clothing these people wore. They appear very cosmopolitan, with a mix of Asian and European



Reisebuch (*travel diary*), Georg Franz Muller. Southeast Asia 1670-1682. Stifsbibliothek, St Gallen, Switzerland

fashions and could have been considered 'badly dressed' by traditional or conventional standards of the day. However, by current standards, they appear quite trendy in their global mix of fashions and aesthetics.



Wooden screen, Batavia, 18th century. National Museum of Indonesia, Jakarta

The diversity of people in the port cities obviously resulted in mixed-race communities, distinguishing them from the more homogeneous hinterlands. These mixed-race populations gave each port city a unique cultural flavour with their own hierarchies and segregation by social status, which then dictated their lifestyles, the goods they consumed, the clothes and jewellery they wore, and the houses they lived in. We see to this day the vestiges of the hybrid products and cultures they created.

At the end of the exhibition, one exits marvelling at the aspects that bound all these cities together. Port cities shared an affinity and the kinship of belonging to an extended family. There was a sense of shared culture and identity, like beads on the same string forming a colourful necklace. This exhibition brings to light the common thread that strung these remarkable and very colourful port cities together.

Vidya Schalk is a docent at ACM and currently heads the research and training of docents for Special Exhibitions, including the one on Port Cities.

All images courtesy of the Asian Civilisations Museum

Artist and Empire: A Look at Art During and Beyond the Colonial Era

By Alison Marrinan, Julie Williams and Tina Nixon

Three docents at the National Gallery Singapore share their 'must-see' picks at the special exhibition *Artist and Empire: (En)countering Colonial Legacies*. Presented in association with Tate Britain, there are over 200 artworks with loans from British collections, as well as from past colonies of the Asia-Pacific region and works from Singapore's national collection.

The show is about the art of the British Empire and the power of art to influence perceptions of the empire and post-colonial identities. A previous version of *Artist and Empire* at Tate Britain earlier this year was more British-centric, while this exhibition, with a more local perspective, draws from the position of Singapore being a former British colony.

The first two galleries display historical empire paintings side-by-side with contemporary artworks that counter or challenge ideas in the historical works. The third and final gallery transitions to a comparative look at some of the diverse artistic responses to the decolonising periods within the Asia-Pacific region, associated with rising feelings



George Francis Joseph, Sir Thomas Stamford Bingley Raffles, 1817, © National Portrait Gallery, London



Lee Wen, [Not titled] (Raffles), AIM: Artists Investigating Monuments Series 2000, image courtesy of Ken Cheong

of national awareness and complex searches for national identity.

An obvious starting point for this exhibition is with the person synonymous with both Singapore and the empire. A very famous portrait of Raffles, painted in 1817, greets visitors as they enter the first gallery. A copy of this painting, done in 1912 by John Adamson, hangs in the permanent galleries of the National Museum of Singapore, so many may feel they have already seen it and are familiar with the man depicted. However, few visitors would guess, from this portrayal of him as the quintessential statesman, scholar and collector, that he had recently been recalled by the East India Company from his post as Lieutenant-Governor of Java, and that it was painted a full two years before Singapore was even founded.

As a counterpoint to this very formal and traditional painting of Raffles, there is a large photographic replica of an installation created by the well-known contemporary Singaporean artist,

Lee Wen, called *Raffles (Untitled)* in 2000, as part of a project by The Artists Village (TAV) called AIM: *Artists Investigating Monuments*. In this work, Lee wished the public to view Raffles from an equal vantage point rather than to always be looking up to him. The original idea was to have Raffles taken down from his pedestal at the Raffles Landing Site, but as this was not approved by the authorities, Lee built a platform of scaffolding some three metres away and asked the public to climb up and view Raffles from the different perspective of eye level, recording their responses via video.



Tang Da Wu, *You see No Sunset on Your Soil, I saw your Son Sat on my Paddy Field*, 1986. Image courtesy of the National Heritage Board

Tang Da Wu is often regarded as one of the earliest conceptual artists in Singapore where he founded the aforementioned TAV in 1988. Living in London in the early 1980s during a time of postcolonial reflection, he created a series of paintings related to the cultural politics at that time. The large (246 x 174.5 cm) acrylic on canvas work found in Gallery One, is of a slobbering bulldog painted in the blue,



George Washington Lambert, *Weighing the Fleece*, 1921, oil on canvas, image courtesy of Alison Marrinan



Elizabeth Butler, *The Remnants of an Army*, 1879, © Tate, London 2016

white and red of the Union Jack, symbolizing Britain. Painted in 1986, the title, *You see No Sunset on your Soil, I saw your Son Sat on my Paddy Field*, is a reflection on the historical phrase "The sun never sets on the British Empire" meaning that some part of it would always be in sunshine owing to its enormous expanse. The work is a contemporary commentary on Britain's imperial past and its continuing legacy in previous colonies. Tang explores a darker side of the British Empire by alluding to natural resources being depleted and the burden Britain placed upon its colonies to meet domestic demand.

A key historical work referring to the idea of the British Empire and a highlight from the Tate Collection is Elizabeth Butler's *The Remnants of an Army*, 1879. Relegated to a military museum after World War II when battle paintings fell out of favour, this beautifully painted canvas depicts the events of the first Anglo-Afghan war in the 1840s when the British actually had to retreat. At that time it was thought that only the surgeon William Brydon, who is pictured clinging to his saddle, had survived the war.

What is interesting is that Butler painted this during the time of the Second Anglo-Afghan war (1878-1880) to reflect on the idea of cycles of war. The artist's husband had served in the British army, fighting in Canada and Burma, and her subject matter makes us feel sympathy for the plight of the ordinary soldier caught up in conflict and violence. She was part of more liberal circles in London that were not entirely supportive of imperial expansion, hence her painting is more complex than many artworks depicting historical events at that time. This different perspective communicated within

the time of empire itself, coupled with the ongoing war in Afghanistan today, make this painting unique.

George Washington Lambert's *Weighing the Fleece*, 1921, depicts Leigh Falkiner, a stud merino sheep-breeder on his property, Wanganella, in New South Wales, Australia. Well-dressed, in a tailored suit and accompanied by his elegant wife, Falkiner proudly observes the weighing of the impressive fleece just shorn from one of his champion rams. The artist spent 20 years working in London where he built a reputation as a highly successful artist for glamorous and arresting portraits, challenging allegories as an official war artist, but he said he had this scene in his mind for 25 years. His love for the Australian country life came from working as a teenager on a sheep station in the late 1800s, shearing sheep, building fences and breaking in horses. This affinity led him to complete this painting in eight days with great attention to detail – from woolshed interiors to the physique of the rams, while restrained in colour and tone. By the early 20th century, artists, musicians and writers often portrayed such idealistic Australian nationalism with their images and narratives of the pastoral frontiers. There was great pride in "living off the sheep's back", when wool accounted for a third to a half of Australian exports and critics hailed this painting as a typical image of Australian life and a national subject.

Meanwhile, one of New Zealand's best-known and most famous artists, Charles Frederick Goldie, had a strong interest in the Maori indigenous peoples of New Zealand, as seen with *A Maori Chieftainess*, 1906, and *Tie Aho-o-te-Rangi Wharepu*, 1907. Goldie's sitters are portrayed in photo-realistic manner, every detail so lifelike, including the highly sacred *moko* or tattoo body art, which was only for noble Maori people of rank, indicating their power and position. Around each of their necks is the carved green nephrite *tiki* that represents the first man in Maori legend. Goldie's portraits aligned with the national turn towards Maori culture as a source of distinct New Zealand identity. By the late 1800s Maori designs entered New Zealand life and the *All Blacks* adopted the Maori *haka*, the ancient posture war dance, when preparing for a rugby match.

Artist and Empire: (En)countering Colonial Legacies runs till 26 March 2017 at the National Gallery Singapore.



(L) Charles Frederick Goldie, *A Maori Chieftainess*, 1906, and (R) *Tie Aho-o-te-Rangi Wharepu*, 1907. Oil on canvas, image courtesy of Alison Marrinan

Alison Marrinan, Julie Williams and Tina Nixon are all docents at the National Gallery Singapore and share a passion for the art of this region and beyond. They are very excited to welcome visitors to the second major international exhibition at NGS.

Singapore Biennale 2016 – An Atlas of Mirrors

By Durriya Dohadwala

The thematic use of mirrors and atlases – devices that help look at the self as well as at the other – are relevant in terms of contemporary art practices since they generally deal with socio-political, personal and cultural themes. The Singapore Art Museum (SAM) combines these two instruments to forge the intriguing theme of *An Atlas of Mirrors* for the fifth edition of the Singapore Biennale 2016, which will run until 26 February 2017.

