

PASSAGE

Friends of the Museums Singapore

September / October 2021



art
history
culture
people



President's Letter

Dear Friends,

As we continue to navigate these unusual times, FOM members are staying connected with multiple online offerings. One of these is the recently concluded *Museums Around the World with FOM* series. FOM members and speakers joined from various parts of the world for virtual tours on Monday mornings and again on Thursday evenings for an encore presentation on Zoom. I would like to thank our speakers Angelita Teo, Cecile Collineau, Gerda Kassing, Gisella Harrold, Marina Thayil, Irina Grishaeva, Srma Chithamoor and Uta Weigelt for taking us on unforgettable tours of museums around the world. A special thanks to Gisella for coordinating this new initiative.

FOM's Open Morning is scheduled for 6 September at 10:00 am. This will be followed by the first Monday Morning Lecture of the season, presented by Dr Farish Noor. Both events are being held virtually and are open to members of the public. Registration via the website is mandatory to receive Zoom log-in details. FOM's Open Morning is a great opportunity to hear directly from the museum and activity leaders. Do join us to learn more about FOM and the many benefits of membership.

Docent training for the Asian Civilisations Museum, National Museum of Singapore and the Indian Heritage Centre is scheduled to start on 14 September and for the Sun Yet Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall on 16 February 2022. A warm welcome to all our new trainee docents. You have an exciting journey ahead of you. I look forward to meeting you via Zoom on Foundation Day and hopefully in person during the coming months.

FOM has been banking with Citibank for the last few years, but this relationship came to an end when Citibank Singapore decided to close their CitiBusiness arm in August. We have successfully moved our funds to the Development Bank of Singapore Limited or DBS. As a result of this move, we are able to offer 'PayNow' as an additional mode of payment for FOM activities. Do check out this option when making your next payment.

Starting in September, the Changi Chapel Museum and Fort Siloso are two new venues where FOM members can enjoy free entry and FOM docent-led tours, once guiding resumes. You can read more about these new initiatives on pages 14 and 23 in this edition of *PASSAGE* magazine. Be sure to visit the Malay Heritage Centre before next year when it will close temporarily for a revamp. Also, do not miss the *Modern Women of the Republic* special exhibition at SYSNMH, which runs until 12 December.

Several of our dedicated volunteers are leaving Singapore this year. If you are one of them, I thank you for your contributions and hope you stay engaged with FOM from your new home.

In July, we received the sad news of the passing of Elaine Cheong, who served as FOM President from 2013 to 2015. Elaine is fondly remembered by all who knew her. Her passing is a loss for FOM.

The past few months have been a bit of a roller coaster for FOM docents and guiding. The suspension of guiding has been disappointing, especially for docents who signed up to guide the special exhibitions on show for a limited time. I appreciate your patience and am happy to share the news that docent-led tours will resume from 1 September.

Albert Einstein said, "*Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow*". As we look towards moving from a pandemic to living with an endemic virus, let us all take care of our physical and mental health, stay connected and stay hopeful.

Sincerely yours,



Garima G Lalwani
FOM President 2021





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Welcome PASSAGE

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On the Cover: A collage of ukiyo-e woodcut prints on loan to the Asian Civilisations Museum from a private collection, courtesy of the Asian Civilisations 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.

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

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

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

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Aspects of Singapore's Seven Museums

By Yusoff Abdul Latiff



The National Museum, Singapore's oldest and originally called the Raffles Library and Museum, moved to its Stamford Road premises in 1887. I can still remember the blue whale skeleton hanging above the lobby, the large collection of *keris* in the main display room and the locked spiral staircase leading to the 'haunted' room beneath the dome. Malays called the museum *Sekolah Gambar* (School of Pictures).



The Sun Yat Sen Memorial Hall in Balestier Road was so named in 1940 as a tribute to the man who led the revolution that overthrew China's Qing dynasty in 1911. He visited Singapore nine times between 1900 and 1911 and may have planned the uprising while staying here.



This Empress Place Building complex, overlooking the Singapore River, was originally planned as a courthouse, but held various government offices. In 1989 it was converted to the Empress Place Museum, which in 2003 evolved into the **Asian Civilisations Museum**, where the main Asian civilisations are commemorated.



The Singapore Art Museum in Bras Basah Road was established in 1996 and occupies the premises of the old St Joseph's Institution (a Catholic mission school set up in the 19th century). It was the first contemporary art museum here and displays one of the world's largest collections of Southeast Asian art. It is currently undergoing a major transformation and we look forward to seeing its successor.



The Malay Heritage Centre building, constructed in 1843, was Sultan Ali Iskandar Shah's palace. Because of a family dispute in 1897, it reverted to the government, but the sultan's family was allowed to live there until it was acquired by the government in the 1990s. It became the Malay Heritage Centre in 2005 and showcases the culture of Singapore's indigenous Malay communities.



The Peranakan Museum in Armenian Street was established in 2008 and displays the culture of the Peranakans, a hybrid community comprising the descendants of early Chinese immigrants who retained much of their Chinese culture but infused it with mainly Malay elements. The building was the premises of the former Tao Nan School. It too is currently undergoing a renovation and is scheduled to re-open in 2023.



The Indian Heritage Centre in Campbell Lane was launched in 2015 and displays the contributions of Indian and other South Asian communities in Singapore. Housed in an ultra-modern, glass façade building, it symbolizes a jewel during the day and a translucent lantern at night.

Yusoff Abdul Latiff is a retired teacher who now indulges in painting watercolours with a focus on intricate Peranakan houses, colourful landscapes and detailed portraits.

When a Thousand Words Are Not Enough

By Caroline Carfantan

The catchphrase, “a picture tells more than a thousand words”, has never been truer than for a painting by the British artist duo, The Singh Twins. Paradoxically, each semiotically dense artwork in their series *Slaves of Fashion*, although silent by nature, is an essay on the history of Indian fabrics. Each detail is a clue, a piece of a puzzle, a story unrolling in front of your eyes. For me, it was love at first sight. I was caught in space, left in suspense, at times lost in translation, but thrilled by every detail, by every mystery solved.

Nevertheless, some question marks remained. So I turned to the primary source and asked the artists themselves. Our online exchange was the absolute highlight for me during this ‘new normal’. I learned that one year of their four-year project had been spent on research alone. The detailed iconography and themes of each painting reveal connections between seemingly unrelated objects, always intrinsically linked to the story of manufacture and trade in Indian textiles, the story of empires and colonialism, highlighting cross-cultural influences and key moments in world history.

Let’s have a closer look at three artworks in this series, ones that combine traditional hand painting, scanned historical archival material, and digitally created elements.

The central figure in *Coromandel: Sugar and Spice, Not So Nice* (Fig 1) is a Dutch woman, identifiable by her attire, a *wentke*, a long-waisted chintz coat that was worn in the province of Friesland, in the Netherlands. This traditional costume emphasises the importance of the Dutch connection to the story of India’s textiles. In the background, on the lower left, a Dutch merchant vessel sails into an unmistakable Hokusai-style wave, representing Japan. On the shore, one can see a Japanese woman performing the tea ceremony, established in the late 16th century. It relates to the ritual use of hand-painted



Fig 1. Coromandel: Sugar and Spice, Not so Nice. Image copyright The Singh Twins: www.singhtwins.co.uk

and printed Indian textiles by the Japanese wealthy classes, who used small pieces of this expensive export good to wrap tea caddies and utensils. This ceremonial use of luxury Indian textiles enabled the users to display their status and good taste in a discreet way during the early 17th to late 19th centuries when imports were restricted and ‘sumptuary law’ in Japan forbade the wearing of fine clothes.

The scene behind the main portrait is dominated by a tree bearing cloves, pepper and nutmeg, in a rocky ocean.

This imagery was inspired by a particular Indian textile known as *palampore*, which typically featured a large tree with stylized flowers rooted in rocks and water and surrounded by a bold decorative floral border. In the artwork, this tree connects the Indian textiles to their initial use by European traders as currency in the profitable Indo-European spice trade over which the



Fig 2. Chintz: the Price of Luxury, Image copyright The Singh Twins: www.singhtwins.co.uk



The Singh Twins, photo courtesy of the Royal Collection Trust/ ©Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2008



Fig 3. Detail from Chintz: The Price of Luxury, Image copyright The Singh Twins www.singhtwins.co.uk

Dutch gained a virtual monopoly in the early 17th century. Profits from trade in Indian textiles enabled the Dutch (like other Western merchant companies and powers) to establish colonies and plantations across the globe, ones that relied on slave labour to produce other lucrative, luxury trade goods. The image of a tortured African hanging from the spice tree, is more than a hint at the title *Coromandel: Sugar and Spice, Not So Nice*, a reminder of the use of enslaved Africans for sugar production in the Dutch plantation colonies of Surinam from the 17th to the 19th centuries.

Sugar and slavery are also featured in the painting, *Chintz: the Price of Luxury* (Fig 2). The central figure, Catherine of Braganza, is dressed in a gown highlighting the variety of Indian and Indian-inspired European chintz (painted or printed and glazed cotton cloth). On a side table next to her you can see porcelain, tea, silver, sugar and chocolate, all luxury items (Fig 3), used as social markers of status and wealth. They were the result of an increasingly interlinked global economy. They are also silent reminders of the human price involved, of slavery and of wars in India and elsewhere, where expanding European empires vied to secure their interests. Some clues, such as *The Produce of Free Labour* sugar bowl are more obvious than others. This slave-free sugar, commercialised by the East India Company, was nothing short of a PR-stunt. The aim, on the one hand, was to divert attention from the 1791 boycott of West Indian sugar by opponents of African slavery; on the other, to develop a profitable pseudo-ethical sugar business sourced from the Bay of Bengal. A less obvious hint is the negligently placed “Blood-red” poppy. What one might mistake for a mere decorative element, is a subtle reference to the connection of tea and Indian textiles to the Opium Wars, a conflict partly funded by the lucrative Indian textile trade. This was a trade that took off after 1662, the year the English monarch Charles II married Portugal’s Catherine of Braganza. Part of her dowry was the territory and port region of Bombay. This was an alliance that made it possible for the company to gain greater control over India and the manufacture and trade in Indian commodities – not least textiles. Catherine’s gown displays various chintz fabrics, exemplifying how patterns and colours were adapted over time to accommodate the different fashions and changing tastes of a global market. As a figure of royalty, Catherine not only popularised tea drinking, but also chintz, an Indian textile initially popularised in Europe through its use by the ruling classes.

The artwork *The King is Dead: Long Live the King* (Fig 4), explores current debates about ethical trade and responsible consumerism, which surround the cultivation and use of cotton – a commodity that remains as valuable today

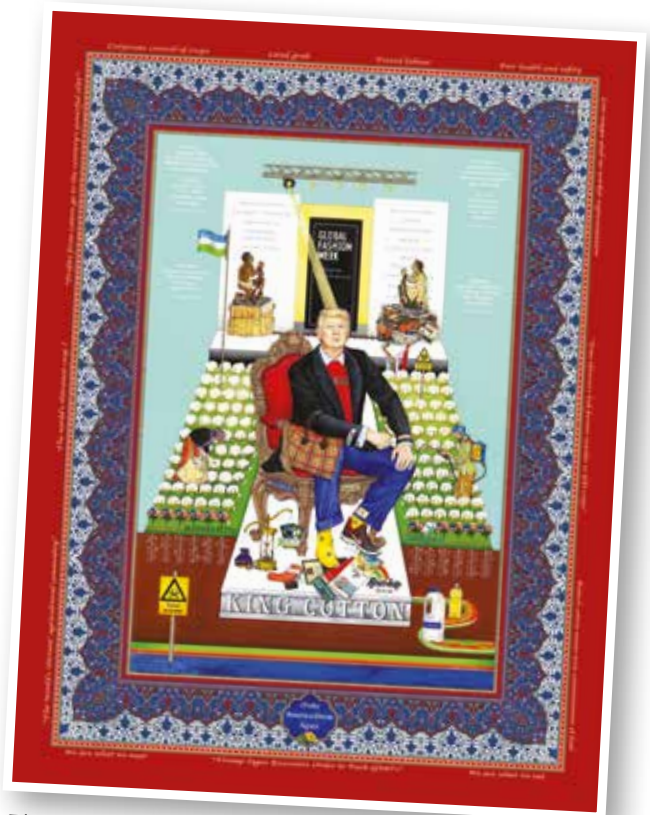


Fig 4. The King is Dead: Long Live the King, Image copyright The Singh Twins: www.singhtwins.co.uk

as it was in the mid-19th century. This artwork focuses on the human and environmental cost of non-organic cotton cultivated using controversial agrochemicals and GM technologies. It also suggests how the exploitation of human and natural resources for commercial gain in an age of empire and colonialism, today finds parallels within the textile and apparel industry.