The exhibition features 62 artists and art collectives from 19 countries in Southeast Asia, East and South Asia and is spread over multiple locations in the Bras Basah Art Precinct. While SAM and its sister building SAM at 8Q house the majority of the artworks, other artworks can be seen at the de Suantio Gallery at the Singapore Management University, the National Museum of Singapore, the Asian Civilisations Museum, Stamford Green and the Peranakan Museum. In order to navigate through the vast landscape of artworks, the Biennale has been divided into nine sub-themes.



Lim Soo Ngee, *Inscription of the Island*, 2016

An Endlessness of Beginnings

On the front lawn of the SAM building is Singaporean artist Lim Soo Ngee's work *Inscription of the Island*. It consists of a bronze and granite sculpture of a large left hand emerging from the ground, with the palm facing skyward and a pointing index finger. Lim imagines that this was once part of a colossal statue that guided the ships of an ancient, mythical civilisation and crafts his own legend about what happened to it. The work explores how myths influence human conditioning and how history is shaped by stories told and retold.

An Everywhere of Mirroring

In this sub-theme, space and place are explored through mirrors and maps. Sri Lankan artist Pala Pothupitiye's *Other Map Series* looks beyond maps as we know them and creates his own version of Sri Lanka's map through the events of its history: shaped by colonialism, civil unrest, religious extremism as well as the natural beauty of the island.

A Presence of Past

This section carries works that address cultural legacies and the persistence of memory, opening up the past into



Han Sai Por, *Black Forest* 2016

the present moment for contemplation and retrospection. Titarubi's work *History Repeats Itself* (on the cover of this issue) addresses the colonial history of Indonesia and its memory. The burnt-out ships in this installation recall the early centuries of European colonialism and make reference to the burning of ships in Indonesia by the Dutch East India Company in an attempt to seize control of the lucrative spice trade.

A Culture of Nature

The mirroring relationship between nature and culture is a key sub-theme in the Biennale. Singapore's celebrated sculptor, Han Sai Por's *Black Forest* depicts a destroyed forest landscape: blackened, real tree stumps and charcoal logs stand upright, representing the charred wood from ongoing deforestation activities that prick our conscience, yet attest to nature's resilience against every imaginable catastrophe.



Pala Pothupitiye, *Other Map Series*, 2016

A Share of Borders

Munem Wasif from Bangladesh interrogates this relevant sub-theme in today's political landscape. *Land of Undefined Territory* presents repetitive frames of barren land with no significant geographical or political identity. While this could be anywhere it is actually the site of one of the most contested territories in recent times – the border that separates India from Bangladesh where wars have been fought and lives lost.



Nobuaki Takekawa, *Sugoroku – Anxiety of Falling from History*, 2016

A Breath of Wills

Featured in this sub-theme is the work of Htein Lin whose soap installations depict crouching figures that speak of the harsh conditions and loneliness of solitary confinement. Having served a seven-year sentence as a political prisoner in socialist-era Myanmar, Htein Lin's installation *Soap Blocked*, replicates the soap carvings that he did during his incarceration.

A Flow of Identities

Nobuaki Takekawa's work *Sugoroku - Anxiety of Falling from History*, is an installation that takes a humorous look at the legacies of World War II for Japan. It comprises a table with board games and maps, paintings and posters, and a glass sculpture that explore the difficult legacies of the war. It surveys the material and mass culture and secular life that developed in the wake of capitalist economic development post-war and the socio-cultural issues that Japanese society faced as a result of ignoring the consequences of its role in the World War.



Htein Lin, *Soap Blocked*, 2016

A Somewhere of Elsewheres

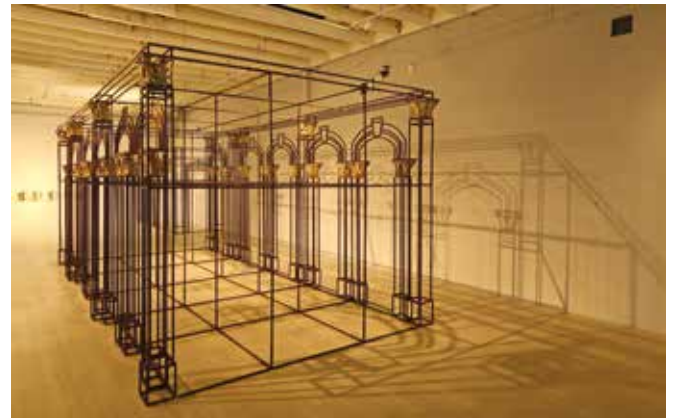
Migration and the sense of displacement in migrant experiences are very current issues of our times. Against the backdrop of refugees fleeing their homelands and the increasing sentiments of territorialism, distrust and fear, as well as the experience of migrant workers, this sub-theme raises critical questions.

Rathin Barman's *Home, and a Home* investigates 'landscape' as an idea in the space that it occupies in the mind and in the memory of Bangladeshi migrants in Kolkata. He explores the idea of 'home' which takes on new meanings for a displaced people. Based on written texts and oral

interviews conducted in Singapore with Bangladeshi migrant workers, Barman has created works that evoke images of the homes left behind, aspirations towards future homes and the present feeling of homelessness.

A Past of Absences

The final sub-theme of the Biennale investigates histories that have been marginalised or left out of history books. It explores the gaps brought on by the imposition of official narratives that have to be re-imagined from different perspectives.



Rathin Barman, *Home, and a Home*, 2016

Ahmad Fuad takes the legend of Panglima Awang, who was also known as Enrique of Malacca or Henry the Black and was Ferdinand Magellan's slave and interpreter. Enrique is famous for being the first person to have circumnavigated the world. Like other cultural elements shared historically across maritime Southeast Asia, the figure of Enrique is subject to ownership claims and counter-claims among Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. Ahmad Fuad's *Enrique de Malacca Memorial Project* takes the form of a memorial, featuring a portrait and a statue of an imagined Enrique, together with video documentation, artefacts and copies of documents. Fuad juxtaposes contradictory and sometimes fictional representations of Enrique demonstrating the complexity of Enrique's intertwined identity and history while at the same time illustrating the difficulty of verifying the truthfulness of a history.



Ahmad Fuad Osman, *Enrique de Malacca Memorial Project*, 2016

Durriya Dohadwala is an independent arts writer and docent at SAM.

All images courtesy of the Singapore Art Museum

Munshi Abdullah's Hikayat Abdullah

By Tania Léger

Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (1797 -1854), also called Munshi Abdullah (*munshi* meaning a language teacher) is recognised today as the 'Father of modern Malay literature'.

Living in Singapore today, one might think that speaking Malay is not necessary in order to be socially or economically successful. This hasn't always been the case. Going back to 1819 when Raffles came to Singapore with the British East India Company, Malay was the lingua franca of the region. During that period, it was necessary for Europeans to speak either Malay or have an interpreter to communicate and negotiate with the Malay Archipelago's various rulers.

Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, a Jawi Peranakan from Arab, Indian and Malay descent, was born in Malacca in 1797. His father, Sheikh Abdul Kadir, also born in Malacca, was a versatile merchant and language teacher. Munshi's father was often sent as an envoy for wealthy traders in the region. He could help them write letters to Malay princes and also taught Malay to William Marsden who published a widely praised Malay-English dictionary in 1812.

Under the very strict teachings of his father, young Abdullah learnt to read and write the Qur'an and was even asked to translate the Arabic text into Malay. He studied with the best tutors in the Malay language and was particularly interested in studying Malay idioms.



Translations from Hikayat Abdullah with comments by J T Thomson, image courtesy of the National Library Board, Singapore

Abdullah began earning his living at the age of 13 teaching the Islamic religion to the Muslim soldiers stationed in Malacca's fort. He was considered an accomplished scholar of the Malay language by the age of 14. At that time, there were only four to five men in Malacca capable of writing official documents on behalf of customers who couldn't speak or write in Malay. There were no schools teaching Malay since Qur'anic schools taught Arabic. Those few men were therefore very popular and it was easy for them to find work. This is how Munshi Abdullah became an interpreter and teacher to

Farquhar, Raffles, Crawford and other influential Europeans in Malacca and Singapore.

Motivated by the missionary Alfred North, who thought that topics of daily life were missing from Malay literature, Munshi Abdullah wrote his autobiography, the *Hikayat Abdullah*, between 1841 and 1843. The manuscript was written in Jawi (an Arabic script used to write the Malay language), and it gave lively accounts of the lifestyle of both the local Malays and the Europeans living in Malacca and Singapore in the early 1800s.