These are just three out of over 20 paintings in the series. For me, each one holds an ‘a-ha’ moment, be it for its beauty, its treasure trove of information or its ability to deeply draw me in and literally and figuratively make my day.

Caroline Carfantan’s article would not have been possible without all the insights shared by The Singh Twins. It was an exchange that highlighted how art and Indian cottons create interwoven dialogues across continents and people at more than one level.

A Hidden Gem: The Blair Plain Conservation Area

By Carol Hamcke-Onstwedder

What first led me to the Everton Road and Blair Plain Conservation Area was the first exhibition from Yip Yew Chong (YYC) at the Art Porters Gallery. However, what I found in this gallery was not only a delightful collection of YYC's work and the locations of some of his earlier murals, but also a gem of a conservation area, one surrounded by the hubbub of Outram, the HDB blocks at Everton Park, the Pinnacle at Duxton, and towering modern condominiums.

The Blair Plain Conservation Area

Comprising Everton, Spottiswoode Park and Blair Roads, and surrounded by the commercial streets of Neil Road and Kampong Bahru Road, this area contains a small cluster of two and three-storey shophouses and terraced houses with varied and distinct architectural styles. And it is this variety that makes this area a 'gem', somewhat hidden and quietly tucked away.

The area was developed just before the end of the 19th century and named after John Blair. He was a senior officer with the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company, which owned land in the area and had a house near the port, where other detached bungalows were built. With the completion of the Tanjong Pagar Railway Station in 1930 near the port area, merchants desired new homes in a more reputable area and the construction of many ornately decorated buildings began along Blair, Everton and Neil Roads. Historically, this was one of the first places in Singapore for wealthy merchants to live because of its proximity to the port. This low-lying area, extending from Kampong Bahru to the sea, is called the Blair Plain.

The area was gazetted for conservation on 25 October 1991. During the 1990s Singapore was redeveloping its neighbourhoods and tearing down old buildings to build new and larger housing for residents. However, the old houses of Blair, Everton, Spottiswoode and Neil Roads were all protected under the umbrella of the Blair Plain Conservation area. There is rich heritage in this area.



Blair Plain refined rococo style



A Venetian palazzo



Chinoiserie details

66 Spottiswoode Park Road

This building always has passersby doing a double take as they gaze upon its unusual colours and decoration. What many don't realise is that it is the *only* known example of an original 19th century decorative scheme in Singapore, according to the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA). The house was built in the 1890s. Today it has a mismatched façade with a brown/red hue on the first storey, while the upper floor's exterior is a mix of brown and blue murals or bird-and-flower painting. This building is a stark contrast to the surrounding ones, which are often one storey taller and covered in ornate designs and decoration. This is why trained conservationists think that number 66 is not only older than the other buildings in the area, but that the owner had a limited budget. You will also note that with road repaving, the five-foot way is below road level.



Façade of 66 Spottiswoode Park Road, oldest painted façade in Singapore

The Baba House at 157 Neil Road

This is the former ancestral home of a Straits Chinese family, restored by the URA for the National University of Singapore. I have only seen the elaborate façade, which highlights an ornately carved entrance door with a *pintu pagar* (salon style door), scrolls over the ground floor windows, and mosaics on its canopy roof. What I have learned is that the upper storey was added later, with Georgian-style fanlights above the windows. It is possible to tour the interior – but by appointment only.



157 Neil Road, entrance to the NUS Baba House, ancestral home of a Chinese shipping tycoon; possibly 1890s.

147 Neil Road

This house was owned by Singapore's first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's grandfather. The house is painted green and white and is a mixture of British colonial plaster decoration on the second storey with bat-wing-shaped air vents above the first storey windows. Note again the *pintu pagar* door.

The area is also known for being the site of the first murals created by Yip Yew Chong, who was a resident here for many years.

The Murals

The *Amah* mural in Everton Road was YYC's very first public mural, created in August 2015. It is a delight to see the rich Peranakan culture reflected in the colours and patterns of the textiles and kitchenware, especially the multi-coloured tiffin boxes and the hanging clothes. The *Barber* mural is located in the back lane of Everton Road, created in September 2015. I love the way YYC uses the existing setting as a prop for some of his murals, such as the milk can hanging from the pipe in the *Barber* mural. Lastly, there is the *Provision Shop* mural in Everton Road, (on the gable wall of No 8 Spottiswoode Park Road) created in December 2015. You can readily see the old-time tins in which sweets and biscuits were stored, the burlap sacks of grains, and the ubiquitous tin basins, before the arrival of plastic. While some might say this is a bit of nostalgia, it is actually a part of history. Without these murals, many of us would not know about or be able to learn about the way of life in Singapore in days gone by. On YYC's website you can read about the story behind the *Provision Shop* mural.



Amah mural, Yip Yew Chong



Provision Shop mural, Yip Yew Chong

Architectural Highlights in Blair Plain

While this area is rich in heritage, it is also rich in its variety of architectural styles and details.

According to the URA, the building and rebuilding of the urban residential terraces in this area continued through the 1960s. This resulted in a range of different styles



Peranakan tiles along the five-foot way

of façades and building forms. Walk the quiet five-foot ways of the this neighbourhood to appreciate the mixture of Chinese, Malay, European and even Art Deco design elements:

- *Chinese*: bat-winged air vents; friezes of coloured ceramic chips featuring dragon, phoenix and flower motifs
- *Malay*: timber fretwork of the roof eaves
- *Peranakan*: exquisite tile work
- *European*: fanlights, French windows, Portuguese jalousies (shuttered panelled *pintu besar* or main doors) and *pintu pagar*
- *British colonial*: Corinthian pilasters on the upper storeys.



Ornately designed shuttered *pintu besar* or main doors, and *pintu pagar* or outdoor gate

This combination of Rococo-style shophouses and the 1920s Chinoiserie led to the houses in the conservation area being referred to as the Blair Plain Refined Rococo style. As you can see in the photographs, there are plaster motifs reminiscent of Wedgewood and homes that could be mistaken for Venetian palazzos (the corner of Everton and Blair Roads), and even an Art Deco structure here and there.



View of Neil Road shophouses overlooked by modern high rises

This is a neighbourhood nestled amongst high-rise condominiums and the towering Pinnacle at Duxton. Despite that, it is a quiet corner of Singapore that you can visit over and over again and always find something you have not seen before. Walk the plant-filled five-foot ways, wonder at the tile workmanship, feast your eyes on the architectural details and appreciate the tranquillity of the neighbourhood. And there is even a café or two to relax and immerse oneself in, in this hidden corner of Singapore.

Sources:

www.roots.gov.sg

www.ura.gov.sg

www.kangic.wikidot.com/perankanhouse

<http://yipyc.com/blog/2016/11/11/provision-shop-mural-art/>

Carol Hamcke-Onstwedder is a freelance photographer who enjoys architecture, street, nature and abstract photography while exploring Singapore. Her images and projects can be found on www.cho-photography.com and on Instagram (@cho_thru_the_lens). When not looking through the lens, Carol enjoys mahjong, cooking, rowing and learning Mandarin.

All photos by the author

Chew Boon Lay: From Rags to Riches

By Evelyn Chew

Chew Boon Lay was born in 1851 or 1852 in a small village called Tong Loon Seah, in Kuan Khaw (also known as Changchow) near today's Xiamen. His was an average peasant family whose subsistence depended on a few *mou* (one *mou* = 0.165 acres) of padi land. He was left fatherless at the age of 13 or 14 and when his mother died a few years later, he decided to join an uncle in Bangkok. After working in his uncle's sundry shop for a few years, he joined a sailing ship that traded between Bangkok and Singapore. As he could read and write Chinese, he was assigned the additional task of being the ship's clerk. In return, he was given the privilege of retaining the rice sweepings and also a small cargo space on the ship for his personal use, in addition to a small salary. He made good use of the cargo space allotted to him and in a few years was able to purchase his own vessel and begin his own business, trading between Bangkok and Singapore.

Because he was resourceful and enterprising, it was not long before he had diversified into manufacturing. From his experience in his uncle's sundry shop, he knew which goods sold well. He started by making soap, which he hawked from door to door, then he baked and sold biscuits. At that time, it



A family gathering



Chew Boon Lay's seven sons

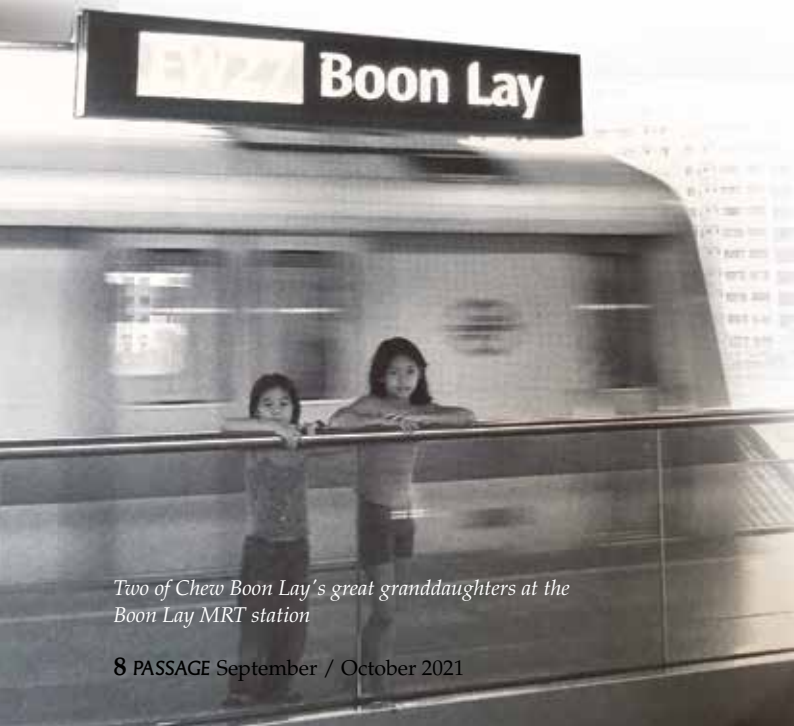
was not easy for the small businessman to get financing, but he was lucky. A member of the Gaw family from Semarang, Indonesia, liked his biscuits and suggested a joint venture, with the Gaws providing the money and he the expertise. Ho Ho Biscuit Factory was incorporated in 1898 and operated in 11 shophouses in Chin Swee Road.

He was a very forward-looking man and had a natural love for things mechanical, so it was not surprising that he imported machines from the West for manufacturing the factory's products: biscuits, confectionery, citronella as well as other oils. It was described in the 1923 edition of *Seaports of the Far East* as, "a large and excellently equipped factory, fully mechanised, one of the most notable undertakings in Singapore". The products were exported to Malaya, Indonesia and China. Their excellence won the company a diploma and a bronze medal at an exhibition in Hanoi, Vietnam in 1902. In 1931, the company went regional, setting up a branch in Jakarta. Apart from manufacturing, the company also traded as agents and commission agents, importing rice and sugar from Indonesia and exporting local produce and native medicine to other countries in the region.

Chew Boon Lay was far ahead of his times. He was astute and understood the value of advertising, so the company went into advertising in a big way. Advertisements appeared very often in the Nanyang Siang Pau, a prominent Chinese newspaper, even on the front page, and in later years in magazines and other



Chew Boon Lay, circa 1931, aged 80



Two of Chew Boon Lay's great granddaughters at the Boon Lay MRT station

publications in the English language as well.

With the cessation of imports of raw materials from Australia in 1942 when the Japanese occupied Singapore during World War II, the factory had to cease operations and never really resumed its manufacturing activities after the war. However, with the money that he had made from biscuits, he bought rubber plantations, owning at least three in his lifetime: one each in Jurong, Kukup (Johor) and in Kota Tinggi. Kukup was the largest.

He was one of several rubber plantation owners in Jurong and would have gone completely unnoticed in the annals of Jurong's history, like the others there, except for what he did in his estate. While the other owners just planted rubber trees and put in the basic infrastructure for the extraction of sap from the trees, he built proper roads, laterite ones, in his estate. Although it is unusual to name roads in one's own estate, he did just that. He named the longest one, the one running across the estate, after himself, and the side roads after his grandsons, Chin Bee and Chin Chong. After World War II ended in the mid-1940s, the British colonial government acquired his and other estates in Jurong. Probably because he had laterite roads in his estate, the government retained the roads and crucially, made the decision to keep the road names. That changed his place in Jurong's history. As Singapore developed, branches of roads were added to the ones named after him and his grandsons and when estates were built, they took on the names of the roads.