It is interesting to note that despite its fame, Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir's work hasn't been integrally translated into



Hikayat Abdullah, image courtesy of the National Library Board, Singapore

English. The two English translations of the *Hikayat Abdullah* for instance – one made by John Turnbull Thomson in 1874 and the other by the Mission Press in 1849 – are not literal translations of the manuscript.

In 1846, Munshi gave J T Thomson a handwritten manuscript of his *Hikayat* and asked him to translate it into English. Abdullah chose Thomson to translate his biography because he was his best student and Munshi trusted that he could produce a good Malay-English translation. But Thomson didn't actually get down to doing the translation until he retired some 28 years later in New Zealand. Interestingly though, Thomson didn't translate the manuscript in its entirety. He left out the parts that he thought might not be of interest to an English readership. Thomson also added comments at the end of each chapter, giving his translation an added historical value. Even though the manuscript was not fully translated, the parts that have been translated by Thomson are very close to the spirit of the original manuscript. Hard copies of Thomson's translation are hard to find, but if you are interested in reading it, it's worth a trip to the microfilm section of Singapore's National Library.

The Mission Press translation of the *Hikayat Abdullah* is available online. It is shorter than J T Thomson's translation since there are no added comments, and an additional chapter about Butterworth was added to the manuscript before publishing. Some parts of Munshi's text have been cut out or modified for publishing – especially those dealing with missionaries or the less favourable aspects of the British in the region.

To allow a wider public to understand the meaning of "Father of modern Malay literature", an interesting project would be to produce a full English translation of Munshi Abdullah's work. As we are getting close to the 200th anniversary of Raffles' arrival in Singapore, such a publication would give a broader audience the opportunity to gain access to an alternative view of colonial Singapore as seen from a Malay perspective.

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 at the Asian Civilisations Museum.

Cities and Kings: Ancient Treasures from Myanmar

By Vidya Schalk

An extraordinary 1,000-year-old treasure made its way to Singapore in December. Great care was taken to transport this precious 11th century statue, a sandstone Buddha, seated in the *dharmachakra mudra* (teaching pose). Sacred prayers were performed before it made its long journey to the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) and when the statue arrived, Buddhist monks performed prayers to welcome it.

So great were the powers of this Buddha that many years ago a plaster replica of the image was created in Bagan and installed in the Alo-daw Pyi Pagoda, where devotees from around the world worship him as the wish-fulfilling Buddha. ACM has very thoughtfully placed him on a large, raised platform so that offerings can be made and blessings sought while this honoured guest is visiting us.

With 60 objects ranging from sculptures, tiles, lacquerware and silver to sacred manuscripts, the exhibition takes you through the three most significant eras in Myanmar's history – the Pyu and Mon, the Bagan and finally the Inwa and Mandalay periods. The subsections include *nat* (spirit) worship, silver and lacquerware artefacts, and end with colonial curiosities. Among the treasures are 14 artefacts that have travelled out of Myanmar for the very first time. This exhibition celebrates 50 years of Singapore-Myanmar diplomatic ties and was five years in the making. The opening ceremony was officiated by Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.

As you enter the exhibition, you encounter a more than 1,500-year-old stele from Sri Ksetra, which still baffles scholars. On one side there appear carvings of three male warrior-like figures with elaborate turban-like headwear. The central figure is seen brandishing a large club with both hands. On his right is an attendant with a bird-like figure described as a Garuda (Vishnu's mount) holding a standard or *garudadhwaja* staff while the other warrior holds a rounded club. On the reverse side of the stele are two female figures holding an empty throne, an aniconic representation of the Buddha. On the top, there is a carving of a *triratna*, representing the Buddha, the *dharmma* (teachings) and the *sangha* (monastic community). While it is believed that the stele shows a mixture of Hindu and Buddhist iconography, it is possible that the first side represents Mara and his warriors with the aniconic representation of Buddha on the reverse side, thereby making it entirely Buddhist.

The stylistic and iconographic differences in the Buddha images are very clearly seen as you move from one section to the next. A wide range of materials from marble to teak wood, lacquerware, bronze, silver, copper and stone were all used with great craftsmanship to create magnificent Buddha images that convey an aura of physical and spiritual beauty.

Hinduism and Buddhism both made their way into Myanmar and the numerous representations of Vishnu and Brahma, along with stories from the Ramayana, are evidenced in many of the artefacts. In addition, *nat* worship, a deep-rooted belief in the supernatural and in animism, coexisted with Buddhism for centuries and continues to the present day.



Warrior Stele Side 1 and Side 2, Sri Ksetra, 4th to 6th century. Sri Ksetra National Museum, Yangon

Merit-making is a very important aspect of Buddhist practice, especially in Myanmar. To achieve merit, hundreds of pagodas were built, images were replicated and everyday objects such as offering vessels and alms bowls were created. You see these in the lacquerware and silverware that are on display – traditional arts and crafts called the 'Ten Flowers'. The elaborate and painstakingly made lacquerware comes in various forms and includes a *kammavaca* (manuscript) with rounded tamarind script and elaborate gold-leaf decorations.

The intricate silverwork with repoussé and chasing clearly shows the advanced metallurgical skills of the craftsmen. Carved into them are the Jataka stories, depicting the Buddha's past lives, along with many other motifs passed down through the centuries.

The long history of kings, kingdoms and their cities ended with King Thibaw in 1885. With the monarchy's demise and the end of royal patronage for the arts along with

separation of religion and the state, traditional Burmese society was drastically altered. Under the British, Rangoon became the capital city and became an important port city – a link between Calcutta and Singapore.

The exhibition is here just for three months and ends on 5 March. It is a great opportunity to visit 2,000 years of Myanmar's history right here in Singapore at the ACM.



Buddha seated in the dharmachakra mudra, 11th century. Bagan Archaeological Museum

Images courtesy of the Asian Civilisations Museum

Ta'at Setia – Loyal and True

The Last Battle at Bukit Chandu

By Khong Swee Lin

It was 1942, the Year of the Water Horse, restless, unpredictable and impulsive. Dawn broke quietly over the crest of the hill on the first day of its first moon, its fingers penetrating the last wisps of smoke spiralling out of the aftermath of the final battle. No celebrations heralded the arrival of this New Year, nor would there be any for many years to come. Instead, a grim silence hung over the southern reaches of a tense and fearful Singapore.

Twenty kilometres south of Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur lies Kajang – formerly tin mine, coffee and rubber estate territory and now a major city in Selangor state, famous for its *saté* or *satay* – marinated, grilled skewers of meat. Near Kajang, in a village called Kampong Sungai Ramal, Adnan bin Saidi was born. His ultimate sacrifice was to be permanently etched not only in the annals of the Malay Regiment (*Askar Melayu*), but also in the history of Singapore.

In 1915 Selangor was part of the Federated Malay States, a British Protectorate established in 1895. Although a proposal was presented by the Malay rulers for the formation of a Malay military force in 1913, the regiment only started operating from 1933, with 25 men selected from 1,000 applicants. It was formalised in 1935 and had attained battalion strength by 1938. Commendations poured in when it ably handled a labour dispute involving 6,000 workers at the Batu Arang Coal Mine in 1937.

Many were called, but few were chosen. Of the few, Adnan bin Saidi, an 18-year-old trainee teacher who had studied at the English-medium Pekan Sungei Ramal School, made the momentous decision to enlist. Joining the Regiment in 1933, he garnered awards and rose swiftly through the ranks: Best Recruit (1934); Sergeant (1936); Platoon Representative for a military parade held in London to honour King George V's accession to the throne (1937); Company Sergeant-Major (1937); and eventually 2nd Lieutenant, leader 7th Platoon, 'C' Company.

Posted to Singapore in 1941, he lived in a house in the Pasir Panjang area with his wife, Sophia Pakih Muda, and their two sons. As the storm clouds of war gathered, he sent his family back to Kajang. Sophia was then expecting their third child, a daughter. He would never see his daughter or his family again.

The Pasir Panjang (Long Sands) coastline, a long, lazy stretch of sand in Singapore's southwest, was true to its name. Holiday homes, villas and bungalows built around 1910 by well-to-do and notable Peranakan and Chinese families, dotted the area. At various times, the area has been the location of a beriberi hospital, cemetery and a much-loved public park.

Today's wharf-lined Pasir Panjang, a bland patchwork of commercial interests and conventional dwellings, is unrecognisable to those who were familiar with the original shoreline. However, what has remained are the district's benign guardians overlooking those sands – roughly 10 kilometres of hilly terrain casting a watchful eye over the western waterway to the New Harbour (now Keppel Harbour). Long a conduit for vessels travelling from the Straits of Malacca towards the South China Sea, this waterway is an attractive entry to the harbour. Clad in rich *belukar* (secondary forest) redolent of angsa and acacia



An arresting mural of The Last Stand on the external wall of Reflections at Bukit Chandu

trees, these ancient hills, today's Southern Ridges, whisper tales to those who care to pause and ponder.