Today it is hard to drive around Jurong without coming across roads and estates bearing his or his grandsons' names. Several roads today bear the names Jalan Boon Lay, Boon Lay Avenue, Boon Lay Place and Boon Lay Way. Many



Staff of Ho Ho Biscuit Factory outside the company's premises, late 1940s (Chew Hock Seng seated fifth from right, and Chew Chin Hong seated at extreme right)



An ad appearing in the local Chinese newspapers in the 1920s



An ad from 1933

structures also bear his name: Boon Lay MRT Station, Boon Lay HDB Estate, Boon Lay Garden Primary School and Boon Lay Secondary School, to name a few. Similarly, in the area where the factories are in Jurong, there is a network of roads that bears the name of one of his grandsons – for instance, Chin Bee Road, Chin Bee Drive, Chin Bee Avenue and Chin Bee Crescent. However, Chin Chong Road has disappeared from maps.

Chew Boon Lay died in 1933, leaving a wife, many sons and daughters and grandchildren. He had focused on two things – his business and his family. He was a man of few words and did not socialise. Nor did he participate in community activities. When he was not at work he was with his large family, in the family compound. In 2002, his family created an album, *Chew Boon Lay: A Family Traces its History*, which includes his family tree, that of his sons and daughters, their spouses and also their descendants. All together they number over 700. Not only is his name today considered an intrinsic part of Jurong, he contributed quite significantly to the increase in Singapore's population.



Ad on the front page of the Nanyang Siang Pau Press on 19 January 1929

Evelyn Chew is the youngest grandchild of Chew Boon Lay. She was a civil servant and then became a lawyer. She joined the Friends of the Museums right after her retirement.

All photos courtesy of the author

Homing in on the Sense of Belonging

By Virginie Labbe

A welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of containers and trucks in the Tanjong Pagar Distripark, STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery has chosen Helutrans Art Space for three editions of its new project, titled *Re*. *Re* brings together a selection of works created in STPI and places them in a series of physical and online viewing rooms, creating new perspectives for us to re-look and re-visit them in a fresh context.

The second edition of *Re*, which closed recently, presented the works of eminent Indonesian artists created in collaboration with STPI's Creative Workshop over 10 years. They are a testament to the diversity and talent of contemporary Indonesian artists, and the innovation and ingenuity of STPI's print and papermakers. As I rediscovered the works online from my quarantine room after a long overdue trip back to my hometown in France, I felt they resonated deeply with me and were particularly relevant to the times we are living in, even though they were created prior to the pandemic.

As the saying goes, home is where the heart is. Like many of us whose family and friends are dispersed around the world at a time when travel restrictions make cross-border reunions difficult, **Entang Wiharso** (who is based in Rhode Island, USA) may be longing for his native Indonesia. Nevertheless, his *Home Sweet Home* – a monumental work made of paper casting using a mould from the artist's 2015



Handiwirman Saputra, Ujung Sangkut Sisi Sentuh I #04 Suspended Forms #04, 2012, Paper pulp drawing with translucent abaca paper

Uprooting is something performance artist **Melati Suryodarmo** is no stranger to. She obliquely referred to this in her iconic performance *Exergie – Butter Dance* (first performed in 2000 in Berlin), in which she stepped and danced on slabs of butter laid out on the floor, slipping and falling repeatedly. The butter – a staple food in Germany where she had been living since her 20s, but not a product commonly found in the Indonesian diet – could be interpreted as a commentary on the struggles of migrating to a new country. Well known for her durational performances, Melati's works deal with the relationship between the human body and its environment. Homes – in particular the ones she left behind – were also the inspiration behind the works she created during her STPI residency in 2018. A residency in the print and paper workshop in STPI is a very challenging exercise for a performance artist – but Melati's series of charcoal rubbings are a brilliant example of how a



Entang Wiharso, Home Sweet Home, 2015, Cast paper, acrylic paint, yarn, acrylic mirror, wood panel

aluminium relief work – offers a disturbing picture. The scene, whilst set in a house, does not conjure an image of a happy family: men and women, with their flat appearance reminiscent of Javanese *wayang kulit* puppets, are depicted in confrontational poses. Furthermore, there is a foreboding of upcoming violence – exacerbated by the bright, blood red yarn in the foreground. One might wonder if this work was created in the light of the artist's own ambivalent feelings for his native Indonesia where the national motto, *Unity in Diversity*, is so often contradicted by the recurrent racial and religious tensions.



Melati Suryodarmo, FAUST 3, 2018, Charcoal powder rubbed into STPI handmade paper

talented artist can push the boundaries of her artistic practice in the workshop. For these works she rubbed her hands in charcoal – and laid them into wet paper laid out on a vacuum table used in paper-making to drain water from the wet pulp. The black coal – a material which she used in her 2012 performance *I'm a Ghost in my Own House* – carries an added significance for Melati, as its transformation from a living tree to dead wood to solid fuel, serves as a symbol of the cycle of life and regeneration. These charcoal rubbings, whilst static, are also gestural as they contain the memories of the artist's performance, the imprint of her hands, which struggled to move across the table.



Eko Nugroho, Photo series (Multi-Identity), 2013, C-Type Print

Contrasting with the black charcoal rubbings is the exquisite work of **Handiwirman Saputra**

titled *Ujung Sangkut Sisi Sentuh I #04 / Suspended Forms #04*. This large circle of what from a distance looks like delicate embroidery on fine organza, on a closer look reveals itself to be made entirely of paper used in an unconventional way – not as a mere support but as a medium in itself. Interestingly, the items Handiwirman represented in this work are not traditionally beautiful – tree trunks, zinc sheets and discarded debris in semi abstracted and minimalist form, showcasing his ability to see beauty in typically overlooked objects. The works are the result of much experimentation and are a technical feat. The team used a special mix of abaca (fibres taken from banana tree leaves) to produce the translucent effect of the base sheet, and continually layered it to produce the right amount of transparency. The opaque drawing lines were made with wet cotton pulp. The different fibres locked together as the pulp dried (no glue was used), but the different shrinkage rates for abaca and cotton were an additional challenge for the team to ensure the artwork did not buckle and warp. STPI's papermakers equated making this artwork to working almost blindly, since the abaca mixture is nearly transparent when it is still wet. Handiwirman had to work very intuitively, knowing that the process involved some degree of unpredictability



Eko Nugroho, Multi-Identity, 2013, Paper mask with relief print, linen, collage, thread, found object, coloured shaped STPI handmade paper



Jumaldi Alfi, Duka Mu abadi #02, 2012, Soft ground etching, hard ground etching and aquatint on Fabriano 100% cotton paper

and chance. The work in its original presentation was suspended and could be seen from both sides – although the presentation in Helutrans on a dark background enables one to see from up close the different textures and the play on translucency and whiteness.

The colourful masks created by **Eko Nugroho** during his STPI residency may not fully protect you from Covid but are guaranteed to turn heads! STPI staff experienced this when they wore them on the MRT, by the busy riverside or when ordering food at a hawker centre, a playful extension of artist/workshop collaboration beyond STPI's premises. Known for his giant murals and embroideries, which mix street art influences and traditional Javanese motifs, the Indonesian artist constantly incorporates masks in his art, a reflection that each one of us tends to hide our true nature in public. The *Multi-Identity* mask, with its bright neon colours, Chinese knots, skulls, multiple eyes and traditional patterns, may have been inspired by the artist's observation of Singaporean society. One usually thinks of paper as fragile, but the paper developed specifically for the masks needed to be akin to fabric so that it could be sewn, printed on and even worn. The latter posed another technical challenge for the workshop staff who used abaca, cotton paper and *konnyaku*, a Japanese root vegetable gelatin, to strengthen the paper while making sure it retained its flexibility.

As Singapore goes back to Phase 2 mode after a period of relative reopening, it is not difficult to see a metaphor in the Greek myth of Sisyphus and its boulder depicted in **Jumaldi Alfi's** small print titled *Duka Mu abadi*, for what seems the endless trudge through the challenges this pandemic has brought. While waiting for a better future, we can be grateful that we can still access art to find solace in these difficult times.

Virginie Labbe has been guiding at STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery and Gillman Barracks since 2016 and as a result, has developed a soft spot for Indonesian contemporary art.

All photos courtesy of the artists and STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery

Enjoy a Degustation of Sikh Arts in The Sikhs in Singapore – a Story Untold

By Khong Swee Lin



Tanjore-Style painting of the Ten Sikh Gurus, India, late 19th century. Wood, pigments and semiprecious stones. On loan from Khanuja Family Collection, Phoenix, USA

The principle of *sewa* or selfless service is a vital part of a Sikh's spiritual life, fulfilling the spiritual and material needs of the Sikh community. Such selfless service, expounded in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the holy book of Sikhism, is amply recounted in *The Sikhs in Singapore – A Story Untold*, an exhibition co-created by members of the Sikh community and the Indian Heritage Centre, running till 31 January 2022.

The Sikh journey is tripartite, proceeding from their origins in the region of the Five Rivers in India (the Punjab) and entitled *Roots*. The exhibition then moves into *Settlement*, comprising exemplary narratives of Sikh arrivals in Singapore. The story of their journey ends in *Contemporary Perspectives*, a look at local Sikh experiences and identity. Perhaps the story does not quite end there – it's up to you to find out more.

The values of *sewa* are particularly exemplified in two august Sikh personalities whose names have become

synonymous with the arts of the Sikh community. Dr Narinder S Kapany, a physicist, established the Sikh Foundation in 1967 with the goal of preserving and promoting Sikh heritage and culture. His vision extended to pioneering the first display of Sikh art in the West at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco in 1992. In Phoenix, Arizona, another repository of precious Sikh art was established – the renowned Khanuja Family Collection and the Khanuja Family Sikh Heritage Gallery in the Phoenix Art Museum.

A walk through *A Story Untold*, instantly reveals the multiplicity of beguiling Indian art forms. Barely past the entrance, to the left, a dazzling 19th century painting catches the eye. Set against an intense blue background, the ten gurus of Sikhism, (the religion founded by Guru Nanak), are portrayed with halos encircling their heads. The ten gurus diligently spread the faith; they also codified and taught the holy book. This painting is in the Thanjavur or Tanjore (an anglicised pronunciation of Thanjavur) South Indian style, whose themes are usually temple iconography or Hindu religious scenes. Costly materials such as 22 karat gold foil and glass beads may also be used. The art form originated in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu around the 16th century. Hailing from the north, Guru Nanak travelled to the south on his second missionary tour.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the first ruler of the Sikh Empire from 1801-39, was powerful enough to be able to unite the quarrelling Sikh *misl*s or factions and ruled over an empire that stretched from the Khyber Pass, across the Punjab and Kashmir to Tibet. His martial abilities were unaffected by one blind eye, the result of a bout of smallpox, his first battle, waged at the tender age of 10.

His court in Lahore has been described as splendid yet the man himself was simple in manner. This is clearly seen in a vivid 19th century gouache painting of his court, which shows the Maharaja seated on a plain chair instead of an ostentatious gold throne. His court was amazingly cosmopolitan and secular, with foreign courtiers, advisers and a modern army that included European (particularly French) and American mercenaries.

He was a patron of the arts, encouraging artists from the Rajput and Pahari kingdoms to settle in Lahore and other cities during his reign. Artists in the Punjab plains began to be inspired by the narratives of Guru Nanak, and the



Painting of the Court of Ranjit Singh, Punjab 19th century. Gouache on paper. On loan from Manraj S Sekhon



Album of Company School Studies of the People of Punjab, Lahore or Amritsar, 19th century, paper on loan from the Kapany Collection

iconography used for earlier Hindu and Rajput mythology was adapted for depictions of Sikh gurus.

The term “Company (school) paintings” generally refers to works painted for colonial patrons (British East India Company employees) and were created in response to British tastes and sentiments. Hence flora, fauna and vignettes of Indian life were featured in watercolours and often sent home as souvenirs. These were a blending of Indian and British artistic styles, hybrid works that served as snapshots into the past.



Rigour by Keerat Kaur



Inscribed and gold-damascened sword, Punjab circa 1850. Steel with gold leaf. On loan from the Kapany Collection

The name *talwar* comes from the Sanskrit word *taravari* meaning one-edged sword, which is about as literal as it gets. The *talwar*'s impressive gold hilt is adorned with decorations known as *koftgari*, an artform introduced by the Mughals in the 16th century. Also known as “beaten wire” in Persian and Urdu, it is an overlay art in which very fine gold or silver wire is pressed into a crosshatched metal surface, one that was initially heated, then cooled. The wire is flattened with the help of *opni* or moonstone.

The term Damascene may have come from *damas*, the Arabic word for water since blades made from this type of steel had ‘watery’ or mottled patterns. Damascus steel was cast from Indian wootz steel in a technique known as early as 300 BCE. Since this technique had been lost, would-be competitors made futile attempts to replicate wootz, even employing reverse engineering.