Colonel William Farquhar, Singapore's first Resident, could never have imagined that his establishment of Singapore's first opium farm would be linked even tenuously to the defence of Singapore. The British East India Company, once described as "the equivalent of a modern-day drug cartel", was the unabashed owner of the Government Opium Factory at the foot of Opium Hill (*Bukit Chandu*, in Malay), today's Pepys Road.

The prelude to the Lunar New Year of February 1942 commenced with an ominous cacophony of gunfire, ironically on Friday 13th. The week before, on 8 February, enemy forces had landed on the mangrove shores of Sarimbun in the northwest (Lim Chu Kang) and the battle-hardened elite troops of the Imperial Japanese Army had speedily advanced, supported by artillery and tanks as the tank-less British/Allied defenders retreated, or in some instances, deserted. Pasir Panjang Ridge (renamed Kent Ridge) was of particular importance to the invaders as not only did it form part of the final defence perimeter, but it also overlooked the northern aspect of Singapore and provided direct access to key military installations, supply depots and Alexandra Military Hospital. Their 18th Division, also known as the Chrysanthemum (*Kiku heidan*) Division, and the 56th Infantry Regiment, efficiently dispatched their duties in their offensive southwest and on the ridge.

Lieutenant Adnan bin Saidi was with his men, tasked with the defence of the ridge. Based at Pasir Panjang Village, they fought valiantly till late evening, despite heavy losses and constant shelling, before giving up the Gap (South Buona Vista Road), the approach to the ridge. Withdrawing to Bukit Chandu, they fortified their new positions with sandbags. There was no respite from the aerial bombardment, artillery and mortar barrage. Sometime in the afternoon of 14th, the



At Bukit Chandu, a sculpture of the regiment's mortar crew preparing to fire



A silent witness to fire and carnage, this bungalow on Bukit Chandu now serves as Singapore's war museum and memorial

soldiers noticed troops dressed as British army Sikh soldiers complete with turbans, proceeding towards them. Lieutenant Adnan was not deceived by this ruse because they marched in groups of four, not three, which didn't conform with British Army drill. His men fired, killing 20. Swift retaliation came in the form of an aerial bombardment and heightened ground attacks. The last battle had begun.

As ammunition and weapons ran out, hand-to-hand combat ensued while fighter planes strafed them from above. Lieutenant Adnan's rallying cry was a proverb coined for his troops "*Biar putih tulang, jangan putih mata*" – "death before dishonour". It was to be the utmost test of courage and loyalty for the lieutenant and his men. In refusing to surrender, he passed the test with flying colours, but paid with his life and the lives of his outnumbered soldiers.

No help came from any quarter. The neighbouring Australian artillery, perched on a higher level than the Malay Brigade, had been ordered to save their ammunition and fire only in defence of their own perimeter, yet they probably had a better view of the enemy's approach. As the hours of the cataclysmic New Year's Eve wore on, the lieutenant was brutally tortured, hung by his feet on a tree and bayoneted, before his throat was slit and his body burned – a grim expression of the conqueror's revenge after encountering



A paean in honour of Lt Adnan and his men

a delay of 48 hours before claiming victory. His remains were never found. One survivor, Corporal Yaakob, feigned death by falling into a heap of bodies. Retreat was out of the question as a canal ablaze with oil from burning oil depots at Normanton, proved to be an insurmountable barrier. This victory gave the enemy the passage they sought, leading to

yet another atrocity on the same day, the infamous massacre at the Alexandra Military Hospital.

As dawn broke over a stunned and shocked island, it was clear that the Water Horse had stampeded its way pell-mell into the lives of the people of Singapore who now faced the onset of the occupation and the indignity of their former masters' capitulation. The first day of the Lunar New Year, 15 February 1942, marked the first day of Syonan-to (Light of the South), once known as Singapore, which was to remain in enemy hands till 15 August 1945, with the formal surrender on 12 September 1945.

Thus, amidst the Lunar New Year festivities of 2017, it is fitting to pay tribute to Lieutenant Adnan bin Saidi and his soldiers, who upheld the Malay Regiment's motto, *Ta'at Setia* (Loyal (and) True) to the bitter end, fulfilling the ideals of "duty, honour and country".

Tan Sri Datuk Dr Haji Abdul Mubin Sheppard (1905-1994), civil servant, historian and academic, FMS Volunteer Force Company Commander and ex-POW wrote, "...Adnan would have never surrendered under any circumstances, he was absolutely dedicated ..."

Noel Barber, author of *Sinister Twilight*, on the Malay Regiment: "...it was a living and dying illustration of the folly of not having raised more such local forces before the war in which men could defend what was their homeland ... For, as Percival noted, the Malay Brigade 'showed what esprit de corps and discipline can achieve. Garrisons of posts held their ground and many of them were wiped out almost to a man'."

Reflections at Bukit Chandu

It was only on 15 February 2002 that *Reflections at Bukit Chandu* opened. This World War II Interpretative Centre was set up not only to narrate the battles of Singapore during World War II, but also to commemorate the gallantry of the Malay Regiment and the soldiers who gave their lives for Singapore in the Battle of Pasir Panjang. Housed in a colonial bungalow on the flanks of the same hill that Lieutenant Adnan and his men so heroically defended, the centre is part of Kent Ridge Park and part of the former Pasir Panjang Ridge.

Khong Swee Lin is an FOM docent who enjoys guiding at various museums as well as keeping Singapore's heritage alive.

Photos courtesy of the author

A Brief Introduction to Singapore's Early Chinese Art Scene

By Praise Poh

The Influx of Chinese Migrants

In its early days, Singapore was an immigrant society and in 1827, Chinese migrants were the largest ethnic group here. By the 20th century, civil conflicts and the Sino-Japanese War increased the flow of Chinese migrants to Singapore.

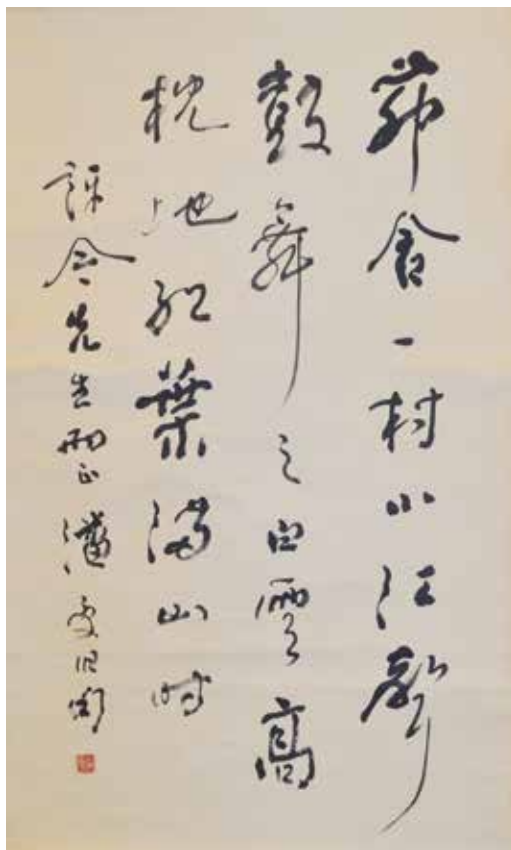
Among the Chinese who relocated to Singapore to escape from political and economic disasters at home were well-educated intellectuals (educators, scholars, writers and painters) and businessmen. Many of these individuals took on influential roles in Singapore and significantly influenced its evolving culture and art heritage.

Interestingly, a lack of support from the British colonial government impelled many wealthy Chinese businessmen such as Gan Eng Seng, Lee Kong Chian and Tan Kah Kee to donate money for setting up Chinese schools in Singapore. Often, the educators in these schools (for example, Pan Shou, Chan Shou She, Chen Jen Hao and Goh Teck Sian) were themselves avid calligraphers and/or painters well-versed in Chinese literati art. The development of Chinese ink painting and calligraphy in the early Singapore art scene was thus galvanised by some of these Chinese schools.

The Flourishing of Chinese Art Forms in the Local Chinese Community

Throughout China's imperial era, calligraphy was an important criterion in the selection of court officials. Candidates who were outstanding in calligraphy were assessed as being meticulous and confident – important qualities when serving the court.

In early Singapore, learning about the development of Chinese culture was heavily emphasised in most Chinese schools, so calligraphy, as the most sublime Chinese art form, was naturally an important co-curricular activity. For instance, at Tuan Mong High School, where the teachers and principals were accomplished calligraphers, the subject of calligraphy proved widely popular. Tuang Mong, initially a primary school set up in 1906 by public-spirited Teochew clan leaders, mostly served the needs of Teochew children.



Pan Shou, Calligraphy, undated



Cui Da Di, Calligraphy Couplet, undated

It was staffed by Teochew teachers using Teochew as the medium of instruction.

During those early days, Singapore had many talented artists with a strong passion for their traditional art forms and were eager to share their knowledge with the younger generation. Although originally from China, many eventually came to regard Singapore as their home and remained here after retirement, creating many extraordinary works in the process. Certainly, the tightly knit Chinese community during that period contributed significantly to the development of art here, while the establishment of Chinese schools ensured that knowledge of Chinese art forms was passed on to the younger generation. Below are a few noteworthy figures who played crucial roles in facilitating the early Chinese art scene in Singapore.

Pan Shou (1911 – 1999) was the principal of Tao Nan Primary School in 1934. An excellent poet and calligrapher, he published three poetry collections including *An Anthology of Poems*. The latter has been hailed as an important publication of classical Chinese poetry, containing more than 1,300 beautiful verses rich in Chinese literary allusions.

During his time at Tao Nan, Pan met Tan Kah Kee, a businessman from his own province, and a genuine

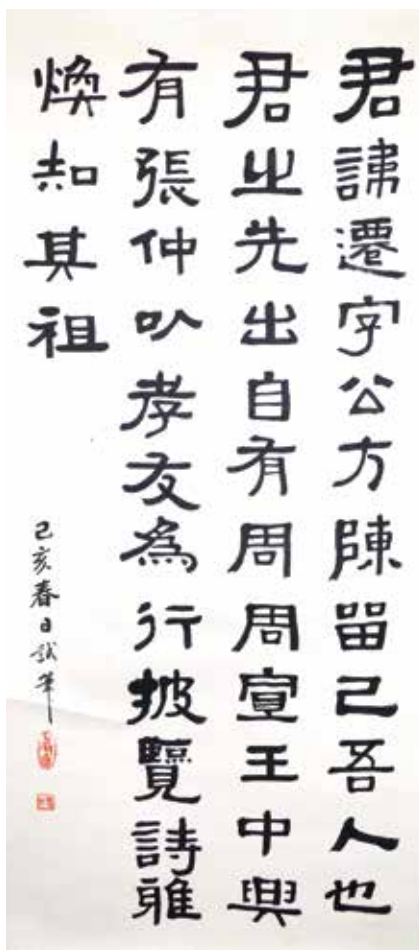
friendship was forged. After World War II, the pair worked together and, along with Lee Kong Chian (Tan's son-in-law), rebuilt the local Chinese community, particularly through the Hokkien Huay Kuan (Hokkien clan association). When the idea for a Chinese tertiary institution was discussed by Tan and other prominent Hokkien businessmen in 1955, they naturally appointed Pan as the secretary-general. He remained the Secretary-General of Nanyang University (which became the Nanyang Technological University) till his retirement in 1960. Today, Pan's calligraphy is still displayed at the main gate of the original campus. Additionally, the Chinese characters on the masthead of the local Chinese daily, *Lianhe Zaobao*, were penned by him.

Tsue Da Tee (1903 – 1974) was among the rare few calligraphers in Singapore and Malaysia who was well-versed in various calligraphic scripts, including *kai* (regular), *li* (clerical), *cao* (cursive), *zhuan* (official seal), bronze and oracle bone inscriptions. Originally from Beijing, he travelled around Southeast Asia and eventually settled in Singapore in 1946.

Tsue had a strong passion for Chinese calligraphy and had extensively studied the various calligraphic styles from a young age. His constant search for knowledge led him to visit London in 1953 where he found the opportunity to do research on Chinese calligraphy, specifically on the oracle bone inscriptions at the British Museum. He also held several calligraphy exhibitions while in London and Paris. He left London in 1958 and headed for Penang where he spent several years

focusing on refining his calligraphic skills. While he did not teach calligraphy in Penang, his artistic traces remain evident – signboards inscribed by his calligraphy are found at various places in Penang today. He returned to Singapore in 1965 and devoted the rest of his life to teaching and promoting Chinese calligraphy. In addition to regular exhibitions in Singapore and Malaysia, he was a volunteer calligraphy teacher at the Calligraphy Society of Hua Yi Secondary School.

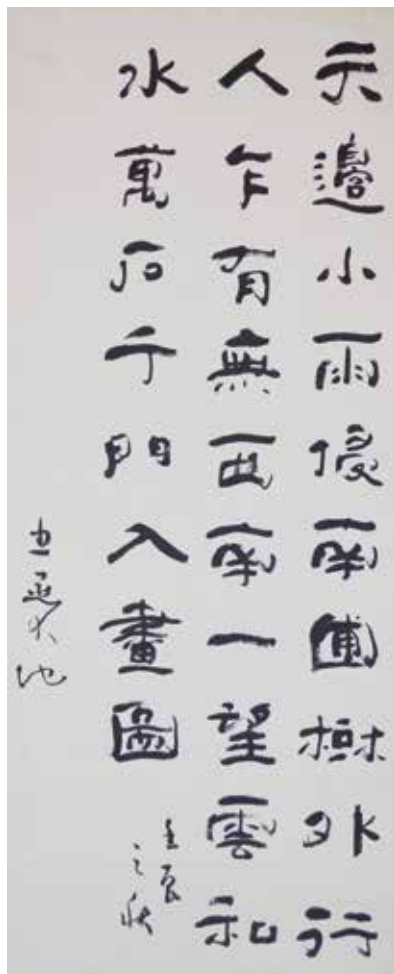
Huang Man Shi (1890-1963) is another interesting figure worth mentioning. It is said that Xu Bei Hong (1895-1953) met Huang's elder brother Meng Gui (1885-1965) in Paris in 1925. Meng Gui came to realise



Huang Man Shi, 临张千碑, 1959



Huang Man Shi, Couplet, undated



Cui Da Di, Calligraphy Couplet, undated

that Xu was having financial difficulties because of irregular government funding from China and asked his younger brother Huang Man Shi for help. Huang, a generous man, avid art collector and practised calligrapher, invited Xu for a short stay in Singapore at his colonial-style residence, the Hundred-Fan Studio.

Wanting to lend a helping hand to his fellow countryman, Huang converted a small living room on the second floor into a studio for Xu and introduced him to many friends. As a result, Xu began painting portraits not just for the rich and famous, but also local senior officials and was soon able to support his wife, Zhang Manwei, in Paris. Among the well-known figures in Singapore who commissioned him for portrait-painting was Christina Li Hui Wang, who later became the first wife of Asian movie mogul Dato Loke Wan Tho.

Huang Man Shi was known to be a lover of orchids and fostered many rare species in his garden at Jiang Xia Tang. It is said that Xu, being influenced by Huang's passion as well as the colourful botanical presence, also picked up orchids as a subject matter in his painting. The friendships and time enjoyed by Xu in Singapore resulted in some of his great works being produced and collected during his stay here, which also contributed to the local art scene.

Praise Poh is a freelance copywriter and translator who is proud to be a Singaporean, and takes great joy in witnessing her country's growing arts and culture scene.

Photos courtesy of artcommune gallery

The Fook Tet Soo Khek Temple

A Unique and Venerable Place of Worship

By Khong Swee Lin

Once upon a time, a village nestled snugly in the shadow of a shady hillock. It was blessed with three benign guardians – a temple for the popular ‘Great Granduncle’ god (*Tua Pek Kong* or *Dabogongmiao* in Mandarin), the knoll’s long-forgotten 19th century cemetery, and the grave of a Sufi saint, the *Keramat Habib Noh* (1866). These were representative of the three distinct communities that had created this unique multicultural site and endowed it with an unparalleled historical legacy, not replicated anywhere else in Singapore.

The village is long gone, ignominiously replaced by a utilitarian bus terminus, yet devotees stubbornly return to the temple to worship and pay their respects.

The 119-foot-high knoll that once housed the cemetery was actually the remnant of a fortified hill, decapitated in the early 1900s to fulfill the needs of commerce, before being scooped out of existence to make way for a transport system. It was known as Mount Palmer, named after the merchant John Palmer, who sold part of the hill to a Parsi in 1828. It was the Parsis who eventually used it as a burial ground.

The temple was described as “Facing the sea with the hill at the back, the dancing of the waves can be felt”, by Dr Evelyn Lip in *The Living Heritage – Stories of Fook Tet Soo Khek Temple*. According to the laws of *feng shui* (wind and water) it sits in a most propitious location and did indeed face the sea at one time, giving rise to its nickname, “sea-facing temple”, although the sea is now hidden from view.