Embroidered shawl. North India 1850, wool. Collection of the Indian Heritage Centre

The art of the Kashmir shawl reached its peak during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He encouraged weaving, so his court was adorned with Kashmir shawls and shawl cloths; he even used them as payment. He very generously gave shawls away as gifts, even to the British who annexed the Punjab after his death.

Small wonder then that the shawls eventually made their way to Europe and in particular to a certain lady, Josephine, who it is said, complained to her son that they were ugly and

expensive. But, she grudgingly admitted, they kept her warm. In any event, they were gifts from her husband, a certain gentleman called Napoleon.

Birds and mythological creatures romp through this cinnamon-coloured shawl, while nobles are seated in *chhatri*, dome-shaped pavilions, or engaged in hunting (a royal sport introduced by the Mughals). All are exquisitely hand-embroidered on the shawl.

Savour every delightful morsel in this exhibition’s artistic menu, from the dignity and calm of Lim Cheng Hoe’s pastel sketch and the subsequent watercolour, entitled *The Old Sikh*, (1937) and *Old Sikh* (1955), to the sheer confidence and exuberance of Georgette Chen’s *The Punjabi Man*, (*The White Turban*) (1958), an oil painting on canvas.

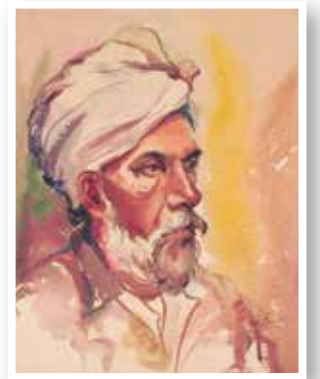
You can also enjoy a photographic installation of 50 young Sikhs in *Through the Lens* by Afiq Omar, reimagining Sikh identity in Singapore and *Becoming Sikh ...*, a trilogy of short films exploring contemporary Singaporean Sikh experiences relating to Sikh culture, history and religion by filmmaker Upneet Kaur Nagpal and writer Balli Kaur Jaswal.

Save the best for last with Keerat Kaur’s whimsical and intriguing portrayals of Singaporean Sikhs. Her four digital prints may be regarded as ‘contemporary miniatures’, a blend of Indian miniature painting techniques. Keerat is a Canadian multi-disciplinary artist with Sikh-Punjabi roots. She explores her roots through paintings, ceramics, hand embroidery, music and architecture.

This article is just a mini-sampler, but all the arts in this exhibition’s memorable feast bring home to us a sharper awareness of Sikhism, as well as the utterly rich culture and priceless heritage of Singapore’s Sikh community.



Lim Cheng Hoe, *The Old Sikh*, 1937, pastel on paper, 37 X 28.5cm. Gift of Michael Lim Hock Ann. Collection of the National Gallery Singapore



Lim Cheng Hoe, *Old Sikh*, 1955. Watercolour on paper, 50 X 39cm. Gift of Michael Lim Hock Ann. Collection of the National Gallery Singapore



Georgette Chen, *The Punjabi Man (The White Turban)*, 1958. Oil on canvas, 61.1 X 50 cm. Gift of the Lee Foundation. Collection of the National Gallery Singapore

Khong Swee Lin has been a docent at the Indian Heritage Centre Singapore since 2015 and guides at several museums and galleries in Singapore.

Images courtesy of the Indian Heritage Centre and the National Gallery of Singapore

The New Changi Chapel and Museum

Timely Inspiration for Resilience in Adversity

By Simone F Lee

During a time when museums around the world are going through the financial consequences of the pandemic, some closing their doors for lack of funding, others still open but going through a severe reduction in visitor numbers and revenue, as preservers of collective memories, it is reassuring to the Singapore heritage sector to have a brand-new site opening its doors.

Changi Chapel and Museum (CCM) was soft launched with a livestream on Facebook on 18 May 2021. We are all adapting to the ever-changing situation and trying to make the most of it. But it only takes a walk through this beautiful new museum to put things into perspective – the trials of those times reached an unimaginable level.

The Changi Chapel and Museum seeks to show the nobility of the human spirit that not even the horrors of a war could crush. This revamped museum takes one on a journey through Singapore's darkest time. The scene is set with the first bungalows in the Changi district, followed by the building of Singapore as an "Impregnable" fortress with its coastal gun batteries, military barracks and prison. After the fall of Singapore, the site quickly transforms into the camp and gaol where many civilians and military prisoners of war were held. Over the course of the Japanese Occupation during World War II, more than 90,000 people passed through the prison.

The CCM features artefacts that belonged to the internees, people from different walks of life, young and old, civilians and military, women and children. Through these objects we see many intimate stories unfolding, and get a glimpse at the resilience, courage and creativity needed to face their everyday reality. No matter the circumstances, they were determined not to give up. This resolve can be seen on every artefact: on each letter written home, on each suggestion for improving or making do with scant food, on each ingenious creation geared to making life more bearable, and on each place of faith that nurtured the soul. At the same time, you must keep in mind that these were hard times and people had to do whatever was required to survive.

Continuing the journey, we also see the tables turning when liberation arrived, and Changi was used to hold



Changi Chapel replica

Japanese POWs awaiting trial. Finally, in the last section, there is some closure when you learn what happened after the war to some of the people that we are now familiar with. Thanks to an interactive panel, you can research a person's name from a list of more than 87,905 Changi internees. Apparently there was never an official record of all the people who spent time in Changi during the Japanese Occupation. The panel might not have all the names, but it is definitely worth exploring.

You can visit the Changi Chapel replica at last. It was modelled after St George's Church, one of several places of worship built by prisoners-of-war. While this is not a consecrated space, it is peaceful and conducive to some soul searching. This is a wonderful spot to have a seat on one of the benches, look around, and reflect on the journey you just took, side by side with so many everyday heroes, or just to rest for a bit.

At the time this article was written, a group of FOM NMS docents was passionately researching the CCM. They can't wait to share the inspiring stories they are learning about, starting in September 2021. Please watch FOM's website for updates.

Simone F Lee is one of the coordinators for and also a docent at the NMS. She also guides at the ACM and is looking forward to guiding at the new CCM.

Photos by Charlotte Dawson

Changi Chapel and Museum entrance



Foot Binding and the Liberation of Chinese Women

By Leong Lee Chiew

The special exhibition *Modern Women of the Republic: Fashion and Change in China and Singapore* at the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall, displays over 90 artefacts and photographs from the late Qing dynasty (1890s) to the 1970s. It uses fashion to tell the story of changes in the role, status and lifestyle of women in China and Singapore. From oversized blouses to form-fitting cheongsams, the first section charts the changes in Chinese women's fashion in response to the political upheavals in China from the 1890s to the 1930s.

The next section shifts our attention to how the print media and consumer culture from the 1930s to the 1960s, particularly in Shanghai, Hong Kong and Singapore, imagined and shaped the ideal modern woman. In the last section, we can see how working women in Singapore from the 1950s to the 1970s were empowered through 'power dressing', giving them confidence when they ventured out in the public sphere and the working world.

The Han Chinese tradition of binding women's feet is believed to have originated from the imperial court of the Southern Tang dynasty. Emperor Li Yu's favourite consort danced for him on bound feet, on a lotus-shaped platform made of gold. This practice spread within the court and gradually outside court circles. For almost a millennium, Chinese women adhered to the practice despite the pain.

Foot binding was initially practised only by the upper classes, but by the 19th century had gained popularity among the lower classes. Girls from upper-class families were subjected to a strict foot-binding regime to keep their feet from growing. The ideal was euphemistically referred to as, "the three-inch golden lotus" (or 三寸金莲 in Chinese). Since girls from lower classes needed to work in the fields, they went through a less restrictive form of foot-binding, the practice thus became a symbol of status and wealth.

Unfortunately, it was believed that the carefully taken steps of bound feet would strengthen the muscles necessary for childbearing, thus making girls and women with small feet more desirable candidates for marriage. Out of love for them, it was usually the mother who bound her young daughters' feet. The practice was so deeply rooted among the Han Chinese majority that Qing imperial family edicts banning foot binding, were ignored.

Many western missionaries were horrified by such "barbaric" practices and started anti-foot binding societies as early as 1875. Reformers such as Kang Youwei (康有为), Liang Qichao (梁启超) and Qiu Jin (秋瑾), were influenced by foreign education and ideas and saw foot binding as a symbol of China's humiliation and inability to modernise. They actively wrote tracts denouncing foot binding and Kang even wrote to Emperor Guangxu to decree a ban on it.

After the fall of the Qing government in 1911, the ban on foot binding continued under the Republican government. This government enacted an "Unbinding" (*Fangzu* 放足) law and mobilised inspectors to carry out checks. Under this law, women were ordered to unbind their feet and straighten the already deformed bones. Fines were imposed on those who defied the rule. Matchmakers were also fined if they attempted to find husbands for girls whose feet had been bound.

The anti-foot binding movement did not proceed without resistance. Ironically, this was from the women themselves; they believed it was their personal choice whether to continue the practice. Owing to the Christian origins of the anti-foot binding movement, the pain of unbinding and the invasion of privacy in their homes, the movement faltered.

Those who eventually unbound their feet wore transitional shoes. These had pointed tips, showing a lingering preference for small feet since they still appeared small when worn under long skirts. The end of foot binding was not homogeneous across China and the practice did not truly end until the late 1940s.

NB: *Modern Women of the Republic: Fashion and Change in China and Singapore* runs from 12 June to 12 Dec 2021, Tues-Sun 10:00 am-5:00 pm, with FOM guided tours every Friday at 10.30 am.

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Leong Lee Chiew is a docent at TPM, SYSNMH and NMS. She also guides at the former Ford Factory and is the Co-head of Docent Training 2022 of SYSNMH.

Images collection of the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall



Lotus shoes (date unknown) Singapore



Transitional lotus shoes (date unknown) Singapore

Ukiyo-e Puzzles

By Patricia Bjaaland Welch



Hiroshige, Katata [Geese Descending], 1834-35

One of the loveliest surprises of the recent exhibition of ukiyo-e woodcut prints on loan to the Asian Civilisations Museum from a private collection was the discovery that many of the prints were the response of Japanese ukiyo-e artists to the 11th century series of Chinese paintings known to Sinologists as the *Eight Views of XiaoXiang*, which in turn were inspired by an entire genre of Chinese poetry known by the same name.

The term XiaoXiang refers to the area in the heart of Hunan Province (China) where the two rivers (the Xiao and the Xiang) meet. The area was not considered a healthy one as it was prone to swarms of mosquitoes and 'dangerous vapours' and was the region where officials who had fallen out of favour with the imperial court were frequently exiled.

But the origins of the symbolism of XiaoXiang began even earlier, in the fourth to third century BCE, when the famous Chinese hero Qu Yuan was exiled to the ancient state of Chu, where he died. (It was this region that later became known as XiaoXiang.) Scholar Alfreda Murck¹ has traced the fascinating history of how this district inspired poetry often redolent with the hidden meanings of exile and despair, hence dissent, and how in turn the poetry inspired later landscape paintings that reflected these emotional states.

The original paintings dedicated to the theme of XiaoXiang no longer survive; the oldest extant set of paintings of the eight views are attributed to Song Di (ca. 1015-1080), first published in 1090 in a compendium compiled by a government official (Shen Gua) who had himself fallen into disfavour and been exiled to the region. They are as follows:

1. Geese descending to Level Sand
2. Sail Returning from Distant Shore
3. Mountain Market

4. Clearing Mist
5. River and Sky
6. Evening Snow
7. Autumn Moon over [Lake] Dongting
8. Night Rain on XiaoXiang
9. Evening Bell from Mist-Shrouded Temple
10. Fishing Village in Evening Glow

The list ended with the comment, "He calls them *Eight Views*. Connoisseurs are talking about them."

Over the years, these motifs became favourites of Chinese painters, including the 13th century Buddhist monks Muqi and Yujian, who turned them into Chan Buddhist art². And in the same century, the earliest Japanese version of *Eight Views* poems emerged from the brush of a Japanese courtier exiled to Sado Island in 1298 (Kyōgoku Tamekanu).



Suzuki Harunobu, Twilight Snow on the Norioke, ca. 1766

Edo Japan

Four and a half centuries later, these same motifs became the inspirational playthings of Japan's ukiyo-e artists. The world of Edo Japan (1603-1868) entrances all visitors to the ACM's exhibition of the 'floating world' when its artists found 'play' (*asobi*) in all things – travel, food, dress, pets, flowers, theatre, sex. And the themes of *Eight Views of XiaoXiang*, which had been popular in Japanese art for centuries, did not escape these artists' incredibly clever minds and desire to amuse.