In early 19th century Singapore maps, it was deprecatingly described as a “joss house”, but this tiny, long-overlooked temple has a pedigree that may predate 1819. As new Hakka (also known as Khek) migrants stumbled onto dry land in search of a better life, they gave thanks and paid their respects to the shrine of ‘Great Granduncle’, the God of Wealth and Prosperity, who despite his obscure origins and the syncretic nature of Chinese religious beliefs (which embrace Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism and ancestor worship as well as folk religion), got the job done to the satisfaction of his devotees. This deity



The Fook Tet Soo Khek Temple at 50H Palmer Road

is linked to the tale of a sailor who sacrificed his life to save another’s and is popular in other areas of Southeast Asia, as well as in Singapore.

The building’s construction began in 1844. It is believed to be one of the oldest Hakka temples and also one of the oldest Chinese temples in Singapore. Here Hakkas from diverse districts of China forged a collective identity. Two Hakka clan associations, the Ying Fo Fui Kun and Fong Yun Thai Association, have managed the temple for almost 200 years.

The temple was built in the southern Chinese Teochew (*Chaozhou*) style (probably owing to the hiring of Teochew artisans), with the typical ridged roof. Of particular interest are the couplets on plaques displayed within the main hall. A central panel is reputed to date back to 1903 (Emperor Guangxu) and there are some religious artefacts, for example a bronze bell and steles. A stele from 1861 is informative, indicating that Hakkas linked up with non-Hakkas for the greater good.

Situated in its original location on a sliver of land beside the Shenton Way/Palmer Road traffic light junction, this quaint and out-of-place temple seems at odds with the city’s glitz, but it is a reminder of the courage and determination of the country’s early immigrants and is thus more than worthy to be on the register of Singapore landmarks.

This stretch along Palmer Road, comprising the Fook Tet Soo Khek Temple, Mount Palmer and the grave of the Sufi saint, has been largely forgotten, but remains fascinating. The area was also known as Tanjong Malang and it was here that Raffles hanged Syed Yassin. Yassin had attacked and stabbed William Farquhar, who had jailed him for an unpaid debt. Farquhar survived the attack and died peacefully in Perth, Scotland, in 1839.



Despite the expressway blocking its view, the temple still looks out toward the sea

Khong Swee Lin is an FOM docent who enjoys guiding at various museums and heritage centres.

Photos by Gisella Harrold

Textile Enthusiasts Group

Programme: Shared Passion

Date: Friday, 27 January

Time: Arrive at 10:00 am for 10:30 am start

Location: TBA

RSVP: Email Lynelle Barrett at lynellebarrett@gmail.com

TEG members always look forward to *Shared Passion* month. This annual show-and-tell event is a wonderful opportunity to share and learn from fellow members. Bring one of your favourite textiles to share with the group, a piece that is either something you wear or keep as a collector's item. It would be helpful if you knew the weaving technique and provenance of your selected piece, but even if you don't, you will have the opportunity to draw upon the knowledge of other members. Each member will be given a chance to speak about their textile piece. Please note that it is not required that you bring one; you are still welcome to attend for the learning experience.



Kathy Nichols modelling a traditional textile

Our February event will be a *Collector's Corner*, when members view the textile treasures of a private collector. Details will be available soon on the TEG page of the FOM website.



Detail of beadwork on an antique jacket

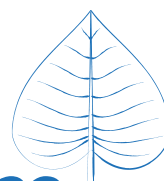


Embroidered piece from a traditional Chinese ensemble

Photos by Lynelle Barrett



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Japanese Docents

Tour for Japanese Children

The *Imaginarium*, at the Singapore Art Museum, was such an excellent children's exhibition that we decided to plan a tour for those aged four to nine years. On 25 and 26 August 2016, Ms Okamoto and Ms Morisako conducted tours for about 10 children in the style of *MANZAI* (a comic duo), which made it fun for the children and adults alike. The children were ecstatic and excited to get to see and experience art.

They first went into the *Plastic Ocean*, where they had to lie down and look up at the rubbish floating above. Some of their responses were: "I feel so uncomfortable, I don't want to stay in rubbish.", "Oh, the fishes are so sad to stay in the dirty sea.", "We must stop throwing rubbish into the sea."

When the children got to meet ADA, an artwork that was 'floating' in the room, they could not contain their excitement. They drew lines on the walls ceiling and floor with her pointed parts (charcoal). They were incredibly happy to befriend and play with ADA under the deep blue sea. Then they went to see *Mongus*, where they relaxed and lay on their backs on the big fish. The docents explained to the children, "You are relaxing in contemporary art. This is one of the ways we can enjoy art. Appreciating and understanding contemporary art isn't difficult. It is for everyone to enjoy."

We also had the opportunity to guide children from Fukushima. These children were victims of the Tohoku earthquake in 2011 and came to Singapore to experience art as a form of therapy.

Since it was the last day of their trip, they went to the exhibition looking exhausted and listless. However, when Ms Sawada and I took them to view the artworks, they were full of energy and excitement. They were especially engaged and lively when they got to meet and play with ADA. With dirty hands, faces and soiled clothes, they left the exhibition feeling content.

Coco-Ro Learning House Singapore also came to our guided tour. All these guiding experiences definitely created a beautiful and unforgettable memory for us.

Ikuko Nakamaru, former JD SAM representative



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Explore Singapore!

Sight & Insight Sculpture Tour

Thursday 12 January
10:00 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$20



The Singapore Sculpture Society will hold two exhibitions in 2017 – an outdoor installation with the theme *Sight* and an indoor one of miniature sculptures themed *Insight*. This describes the inspiration behind the delightful and thought-provoking works from five countries. Explore Singapore! has arranged a special guided tour of the exhibitions by one of the artists.

Chinese New Year Walk in Chinatown

Thursday 19 January
10:00 am – 12:00 noon (approx)
Fee: \$30



Of all festivals, Chinese New Year is the most important to the Chinese. Immersion in Singapore's multi-racial culture is not complete without an experience of Chinatown during this period. The area turns into a lively hub with shops and street stalls stocked with special goods. This exciting walking tour will enlighten you about the customs associated with Chinese New Year and the importance and symbolic meanings of the special foods and culinary delicacies. You will have an opportunity to taste some.

City Trees Walk

Thursday 9 February
10:00 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$25



Singapore is known as a City in a Garden. From the first national tree-planting campaign launched in 1963 to the present green landscape, thousands of trees have been planted. Want to learn more about the trees in the heart of the city from Empress Place to Chijmes? Walk with us and appreciate the work behind planning and maintaining the tree-scape along the riverbank and around Esplanade Park. You will learn to identify trees that you have walked past, but not really noticed before.

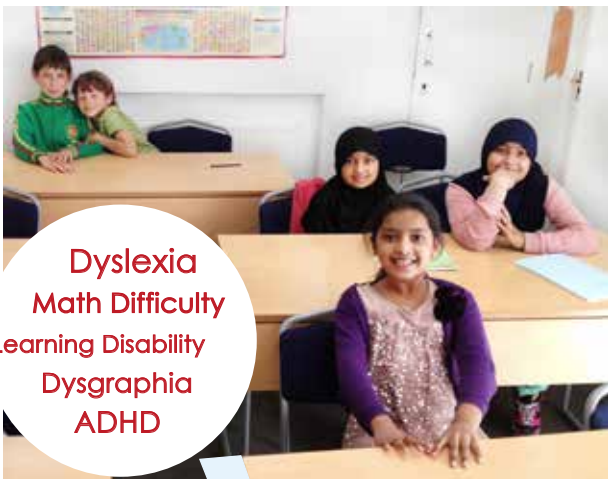
Painted Prayers of India – The Art of Kolams

Thursday 16 February, 2017
10:00 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$25



Throughout the ages, Indian women have drawn *kolams* (geometric designs) at their doorsteps or in their courtyards as a welcome sign. This South Indian art form is a religious ritual, a social activity and a channel for artistic expression. It is not meant to be permanent; the life of a *kolam* is usually just one day. Join Explore Singapore! to learn about *kolams* and their variations throughout India. Learn how to create these geometric designs and discover the benefits they bring.

COGNITIVE CONNECTIONS



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Jennifer Lee
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BSpecEd (Australia)
Ed Therapy (USA)
MSPinEd (UK)

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FOM Docent Training Opportunities this Spring

The Indian Heritage Centre (IHC) and the Malay Heritage Centre (MHC) will both be offering Docent Training courses starting soon.

This is a wonderful opportunity to learn about the history, heritage and culture of the Indian or Malay communities in Singapore.