Their acuity becomes immediately apparent in one of earliest prints in the exhibition, *Twilight Snow of the Floss-stretching Form* (~1767-68) by Suzuki Harunobu (d. 1770), the artist who introduced *nishiki-e* (brocade prints) by reasoning that if one could print with two or three colours, why not more?

In Japan, *Eight Views* was known as *Shōshō hakkei*, but when the location moved from China to eight specific sites³ located around Japan's Lake Biwa, they became known as *Ōmi hakkei*. At first, Harunobu followed the tradition of assigning each of his takes on the series to the designated geographical location, but as he became perhaps more confident (or playful), he ignored those locations and moved his 1766 series indoors, renaming it *Zashiki hakkei* (*Eight Views in the Parlour*).



Suzuki Harunobu, Katata [Geese Descending], 1763



Suzuki Harunobu, Returning Sails, courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York)

Take a look at Harunobu's print depicting the theme of twilight snow, mentioned above). Don't see the snow? Look beyond the *watatsumi* (a low-class prostitute) and her maid (*kamuro*) and you'll see mounds of white silk floss on two black lacquer forms (*nurioko*) used in the making of felt hats (worn in the winter).

In his *Returning Sails* (*Tenugukake kihan*), the returning sails conventionally shown on small fleets of fishing or leisure craft are represented by towels hanging on a drying rack with a nearby tea kettle, a surrogate for the sea.

The theme of *Night Rain* (*Daisū no yau*) is suggested by a boiling kettle beside a sleepy figure. In all these scenes, the figures are the innocent young, lithe figures that are unmistakably Harunobu's preferred models. My personal favourite is *Descending Geese* (*Kotoji no rakugan*) showing two young women preparing to enjoy *koto* music where the descending geese are represented by the line of movable bridges on the *koto*. The smooth sand (on which the geese are to descend) is represented by the level surface of the musical instrument itself.

Harunobu's sense of play didn't stop there; he also embeds other hints, often of time or place (for example, kimono patterns or glimpses of plants or flowers that reveal the season or time of day), which require an extensive knowledge of Japanese culture (and language for the puns). Utilising homophones, arcane references and metaphors, his woodblock prints have challenged and amused viewers ever since. Other ukiyo-e artists such as Utagawa Toyohiro, Utagawa Kunitora and the most prodigious of all, Utagawa Hiroshige (who is credited with at least 20 different versions of the series), produced series inspired by the *Eight Views*.

Nor were hidden meanings restricted to this series alone; a good number of talented Edo wits joined in the fun, dotting their prints with pictorial clues to amuse their fans. A lifetime of study and exploration awaits all lovers of ukiyo-e.



Suzuki Harunobu, Night Rain, ca 1766



Suzuki Harunobu, Descending Geese, ca 1766, a *benizuri-e* or two+colour print

¹ Alfreda Murck, *Poetry and Painting in Song China: The Subtle Art of Dissent*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard-Yenching Institute series, 2000.

² Four of Muqi's paintings from the series can be seen today in Japanese museums (the Idemitsu Art Museum, the Kyoto National Museum, the Hatakeyama collection, and the Nezu Museum) as have other *Eight Views* compositions by other Buddhist monks. Merck, p. 350.

³ Karasaki (*Night Rain*), Mt. Hira (*Evening Snow*), Awazu (*Clearing Weather*), Yabase Harbour (*Sails Returning*), Miidera Temple (*Evening Bell*), Katata (*Descending Geese*), Seta (*Sunset*), and Ishiyama Temple (*Autumn Moon*).

Patricia Bjaaland Welch is an ACM docent and the author of *Chinese Art: A Guide to Motifs and Visual Imagery*, Vermont: Tuttle, 2008).

All images courtesy of the Asian Civilisations Museum

Malaya Lacquer Photo Albums

A Pictorial Survey of Albums over the Century

By Alex Teoh

The photographs in the album were taken whilst doing my national service in Malaya 20/12/55 to .../57 A A Brown

This was written on the front page of an attractive, solid wood, black lacquer, Malaya photo album. Comparatively larger and heavier than other albums, the Malaya lacquer album is colourfully decorated with scenes of local flora, wildlife and a map of Malaya. It has 20+ album cards for photographs interleaved with glassine tissue, and when opened, a soft melody plays from an attached musical device. A pleasant audio treat to create the mood and revive memories while viewing the photos.



Malaya lacquer albums

Photography and photo albums through the 1800s

Since the introduction of photography in the 1840s, photographic print has always been a visual documentation of its time. Early photography was confined to photographic studios owing to the chemical process required. Studios were set up in major port cities such as Singapore and Penang by various European photographers including Gaston Dutronquoy, Thomas Heritage, John Thomson, Sachtler & Co and G R Lambert¹. These studios offered portrait-taking services, appealing to colonial authorities, rich merchants, commercial establishments, and neighbouring sultanates.

The early photographic process, daguerreotype² captured images on metal. These image plates were probably stored and protected individually. With the introduction of wet plate collodion³ in 1851, prints were reproduced in albumen paper.⁴ Because albumen prints were on thin paper, these prints are fully attached to a thick card for better handling and protection. Albumen prints grew in popularity through early stereo view cards⁵ and *cartes-de-visite*⁶.

In the collections of museums and libraries, most of the albumen prints in the late 19th to early 20th century are fully adhered to thick cards. These photo cards, often with handwritten captions, are cloth-hinged and sewn to cloth tape or cords. Cased between covers, the cover materials include full leather, half leather with cloth sides, half leather with paper sides and full cloth. The album is often hollow backed with the spine rounded, to allow for easy opening. A title is frequently stamped on the front cover. For large albums with stiff cards, guarded hinge leaf binding⁷ allows for 180° opening of pages, without strain to the spine. Some examples of these large leather cover albums have been exhibited at the National Library of Singapore and the National Gallery.



Leather bound album 1910s - 1920s

They include G R Lambert's *Fotoalbum Singapur 1901* and *Singapore Centenary 1919*.

However, at the beginning of the 20th century, albumen prints were slowly being replaced by other photographic developments such as platinum and gelatine prints. This newer process was more durable and less prone to fading, a flaw of the dominant 19th century albumen print.⁸ Amateur photography also became popular with the setting up of photographic societies, equipped with darkroom facilities for their members. The societies held regular exhibitions and photographic competitions. Moving away from the traditional studio portraits, photography of the outdoors and family events caught on.

Demand for local photographs also grew as overseas tourists began arriving in groups. After the opening of the Suez Canal and the advent of steam ships, visitors wanted local pictures as souvenirs. Many accumulated memories of their adventures and journeys through self-decorated, personalised albums, often with printed ephemera such as tour agendas, ticket receipts, ships' menus, tourist brochures, etc attached.

Card cover album 1920s - 30s - velvet, fabric and paper covers

In the 1920s and '30s, velvet, fabric and paper cover photo albums were available, presumably costing less than the leather version. Usually smaller than the leather albums, the black and white prints were attached to the album pages with gold or silver photo corners. The album block consisted of many single leaves held together by fasteners such as metal staples and attached to the covers with thick twisted cord. The covers were relatively plain with a hot-stamped title such as ALBUM or Photographs. These albums could be of local design and manufacture since the component materials were locally available.



Card cover album 1920s - 30s - velvet, fabric and paper covers



Japanese scene lacquer albums

Lacquer photo albums

One exception was the availability of Japanese-made lacquer photo albums. For many years before WWII, Japan was a major producer of photo albums. Known for their beautiful lacquer work on utilitarian and decorative items, lacquer photo albums were also exported. Attractive albums became popular among travellers, military personnel stationed overseas and rich families.

A search on the internet reveals a wide variety of designs of such lacquer-work albums. The front covers are colourful paintworks depicting Japanese landscapes and flora and with a map of Japan. Popular cover designs included geishas, jin-rikshaws, pagodas and Mt Fuji. To add to the attractiveness, mother of pearl is inlaid against the black or red lacquer background. The covers are made of solid wood and held together with multi-coloured string tassels. The album block consists of thick card pages interleaved with translucent tissues.

Other designs that were targeted to different markets were albums with scenery and a map of Korea (with the 38th degree line between North and South Korea), Hawaii (with print of ALOHA HAWAII), GUAM and MALAYA.

The Malaya albums are painted with a variety of local predators such as tigers, leopards and eagles, set in the local vegetation and with a map of the Malay Peninsula. On the map, a series of Malayan town names including Singapore are listed. Colourful



Lacquer albums with different Malayan scenes



Anatomy of the Malaya lacquer album

flowers and leaves frame the outer borders of the front covers. Some mother of pearl inlay provides a reflective façade.

The folio album pictured with its cover raised (below left) has material made of wood, lacquer, metal, fabric, shell and paper. Its construction involves a combination of woodwork, metalwork, artwork, needlework and bookbinding, making it a unique, attractive and functional album.

In the 1960s, new materials and binding structures were incorporated in album design. Ring binders with local scenery and glittering linen covers were attractive and offered ease of use. A local supplier, Yat Seng & Co, supplied many such designs throughout Malaya and Singapore.

Another development was the 'magnetic' album. The album pages were pre-set with adhesive. It provided the convenience of quick and easy adhering of photos without paste or photo corners. However, from a conservation point of view, the adhesive lost its stickiness over time and turned yellow, staining the verso of the photo.

In the 1970s, plastic albums with standard-sized photo pockets were very popular and economical. They were easily available from local bookshops, photoshops and convenience stores.

Today, hard copy photographs and physical photo albums may be outdated items. With the advent of digital photography, digital cameras and hand phones can capture high resolution images and store unlimited quantities without any additional cost or storage space. However, this particular Malaya lacquer photo album is more than an object of the past. Other than the memories of the photographs it holds, the physical album is a piece of the history of a period as well as a work of art. It should be appreciated and kept as a display piece, to be remembered and admired by future generations.



Ring binders with local views and linen covers



Magnetic photo album, plastic covers and 'stained' adhesive pages



Plastic pocket album

¹ Toh, Jason. (2009). *Singapore through 19th Century Photography*. Editions Didier Miller, Singapore.

² Daguerreotype is a photograph made by an early method on a plate of chemically treated metal

³ The collodion process, mostly synonymous with the 'collodion wet plate process', requires the photographic material to be coated, sensitised, exposed and developed within the span of about fifteen minutes, necessitating a portable darkroom for use in the field

⁴ Albumen prints is a process using albumen from egg white to bind the photosensitive chemicals to the paper

⁵ Stereoview shows two nearly identical photographs or photomechanical prints, paired to produce the illusion of a single three-dimensional image, usually when viewed through a stereoscope

⁶ Cartes-de-visite are albumen prints of approximately 6 cm x 10cm in size pasted onto cardboard

⁷ Guarded Leaf Binding, commonly found in books such as photograph albums and scrapbooks. The guards compensate for the thickness of the materials to be affixed to the pages, and may be made from cloth, leather, paper, or combinations thereof.

⁸ Toh, 2009

Alex Teoh, a member of FOM, is a paper and book conservator of rare manuscripts, collectible prints, antique maps and antiquarian books. His focus is the local material culture of the written text in Southeast Asia, including local book bindings and daluang (bark paper) in Javanese and Malay manuscripts.