Training Dates:

Indian Heritage Centre
7 February - 30 May 2017



Malay Heritage Centre
13 March - 22 May 2017



For more information, please check out the FOM Website www.fom.sg under **Docent Training** where you can download the Docent Training Application form or email: docenttraining@fom.sg

Study Group

Join the Asian Study Group on 18 January to nourish your brain, your soul and even your tummy. Meeting once a week, this group of 12-16 participants studies many facets of one broad topic for roughly eight weeks. There are three sessions each year. Previous topics have included the Silk Road, SG50, UNESCO World Heritage sites in Asia and the rivers of Asia. Each participant picks a sub-topic that she finds particularly interesting, researches it, and then presents her findings to the group – we are a very friendly, supportive group. We learn a ton, have a lot of fun and wind up the morning with an always scrumptious potluck lunch. So, curious about Asia? Looking for interesting friends? Eager to share recipes? The Asian Study Group is for YOU!

Hatch, Match and Dispatch: Birth, Marriage and Death Customs in Asia

Join us to look at the milestones that unite us all. Around the world, cultures have developed unique traditions based around three fundamental lifetime milestones: birth, marriage and death. Whether they are based on a current religion, or on beliefs rooted in the mists of the past, societies have often created very specific sequences of events they feel need to be followed. Rituals and ceremonies form an integral part of all of life's milestones.



A few suggested topics:
Birth: naming customs, China's one-child policy, baby carriers in SE Asia.
Marriage: Hindu wedding customs, bride price, Peranakan wedding customs.
Death: death-defying versus death-

accepting beliefs, Balinese Ngaben (cremation) ceremony, death customs of the Toraja (Sulawesi)

For more information, check out the Study Group page on the FOM website, or contact Melissa Diagona, melissa.diagona@gmail.com or Anna Alexander, annaalexander00@gmail.com



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Singapore Art gallery guide

Your magazine to all arts in and around Singapore

www.sagg.info

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Island Notes

The Buddha Tooth Temple

By Karen Berry

Located within historical Chinatown, the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple and Museum was opened in 2007. Built in traditional Tang style and comprising four floors, the building houses the famous Buddha tooth relic and other sacred artefacts. On the roof is a wonderfully peaceful orchid garden with many areas for contemplation, as well as a cylindrical Buddhist prayer wheel where every turn of the wheel represents a single recital of the scripture.

It is easy to forget you are at the edge of Singapore's central business district with only a glimpse of the skyscrapers beyond as a reminder.



Karen Berry enjoys exploring Singapore and finding hidden gems and interesting subjects for her to photograph.

Monday Morning Lectures

Free public lectures are held in the auditorium of the Asian Civilisations Museum on Mondays. Everyone is welcome to arrive at 10:30 am for coffee or tea before the lecture, which begins promptly at 11:00 am. For safety and fire hazard reasons, there may be times when we cannot admit all those who wish to attend our lectures. Please take your seat early to avoid disappointment.

16 January • Fowl Play!

Speaker: Patricia Welch



Roosters and hens as tomb figurines, on priceless Chinese porcelain, nyonyas' kebayas and babas' slippers – what's going on? As we approach the Year of the Rooster, come see and hear how and why these barnyard fowl are so

highly beloved and widely depicted in Chinese art.

23 January: Cities and Kings: A Journey through the Art and Archaeology of Myanmar

Speaker: Stephen Murphy



This talk will take you on a journey through Myanmar's history and culture, beginning with the ancient Pyu cities of the mid first millennium through to the 19th century when the country was controlled from Mandalay. The Pyu and Mon cultures, the temple-studded

plains of Bagan, the teak palaces of Mandalay, all combined to create Myanmar's artistic heritage. Today, the country has reopened to the world, thus affording us a chance to experience its rich art and culture first-hand.

30 January • NO TALK

Chinese New Year

6 February • King Bhumibol in Historical Perspective

Speaker: Bruce Lockhart



The late King Bhumibol Adulyadej was Thailand's longest reigning monarch. During his 70 years on the throne, he oversaw the revival and strengthening of the Thai monarchy after a period of weakness and decline

following the 'revolution' of 1932. This talk will provide a historical overview of his reign and what it has meant for modern Thailand.

13 February • Battleship Grey, Old Gold and Billiard Chalks: the POW Art of Singapore

Speaker: Jeffrey Say



In May 1943, a prisoner-of-war (POW) named Stanley Warren completed the last of five murals in a hospital chapel in Changi Camp. The murals had been 'lost' and then 'rediscovered' in 1958.

They have since been restored three times by the artist. The Changi Murals, as they are popularly known, are arguably the most historically significant works of art executed by a POW in Singapore. While focusing on the famous Changi Murals, this lecture will also discuss the category known as POW Art and highlight other notable artistic personalities interned at Changi: men such as Murray Griffin, Ronald Searle and Richard Walker who, despite adversities and inhumane conditions, managed to produce a body of works that is remarkable as much for the ingenuity and sense of humour the works reveal, as for their brutal realism.

20 February • The Mahabharata – Not Just Any Story

Speaker: Abha Kaul



Come listen to the telling of a powerful and transfixing ancient story, but not just any story. Translated as 'The Great Epic of India', the *Mahabharata* is one of India's two most famous and revered works of sacred literature. A national epic and a defining text of Indian culture, the *Mahabharata* has been told and retold countless times and in many forms over two thousand years. It narrates mesmerising tales, contains philosophical truths, offers spiritual guidance and also straddles myth and reality.

27 February • Wanderlust – the Amazing Ida Pfeiffer

Speaker: Dr John van Wyhe



This talk tells the true story of Ida Pfeiffer (1797-1858), the most remarkable female traveller who ever lived. She was the first woman to circle the globe alone. Along the way, she had some incredible adventures: she survived storms at sea, parched deserts, plague, malaria, drowning, earthquakes, robbers, head hunters

and cannibals. It is the tale of a stubborn tomboy, of lovers torn apart, and a miserable housewife who decided to follow her dreams despite the disapproval of society.

Museum Information and Exhibitions

Asian Civilisations Museum

1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555

Tel: 6332 7798

www.acm.org.sg

Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am - 7:00 pm

Fri 10:00 am - 9:00 pm



FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am 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.

Port Cities: Multicultural Emporiums of Asia, 1500 -1900

(Through 19 February)

FOM Guided Tours: Mon to Fri at 11:30 am

Traders and migrants, jewellery and multi-coloured cottons, languages and commerce – port cities mix people, merchandise and ideas. This special exhibition paints a picture of life through photographs, paintings, fashion, luxury goods, and everyday objects. Disembark at ACM for a view of hybrid cultures, ingenuity, and global trends bred in these cosmopolitan centres.

Cities & Kings: Ancient Treasures from Myanmar (Through 5 March)

FOM Guided Tours: Mon to Fri at 1:00 pm

This exhibition spans three of the most significant eras in Myanmar's history: the formative Pyu and Mon Period (4th-9th century), when early city-states emerged; the famed Bagan Period (9th-14th century), when Buddhist temple architecture flourished; and the Mandalay period (19th century), with its celebrated courtly arts.

Gillman Barracks

9 Lock Road, Singapore 108937

www.gillmanbarracks.com

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



Opening hours: Tues to Sun – Refer to individual gallery pages on-line for opening hours

Closed Mondays & Public Holidays

FOM guided tours:

Sat 4:00 pm: Art and History Tour

Sat 5:00 pm: History and Heritage Tour

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

Incomplete Urbanism: Attempts of Critical Spatial Practice

A Parallel Project of Singapore Biennale 2016

(Through 29 January)

An open-ended exhibition that serves as a laboratory of ideas, exploring the indeterminacy and changeability of urban living. This project takes William S W Lim's practice and the initiatives of the Asian Urban Lab as a point of departure, and presents research into the spatial, cultural and social aspects of city life. A summit and mini festival will take place during the exhibition, producing dynamic spaces to engage urban issues, through discussions, debates and collective efforts.

Art After Dark

Fri 13 January 7:00 - 11:00 pm

An evening of contemporary art, live music and food pop-ups awaits, as the galleries, NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, and other visual art tenants open new shows—and their doors, till late.

The event will also include the opening reception of *LOCK ROUTE*, a public art showcase at Gillman Barracks curated by Khairuddin Hori. It takes inspiration from Gillman Barracks' address and the route march army recruits typically undergo during their training. Situated outdoors, artworks include new commissions by international artists Cleon Peterson, Mel O'Callaghan and Oanh Phi Phi, alongside Singapore artists Gerald Leow and Sheryo+Yok. The works will be on show till 30th June 2017.