All photos by the author except for the photos of the two Japanese scene lacquer albums on page 18, which were downloaded from the internet

Historical Anecdotes of the Orang Laut of Negara Selat

By Ratika Shah Singh

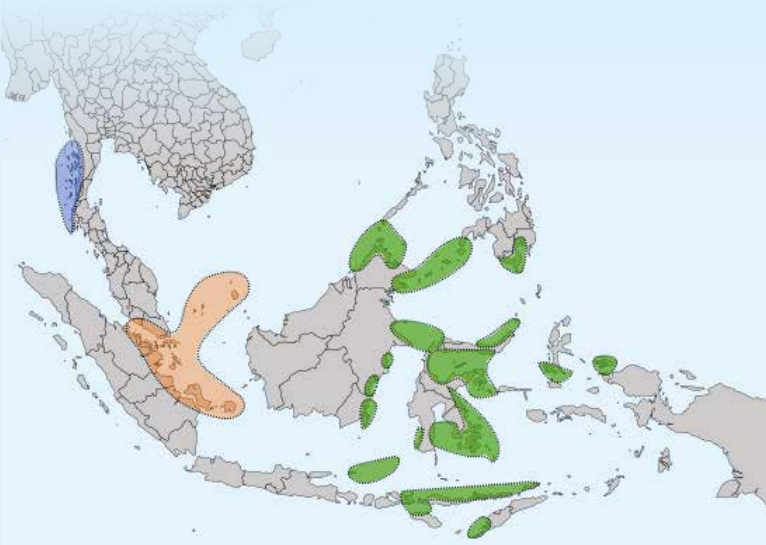


Fig 1. Orang Laut in the Negara Selat shown in orange. Image courtesy of Obsidian Soul, Wikimedia Commons



Fig 2. Painting of Orang Laut by Dr John Crawfurd, Singapore's second resident

For millennia, maritime Southeast Asia, also known as *Nusantara* (land between the seas) or the Malay Archipelago, has acted as a conduit between the two great civilisations of Asia, India and China, facilitating the exchange of goods, peoples and ideas, all the way to Arabia and Europe, along the ancient maritime trade routes of the Indian Ocean, borne on the monsoon trade winds. Sheltered from torrential monsoons all year round by mountain ranges on Peninsular Malaysia in the north and Sumatra in the south, *Selat Melaka* (Strait of Malacca) has been its nodal artery, contributing heavily to the riches and glory of the entrepôts established on either side. At its southern end the strait narrows down to a width of 65 kilometres and depth of 37 kilometres – a chokepoint. It is a swampy, rich marine ecosystem dotted with islands and islets fringed with sandbanks and coral reefs; beautiful and treacherous, land and water, water and land – boundaries are not very clear in the *Negara Selat* (Realm of the Straits). (Fig 1.) Here plants, animals, gods, goddesses, myths and legends are all amphibious – equally at home on land and in water, as are the indigenous inhabitants, the *Orang Laut* (Sea Peoples) or *Celates* (Straits People). (Fig 2.)

Who are the *Orang Laut* and what do we know of them? How do we know of them?

From Chinese records

A very early reference to them is found in the writings of the famous Chinese pilgrim-traveller Faxian who passed through the region on his way back from India to China in early fifth century. He described the seas around Singapore as being “infested with pirates, to meet whom is death”.

A more detailed account of the *Orang Laut* can be found in the *Dao yi zhu lue* (Description of the Barbarian of the Isles) published in 1349, written by Wang Dayuan, a trader from Nanchang (a centre for porcelain trade in China at the time). He made two voyages to Southeast Asia between 1330-1339, “attached to a boat”, possibly to sell his porcelain wares. He has described three place names in conjunction with Singapore – Temasek, Banzu and Longyamen. On this map (Fig 3.), which is from a later Chinese military annal, *Wubei Zhi*, you can see Longyamen, which corresponds to the present-day area between Labrador Park and Sentosa. According to Wang Dayuan, the *Orang Laut* lived here. He provides details about their life – social structure, attire, festivals, and most importantly, their activities as pirates. Two sets of inhabitants lived together and “The *xiangfu* (prime minister) instructs both men and women to live in harmony with the Chinese.”

The population’s “favourite pastime” was “pillage and plunder”, so Chinese ships passing through the strait were cautioned about pirates, who would come in 200-300



Fig 3. Mao Kun map from the Chinese military annals *Wubei Zhi*. Settlement of the Orang Laut, Longyamen is shown in the centre-right. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

perahus (boats), shoot poisoned darts from blow guns and slaughter all their victims. They followed the lunar calendar and the headman dressed in special headgear on the first day of the new month. Common attire was short cotton *bajus* (blouses) and black *sarongs* (skirts), and they tied their hair in a chignon.

From Malay records

The three doyens of Malay literature – *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals), *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (Story of Hang Tuah) and *Tuhfat-al-Nafis* (The Precious Gift) composed between the 17th and 19th centuries, illustrate the economic and political importance of the *Orang Laut* to the maritime Malay kingdoms – starting from the seventh century Srivijaya maritime empire. As patrollers, (note the difference in wording from “pirates” mentioned in earlier texts) they helped trading ships navigate the Straits of Malacca and led them safely to entrepôts. As boatmen, they ferried people and messages to the rulers of foreign lands. Additionally, they were holders of important posts such as *bendahara* (chief minister) and *laksmana* (naval chief); heroes such as Hang Tuah and Badang traced their ancestry to the *Orang Laut*. They engaged in important trades for the Malay kings, in the natural products of the coastal ecosystem – *sago* (palm starch), *agar-agar* (seaweed), mangrove wood, fish and coral. Furthermore, they were blacksmiths (which included making swords and spears), shipbuilders, water carriers, wet nurses and they raised hunting dogs.

The Malay works also remark on the social structure of the *Orang Laut* communities, which were divided into *suku* (divisions) with each one having its own *batin* (clan leader), appointed by the Malays to deal with them.

From Portuguese and Dutch records

The *Suma Orientalis* (An Account of the East, from the Red Sea to China) written by Portuguese diplomat and apothecary, Tome Pires between 1512 and 1515, corroborates the factual information of the *Sejarah Melayu* and throws light on some aspects that have been evaded in it. It goes into great detail about *The Legend of Parameswara*, his close association with the *Orang Laut*, familial connections and how they helped him to first overthrow the ruler of Singapura and later establish the Sultanate of Malacca. Pires introduced the word *Celates* to the Europeans, referring to the local inhabitants in and around Singapore (after *selat*, the Malay word for strait). According to him, “The Synggapura channel, it has a few *Celates* villages; it is nothing much.” The *Celates* had been involved in the collection and trade of sea products for centuries. They usually had a Malay or Chinese patron, who claimed exclusive rights to trade with them and was also their protector.

When Dutch Admiral and VOC fleet commander Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge landed with his ships in the western part of the Malay Peninsula at the end of April 1606, he made the following note in his diary (Fig 4.) “the *Tuhfat-al-Nafis* notes

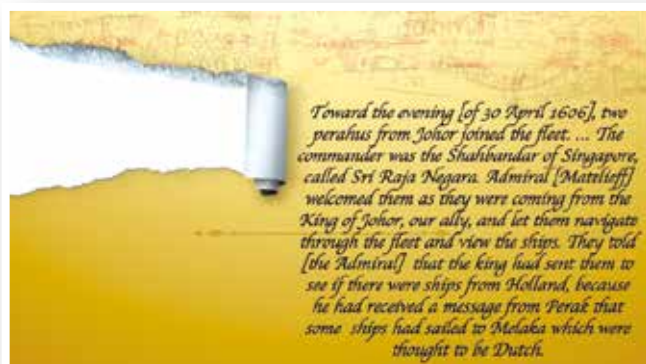


Fig 4. Diary entry of Admiral Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge on 30 April 1606

that the *Raja Negara* was also known as *Raja Negara Selat* (King of the Realm of the Straits) or *Ketua Orang Laut* (Leader of the Sea People). In essence, the *Shahbandar* (Harbour Master) of Singapore, was the leader of the *Orang Laut* and also the leader of the naval forces of the Malay kings till the 17th century.

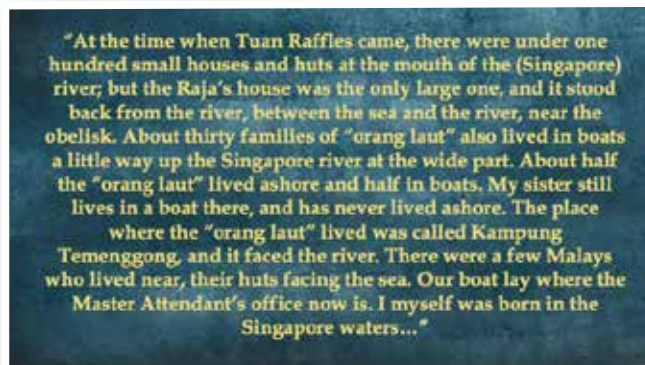


Fig 5. Account of *Orang Laut*, by Wa Hakim who witnessed the landing of Raffles in Singapore in 1819

From records at the time of Raffles' landing in Singapore

Wa Hakim, an *Orang Laut* between 75-80 years of age living in Kampung Telok Saga in Pulau Brani, gave an account of Raffles' landing in Singapore in 1819. (Fig 5.)

Malay writer Munshi Abdullah, who arrived in Singapore four months after Raffles, wrote in his *Hikayat Abdullah* (Story of Abdullah), of a settlement of four to five huts of the *Orang Laut*, who paid obeisance to a stone shaped like a garfish head beside the Singapore River. He described them as dirty, superstitious, little better than animals, and in the same breath expressed amazement at their diving skills, “they jump into the sea like a fish and disappear from sight for half an hour”.

Perhaps most telling is the comment made by Sultan Hussein Shah, the first Sultan of Johor and Singapore to Raffles, “Piracy is our birth right, and thus brings us no disgrace.”

Pirates, patrollers or protectors? Ship builders or wreckers? Foragers or raiders? Naturalists or nomads? What do you make of the *Orang Laut* of the *Negara Selat*?

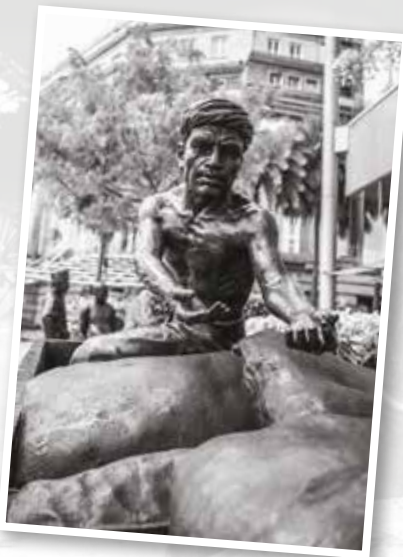
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Ratika Shah Singh is pursuing a Master's in Museum Studies and Curatorial Practices from NTU. She is a docent for the KGHT and previously guided at the National Museum, Indonesia.

Riverside Sculptures

By Angela Echanove



The Singapore River, from the Cavenagh Bridge to the Elgin Bridge, is an outdoor sculpture gallery. Botero, Moore, Dali are some of the famous artists who will amaze you. Among them, everyone's favourite is *The People of the River* statues, a formidable series of pieces by Singapore sculptor Chong Fah Cheong. They are a tribute to Singapore's past and to the great men and women who built this country. Made in bronze, they depict the different everyday scenes of the riverside: kids diving into the river, merchants, financiers, Chettiers and coolies. These characters seem to come alive, such is the realism of their faces, expressions and poses. Do not miss a wonderful stroll along the river, enjoy art and history in the heart of Singapore. It is free, always open, and for all ages.



Angela Echanove is a photographer from Spain, now based in Singapore. She specialises in portraits, architecture and travel photography. Her works can be seen at <http://www.angelaechanove.com>, www.angelaechanove.com and IG @angelaechanove



Fort Siloso: Exploring a New Guiding Opportunity

By Charlotte Dawson



Last year, FOM was approached to consider guiding at Fort Siloso on Sentosa Island. Garima Lalwani, Aditi Kaul and I met with the Sentosa Development Corporation representative responsible for this outreach, Mr Muhammad Saifullah Kamaludin, to see if this was something FOM members and docents might embrace. What a reconnaissance outing we shared that wet day in October last year!

Saifullah's passion was clear; this was a person who wanted our docents to help complete his vision for Fort Siloso. The tour he gave us of the site was filled with enthusiasm and knowledge; it was a wonderful example of how to guide it. And what a site! As the only complete coastal artillery fort in Singapore, it is a dream for both historians and docents. The three of us were impressed and the Fort Siloso History Trail was born.

As the Overall co-Heads of Training (OHOT), Aditi and I oversee all of the FOM docent training programmes. This also includes helping to establish new ones. One of our first thoughts was to look at how the newly established Kampong Gelam Heritage Trail ran their pilot programme and how they transitioned into a well-established docent training programme.

First lesson: we had to rely on already learned knowledge and skills (in research, guiding, and compiling tours) to lay the groundwork of the structure required to build the programme.

Second, we needed to determine which experienced FOM docent groups to send an invitation to, and from those responses, who our pilot programme co-heads could be. Given the dual aspects of Singapore history and the outdoor trail component of Fort Siloso, it was decided to open this opportunity up to the NMS, Gillman Barracks and URA Chinatown Heritage Trails docents. Nineteen keen docents responded to the call and of this group, two enthusiastically offered to help oversee the programme – Srivalli Sastry-Kuppa and Jayashree Srinath. We were quite lucky as two

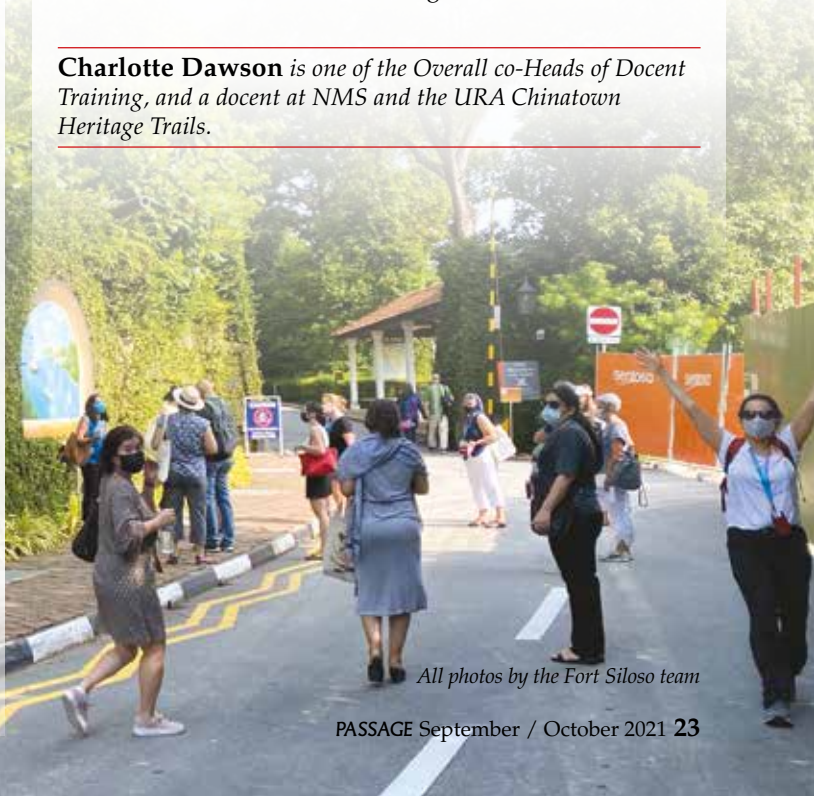
others offered their experience to discuss ideas and answer questions while the pilot programme was being developed – Carey Cookson and Simone Lee. What an amazing team we had to lead all our docents along this journey.

From that first recce trip in October 2020 to a group of eager docents and team leads ready for action, the Fort Siloso pilot programme began in April of 2021. Over the course of six weeks, team members gave detailed presentations on a variety of topics relevant to the fort. And it was completed with ease under the guardianship of our co-heads.

Unabashedly, I must say that this duo was inspiring. Srivalli and Jayashree went to Fort Siloso several times to survey the site, understand various guiding routes and themes, and create research topics for the team to curate presentations. They sought out additional lectures to enhance the research and presentation work. Adapting to our ever-changing circumstances, they were quick to pivot when in the middle of training, the Phase 2 Heightened Alert measures fell into place. They ensured that a virtual tour of Fort Siloso, given soapbox-style by the presenters, flowed as if we were all on site following a tour. In short, Jayashree and Srivalli took on a new project and executed it flawlessly.

And now, as OHOTs, Aditi and I are tasked with converting the pilot programme into a new docent training opportunity for all our FOM members. Located at the far western tip of Pulau Blakang Mati (the Island Behind Death, aka Sentosa), at Fort Siloso you will explore a military history stretching back to the Victorian era, debunk myths associated with World War II, check out some really cool canon-esque guns, and venture through Yip Yew Chong's *700 Years of Singapore History* mural series. Please watch the FOM website for details on when and how you may register for a tour of our new Fort Siloso History Trail once restrictions ease and allow us to begin.

Charlotte Dawson is one of the Overall co-Heads of Docent Training, and a docent at NMS and the URA Chinatown Heritage Trails.



All photos by the Fort Siloso team



A Magickal VAM Under the Dome

By Darlene Kasten



Sim Chong Teck receiving the Salome de Decker Award from FOM's president, Garima Lalwani



Carla Forbes-Kelly receiving the 15-year pin from Garima

If you were a *Muggle** who innocently strolled into the National Museum of Singapore between Monday and Wednesday, 12–14 April, you were probably asking yourself what had happened to this normally staid and respectable institution. Round any corner and you risked running into a coven of wigged-out witches, a gaggle of giggling fairies or some other manner of mythical or magical creature. Was it a midsummer night's dream? No, it was FOM's Volunteer Appreciation Morning (VAM) convened annually to celebrate the spirit of volunteerism within FOM. Traditionally a single morning, 2021's VAM morphed into a series of 'meets' – small, socially distanced gatherings spread across three days.

Inspired by contemporary fantasy literature such as *Harry Potter*, Christine Zeng, FOM Council Representative for Volunteer Appreciation & Membership aka Eugenia Ironwood, Professor of Spellcasting, encouraged everyone to get into the magickal spirit by dressing the part for their trip to *Major William Farquhar's Academy of Magick*. True to FOM form, members went all out, making it downright impossible for the judges to recognise just one team for their creativity. Best Dressed was awarded to the *Coven of Gardenia*, the *Spice Girls* were deemed Most Creative and The Blithesome Award was given to the *Farqu'in Fairies*. Who had the Most Magickal Name? That would be Cinnabar Carlarook, better known as Clara Chan.



Pia Rampal receiving the 15-year pin from Garima



Master grimoire makers



Professor of Super Familiarity, Durga



Professor of Super Familiarity, Simone Stormreaper, and Deputy Headmistress Charlotte Deathtrap



The Blithesome Award winners – Farqu'in Fairies

The itinerary was enchanting. Teams met Under the Dome, took a Magic Carpet ride, crossed the Bridge of Erratic Chandeliers, tiptoed past the Haunted Staircase and emerged to find the Spellbound Harbour to seek out their familiars. Get familiar with the Faculty of Super Familiarity, Head Professor Simone (Lee) Stormreaper and Professors Durga Arivan, HaeAn (Sung) Swan, Hilary (White) Monarch, Jo (Jyoti Ramesh) Draconius, Lara Collette and Mika Parekh. Lessons in the craft at Raffles Apothecary resulted in a spell-worthy, pressed orchid notebook or *grimoire* to take home. Ancient Magickal Texts Deputy Headmistress Charlotte (Dawson) Deathtrap and Head of Faculty Susan (Fong) Telltale oversaw the incantations by Master Grimoire Makers Aditi (Kaul) McQuill, Crafty (Kim Arnold) Pika, Jo (Wright) Witchie Witch, Laura (Socha) Fireflyshine, Magdalene Ho, Michelle (Foo) Hypnobelle, Priya Seshadri, Roopa Dewan,

Yasmin (Javeri Krishan) Jacque Kountess and Substitute Teacher Christine (Zeng) Zzzap.

This being a VAM, all-important service pins were distributed by FOM President and Academy Headmistress Garima Lalwani to dedicated volunteers marking milestone years. Congratulations to Pia Rampal and Carla Forbes-Kelly who were both awarded their 15-year pins. Long-term volunteers Sabine Silberstein and Janet Stride were recognised with certificates for an amazing 23 years of service each! The highlight of the proceedings is always the prestigious Salome de Decker award, established in 2005 to honour those who modestly and quietly contribute towards FOM causes, making a difference without seeking any acknowledgment or return. This year's award was presented to Mr Sim Chong Teck, long-term member of the FOM Hospitality / Welcoming Committee and overall FOM superfan. Polite and unassuming, you can usually find him going about his business and helping others out whenever he can. Congratulations Chong Teck!

As we all know, it takes more than fairy dust and potions to run an Academy of Magick. Special thanks go to Head Spellcaster Irina (Grishaeva) Thunderbolt and her crew of academicians, Professors Carey (Cookson) Cadabra, Jariyah Yusoff and Katherine Lim for their support. VAM 2021 was one for the books and afterwards, together we all, "walked back through the gateway to the Muggle world."

**Muggle - In J K Rowling's Harry Potter series, a Muggle is a person who lacks any sort of magical ability and was not born in a magical family. Muggles can also be described as people who do not have any magical blood inside them. Not a drop.*

Photographs by Gisella Harrold, Angela Echanove and Joyce Le Mesurier



Master grimoire maker, Professor Crafty Pika



Most Creative Class Award – The Spice Girls



Best Dressed Class Award – Coven of Gardenia

Explore Singapore!

Tell us about your favourite tour and win a free one!

Over the years Explore Singapore! has conducted more than 100 different tours. Some are staples, repeated annually for festivals, some give newcomers an initiation into Singapore life, yet others delve deeply, giving both new and long-time residents surprising insights into this little island. At times we were fortunate to offer one-off specials, difficult or impossible to repeat. Among our members we have a base of fans/followers who join almost every tour. We would like to hear from you. Tell us which your favourite tour is and why. Just write a few sentences and you will win a free tour of your choice! Email us at fomexploresingapore@gmail.com

Meanwhile, let the committee members tell you their favourite(s).

Miesi Wiegel (Joined 2011)

Thinking about the many ES! tours I have joined I find it difficult to decide which one I liked best.

But there is one tour which comes to my mind as very interesting and special. It was the Geylang Serai wet market tour, guided by Khir Johari. He made it very interesting and all of us participants were eagerly listening to Khir's explanations about the fruit, fish and of course of the many, many spices and other interesting items that are sold there and are used in Malay cooking. At many stalls Khir would tell us how to use and cook the different ingredients and foods we saw, so that in the end we were all asking for a cookbook from him. I believe he has finished compiling it and that it will be published soon.



Lorena Tan (Joined 2013)

When asked to pick my favourite ES! tours, the more recent ones come to mind. When all tours had to be suspended during this phase of heightened restrictions, even those that were in gestation and about to be delivered, there is a welcome feeling of nostalgia when I recall past tours. Here are my two picks.



The Balestier Heritage Trail

I really liked and remember this one well, partly because I know the effort that the guide (Lim Chey Cheng) put into it. For me, it was a study in the

discipline of identifying goals and achieving them: time management, which details should be included, what's interesting to say and for others to hear, etc. She had done it before and so for her it was familiar territory. But this time was different. The personal stories were welcome, connecting us to our guide and, through her, a neighbourhood that had seen better days.

A paean to trees – City Trees Walk

These days, no need to shout out for trees. Some years ago, a fellow ES! committee member, Heather Muirhead, and I joined a National Parks Walk of Trees in the Civic District. We repeated the walk for ES! and it touched something among other FOM members. When Heather left, another committee member, Kshama Joglekar, a tree enthusiast, pressed for a repeat and was set to work to guide it. She loved it and plans to frame the book voucher that was her reward.

'City' trees is a paradox – an antidote to the concrete jungle that threatens to engulf this city state. Trees are part of our living community; many outlive us. And they come in many types – from the ones in the car park near my block (no flowers, deciduous, nameless) to the majestic individuals in the National Institute of Education (NIE) campus.



Kshama Joglekar (Joined 2006 – 2008, then 2015)

The city trees tour was indeed my favourite. It brought home to me what vision, leadership and dedication can achieve. Hats off to Lee Kwan Yew and the National Parks Board.

Anne Gelardi (Joined 2013)

Love the images of Little India – washerwomen, men wearing *dhotis*, decorative flower garlands for special occasions, community friendships

Vivien Choo (Joined 2013)

It was really hard to choose, but I narrowed it down to these two:



Explore Singapore!

Craft shops in an industrial park

One Chinese custom is ensuring that a loved one is well provided for when he/she departs this world. I have been struck by the colourful mansions visible in funeral processions, but during a visit to the little craft shop where such structures are constructed, I was fascinated to find out what else the deceased is provided with on his/her final journey. These items can include iPads and smart phones. The visit was especially interesting because this shop is in an area I had never visited – an industrial park full of other small craft places. Another interesting shop here was one making joss sticks and cinnamon wood figurines from cinnamon bark.



The soy sauce brewery

An ingredient found in almost all Chinese dishes is soy sauce of one type or another. I had assumed that the bottles of soy sauce found on supermarket shelves are all speedily mass-produced in factories full of modern

equipment. However, at the brewery we visited, soy sauce is made using traditional methods and the beans are fermented for many months in large vats in the open. The last part of the visit was sitting down to taste the different types of sauces and to learn how to pair them with different foods.



Elsa Gianno (Joined 2019)

While scrolling through my ES! events history, I soon realised that I would have difficulty in choosing my favourite tour...Club Street and Clans, Geylang, Chinese Opera, Haw Par Villa, NeWater, Freemasons, Clifford Pier and Fullerton, the Japanese Cemetery, but also Bishan and Bukit Brown, temples such as the Sri Senpaga, Lim See Tai Chong Soo Kiu Leong, City Trees and Nature Walks. Impossible to highlight only one! So I can only wish for new tours to participate in and especially look forward to the Labrador Park and the Singapore River ones!

These programmes are planned for September/October. However, owing to the uncertainty of COVID-19 restrictions, dates have not been fixed. Confirmed dates will be announced on the FOM website, the monthly FOM activities newsletter (What's Trending) and the weekly newsletter

Nature and Nostalgia in Labrador Park – Crossroads of Maritime, Migration and Manufacture

Fee: \$30

Labrador Park is an interesting nexus of significant activities and events in Singapore's pre-modern and modern history. For over a century it was protected by a sophisticated series of defence fortifications. Today this is the last nature reserve on Singapore's southern shoreline. Join us on a walk through this area filled with nature and nostalgia.