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 and 2:00 pm

The Indian Heritage Centre's permanent gallery's storyline revolves around five themes, arranged chronologically to span the period from the first to the 21st century. The themes present the early interactions of South Asia with Southeast Asia. The museum also narrates the history of the Indian migrant community and its contributions to Singapore.

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. This exhibition presents an appealing and arresting mix of historical artefacts and contemporary art installations and 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; Sat

and Sun:12:00 pm (Subject to availability.

Please call ahead to confirm the availability of a docent).



Mereka Utusan: Imprinting Malay Modernity, 1920s – 1960s

(Through 25 June)

The Malay Heritage Centre's fifth special exhibition, *Mereka Utusan: Imprinting Malay Modernity, 1920s – 1960s* affirms the importance of language to a community by tracing the development of Malay modernity and identity through print, advertisements and editorial cartoons.

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.

What is Not Visible is Not Invisible

(Through 19 February)

What is Not Visible is Not Invisible broadly surveys the imaginary and the temporary through selected artworks from the French Regional Collections of Contemporary Art (FRAC). The 34 artworks by 32 French and international artists encourage the audience to interact with and explore the intangible, the emotional and the volatile relationship between the abstract, the organic and the structured.

Desire and Danger

Discover the fine line between *Desire and Danger* at this stimulating new exhibition at the Goh Seng Choo Gallery. This selection of drawings from the William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings explores the complex and sometimes uneasy relationship between man and nature.

Museum Information and Exhibitions

NUS Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts

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



Opening hours:

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

Guided tours:

Tues to Fri (by appointment), Sat 2:00 pm – 3:00 pm (selected exhibitions only – phone for details)

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. His most recent work, *The Last Masterpiece*, was completed posthumously and is presented as part of this exhibition.

Who Wants to Remember a War?

War Drawings and Posters from the Ambassador Dato' N Parameswaran Collection (Through 24 June)

This exhibition of artworks produced during the period of the Indochinese and Vietnam Wars (1945 – 1975) draws from the one of the largest privately held collections of the genre. The collection, which is on a long-term loan to NUS Museum, also includes depictions of Vietnam's cross-border conflicts with Cambodia and China (1976 – 1986).

NUS Baba House

157 Neil Road, Singapore 088883
Tel: 6227 5731
www.nus.edu.sg/museum/baba

Baba House is a heritage house dating back to the early 20th century. It exhibits the Peranakan community's material culture in a domestic context. Visits are by appointment only owing to conservation concerns. Please sign up in advance for free heritage tours which are offered on Mon 2:00pm, Tues 2:00pm & 6:30pm, Thurs 10:00am & Sat 11:00am.

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.

Nyonya Beadwork and Embroidery: Craft and Heritage (Through 26 March)

FOM Guided Tours:

Wed & Fri 12:30 pm (English)

Tues to Friday 11:30 am (Japanese)

This exhibition explores the art of embroidery with glass beads, silk, and gold produced by and for Peranakans. The familiar look of the beaded slippers, purses, bed hangings, and embroidered handkerchiefs and kebayas of the Peranakan communities of Southeast Asia is the result of diverse Chinese, Indian, Portuguese, Dutch, and local Malay influences. The exhibition was curated by Dr Cheah Hwei-Fen, of the Australian National University.

Singapore Art Museum

71 Bras Basah Road, Singapore 189555
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)

Once Upon This Island (permanent)

SAM's Learning Galleries showcase a series of contemporary works by Singaporean artists, from the Singapore Art Museum's permanent collection as well as commissioned works. The exhibition navigates the ideas of home, community, identity and memory.

Singapore Biennale 2016 – An Atlas of Mirrors (Through 26 February)

Exploring shared histories and current realities within and beyond the region, Singapore Biennale 2016 is a constellation of artistic perspectives that provide unexpected ways of seeing the world and ourselves. Titled *An Atlas of Mirrors*, the international contemporary art exhibition will feature site-specific and never before seen contemporary artworks by more than 60 artists across Southeast Asia, and East and South Asia. These works will be spread across Singapore Art Museum, SAM@8Q, National Museum of Singapore, the Peranakan Museum, Asian Civilisations Museum, Stamford Green and Singapore Management University.

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.

We Are the World – These are Our Stories 7 January to 25 February

STPI Gallery proudly presents "We Are the World – These are Our Stories", the first solo exhibition at STPI Gallery by Singaporean contemporary artist Amanda Heng. In this unique presentation of a single work made up of 24 parts, Heng applies her collaborative and process-driven approach to printing and papermaking techniques to highlight the power of storytelling and of collective artmaking.

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

One Night in Wuchang: 1911 Revolution and Nanyang (Through 30 April)

This special exhibition provides insights into the historical significance of that one night in Wuchang in October 1911 and the social impact on Chinese society, as well as the Singapore Chinese community response.

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

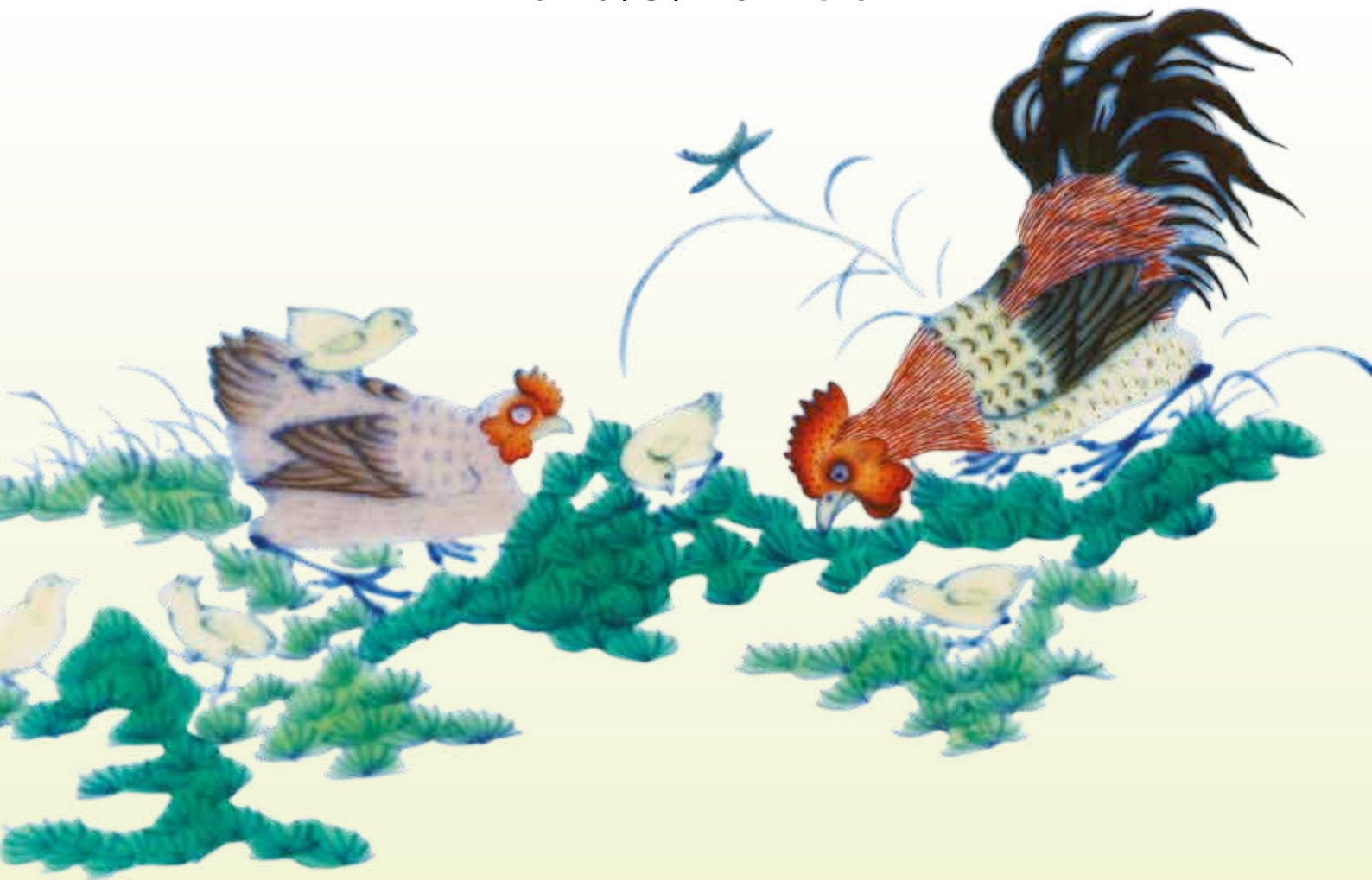
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Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre - Hall 5BC

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