The Shuang Lin Monastery: History and Religion

Fee: \$35

The Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery (Lotus Hill Twin Grove Monastery) in Toa Payoh, is Singapore's oldest Buddhist monument, built in 1898 on land donated by a wealthy Chinese migrant and support from communities in Singapore, Malaya and Indonesia. They helped by sourcing for the best craftsmen from their various regions of origin. As a result, the monastery has a mix of architectural styles. During the tour, our historian guide will trace its history and tell us about its use during the Sino-Japanese War. He will also talk about the monastery's architecture and Buddhism in general.



A tour of Bukit Brown Cemetery

Fee: \$40

Spend a morning in a unique way, join us for a walk in Bukit Brown Cemetery. This was the first municipal Chinese cemetery in colonial Singapore and was once the largest outside China, with nearly 100,000 graves. Our guide will share the fascinating stories and history behind the various graves. Learn about the graves' different styles, *feng shui* elements and other features. Admire the art, sculptures and beautiful tiles that adorn them.



Painted Prayers of India: The Art of the Kolam

Fee: \$35

Through the ages, Indian women have drawn *kolams* (geometric designs) at their doorsteps or in their courtyards as a welcome sign, using rice powder mixed with water. This South Indian artform is a religious ritual, a social activity, and an ephemeral channel for a commoner's artistic expression, not meant to be permanent. It must be constantly regenerated (a *kolam* usually lasts just one day). Join Explore Singapore! to learn more about them.



Singapore's Culture and Heritage

By Darlene Kasten

FOM members and friends got a double dose of Singapore history with our FOM Singapore Heritage Tile Tidy when we acted as urban archaeologists searching for more of Singapore's ceramic tile legacy found decorating the tombs of Chinese and Peranakan families in Singapore's oldest municipal Chinese cemetery, Bukit Brown.

A true community caring for culture, 40 FOM members were able to participate safely on 8 May by separating into two sessions each, with three socially distanced groups guided by experienced Tile Tidy leaders. Thank you to Bukit Brown historian Claire Leow, Bukit Brown descendant Cathie Chua, Clare Teo, cemetery caretaker Ah Beng Soh, Bukit Brown Brownies Peter Pak and Raymond Goh, and working remotely from Australia, Singapore Heritage Tile Project Director, Jennifer Lim.

The Singapore Heritage Project was started by Australian artist Jennifer Lim, a Bukit Brown descendant herself, who began researching her own family tree after moving to Singapore in 2012, leading to her discovery of decorative tiles linked to her ancestors. She is in the final phase of publishing a comprehensive book on the project's most notable ceramic artefacts. For more information on the project as well as Jennifer's book, visit <https://jenniferlimart.com/singaporeheritagetiles>.

Check out our activity page on the FOM website and our public Facebook group for updates and information on upcoming FOM Members Care activities.



Japanese Docents

It is fascinating to know how foreigners perceive one's home country. Especially when it comes to travel ideas, it opens up a new horizon filled with different perspectives. During the winter every year, I take my Singaporean friends to Japan to explore its beauty. I'm often surprised and even perplexed when I bring my friends along because they enjoy things that I'd assumed were uninteresting and ordinary. For example, my Singaporean friends asked me to take a photo of them in front of a traditional Japanese house. However, when I went there, I realised that it was a public bathroom. This illustrated that Japan is filled with unique features that don't exist anywhere else. Similarly, I remember one of my friends saying he was interested in walking along the Nakasendō, a famous old highway from the Edo-period connecting Kyoto and Edo (today's Tokyo). The experience of walking along the old roads of Nakasendō with a sense of history and nature, discovering the scenery Hiroshige saw and becoming a part of the landscape of *ukiyo-e* is totally different from a typical travel idea I might have imagined. The traditional atmosphere of a *shukuba-machi* (post town) along the Nakasendō was one of the settings that Sanosuke (from a



famous anime called *Rurouni Kenshin*) walked along to train. Don't you think this is a great idea for your next journey? We cannot wait for you to be safely able to travel to Japan again.

Yuka Mashita, Japanese Docent

Textile Enthusiasts Group

The Textile Enthusiasts Group (TEG) is starting its new season in September, and we invite you to be a part of our warm and welcoming community. TEG was formed to support and foster interest in Asian textiles, with events for members held monthly from September to May. We invite specialist speakers and practitioners, pay visits to textile-related locations, and offer hands-on experiences and demonstrations in weaving or natural dyes. You don't need to be an expert to enjoy TEG activities: as the name suggests, we are enthusiasts. Register via the TEG page on the FOM website.

Programme: Modern Women of The Republic: Fashion and Change in China and Singapore

A virtual tour of SYSNMH's special exhibition (via Zoom)

Date: Friday 10 September

Time: 10:00 am

From the early 20th century, Chinese women began enjoying many new opportunities. The changes were reflected in the 'liberalisation' of fashion; bulky and shapeless garments were discarded in favour of form-fitting ones. Singapore's position as a port city provided exposure to multi-national cultural dynamics.

While Chinese women followed dress trends in China, they also drew inspiration from the West. Shirley Kan and Tina Sim will take us through this exhibition, which showcases over 90 artefacts and archival photographs from China and Singapore from the late 1800s to the 1970s.



Programme: Heritage Handlooms of Telangana (via Zoom)

Date: Friday 29 October

Time: 10:00 am

Hand-woven textiles from Telangana in South India enjoy a unique place in India's textile history. The region's ikats and *gadwals* are distinctive weaves with heirloom value, redefining elegance.

Samsthanams (princely states) such as Gadwal, encouraged weavers and their livelihoods flourished.



About the speaker

Sudha Rani Mullanpudi founded Abhihaara Social Enterprise in 2015 and has over 20 years' experience in rural development and sustainability projects in the region. She aims to revive the handloom weaving ecosystem in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh through skill building, restoration, design development, promotion of women's entrepreneurship and market access.

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Monday Morning Lectures

Currently all MML lectures are held online. Lectures are open to FOM members only. To attend, please download the Zoom App. Visit the Community Events page on the FOM website to sign up; registration opens one week before the event. The lectures will begin promptly at 11:00 am.



6 September • Ante-Covid: Borders, Migration and the Fear/Control of Movement in 19th Century Colonial Southeast Asia

Speaker: Farish A Noor

During the Covid-19 pandemic, states world-wide are attempting to stop the virus's spread, with the border being the primary tool for safeguarding their societies' health and security. In Southeast Asia the border/frontier has always been the interface between the Self and the Other. Border control was considered crucial to the survival of former colonies as the colonial powers attempted to control not only the spread of diseases but also communities, ideas and ideologies.



13 September • Myanmar and Museum Collections: Creating a National Heritage

Speaker: Charlotte Galloway

Myanmar's rich material cultural heritage spans over 2,000 years.

While museums have long been part of regional history, Myanmar's first state-sponsored museum only opened in the early 1950s. Since then, museum development has been strongly impacted by Myanmar's internal events. This presentation considers the museum's history, its displays, and how they have presented history to both Myanmar nationals and foreign visitors.



20 September • The Story of the Stones: Chinese Epigraphy in Singapore

Speaker: Kenneth Dean

Several thousand Chinese inscriptions are displayed in hundreds of temples and

associations across Singapore. This talk will highlight some of them in order to bring out themes such as Confucian values, Daoist ritual powers, Buddhist compassion and links to ancestral communities. These inscribed stones tell a different set of stories about Singapore's Chinese communities, their history and heritage.



27 September • Secrets, Drama, Intrigue – Dr Sun Yat Sen's Forgotten Friends in Ipoh

Speaker: Chan Sue Meng

Dr Sun, the 'Father of Modern China', travelled the world to raise support for his dream of a new China. His supporters in Malaya and Singapore contributed significant resources towards his revolutionary efforts, which led to the

Qing Dynasty's fall in 1911. There are books about supporters from Penang and Singapore, but the book about the Ipoh link was published only in 2013. The book's author will share her research and offer a glimpse into the corresponding marker trail created in 2019.



4 October • Travelling with the 'Real' Ang Mo

Speaker: Michel van Roozendaal

Who were the original *ang mo*? "Red-haired barbarians" is one,

not very complimentary, translation from Hokkien. It did not refer to the British, but to people from the Netherlands, a country barely above sea level. Join Michel for a light-hearted tour following objects, prints and maps in Singapore museums, traces of the 'real' *ang mo* remaining in Asia.



11 October • The Tartan Tenko

Speaker: Jon Cooper

This talk explores a Scottish soldier's experiences during

a unique event in British military history. Never had so many British soldiers capitulated at one time, never had they surrendered in such large numbers, and never had they ended up being housed on the battlefield, among people they had been sent to protect. This talk will explore how this set of circumstances shaped the 'Jocks' experiences and determined their chances of surviving.



18 October • A Personal Journey with Sanxingdui

Speaker: Tan Kee Wee

In March 2021, China announced the discovery of six more pits full of artefacts from the famous Sanxingdui (Three Star Mound) site in Sichuan province. The first were discovered in 1986. The Sanxingdui culture is at least 3,000 years old. A few similar-looking Sanxingdui bronze heads have been in Singapore since the 1970s. In this lecture you will learn how these similar-looking heads reached Singapore.



25 October • Ramayana – A Tale of Endurance and Influence

Speaker: Siva Kumar

The *Ramayana* is one of two great epics from ancient India. A monumental work of devotion, it contains deep realisations about human existence and how to navigate the challenges of life based on spiritual values. It is a timeless tale that continues to move millions who practise its precepts.

Island Notes

The Lighthouse at Fort Canning

By Darly Furlong



Have you ever walked past the lighthouse atop Fort Canning and wondered about its significance? It is almost as old as Raffles' Singapore; the lantern went up on the then-existing flagstaff in 1855. The flagstaff was demolished and replaced with the lighthouse in 1902. It stood 24.3 metres tall and generated 20,000 candelas of light through a vaporised kerosene burner. The lighthouse guided ships safely into Singapore's harbour for 55 years and was decommissioned in 1958. A fully functioning one still sits perched on Fort Canning, spreading its light and surveying the city spread beneath its feet.



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

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Museum Information and Exhibitions

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

Asian Civilisations Museum

1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555

Tel: 6332 7798

www.acm.org.sg

Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am - 7:00 pm

Fri 10:00 am - 9:00 pm



FOM guided tours:

Please consult the museum's website at www.nhb.gov.sg/acm/whats-on/tours/daily-guided-tours

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.

Life in Edo | Russel Wong in Kyoto (Through 17 Oct)

The exhibition spotlights the lifestyles and trends of Edo-period Japan through over 150 *ukiyo-e* prints and paintings, while scenes of present-day Kyoto – including a peek into the lives of the geiko community – are presented through black-and-white photographs captured by acclaimed Singaporean photographer Russel Wong, in their first-ever display.

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:

For the tour schedule and to register, please consult the Gillman Barracks' website at www.fom-gillman-barracks.eventbrite.com

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

Please consult the centre's website at <https://www.indianheritage.gov.sg/en/visit/guided-tours>

The Indian Heritage Centre (IHC) celebrates the history and heritage of the Indian diaspora in Singapore and the Southeast Asian region. From early contacts between the Indian subcontinent and this region, the culture and social history of the community after the arrival of the British, through to

the early stirrings of nationalism and political identity, and the contributions of Singapore's Indian community – the five galleries take visitors on a fascinating journey through the Indian diaspora. Located in Singapore's colourful and vibrant Little India precinct, the centre opened in May 2015 and is our only purpose-built museum.

Sikhs in Singapore – A Story Untold (Through 30 Sept)

Co-created by members of Singapore's Sikh community and the Indian Heritage Centre, *Sikhs in Singapore – A Story Untold* is presented in 3 parts – *Roots*, which tells the story of the origins of Singapore's Sikh community; *Settlement*, which brings together some exemplary narratives of Sikh migrants to Singapore; and *Contemporary Perspectives* which offers glimpses into the experiences of some contemporary Sikhs.

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:

Please consult the centre's website at www.malayheritage.gov.sg/en/visit#Free-Guided-Tours

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

National Museum of Singapore

93 Stamford Road, Singapore

178897

Tel: 6332 3659

www.nationalmuseum.sg

Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am – 7:00 pm



FOM guided tours:

Please consult the Museum's website at www.nhb.gov.sg/nationalmuseum/visitor-information/nmsquicklinkretailvenuerental/guided-tour

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

NUS Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts

University Cultural Centre

50 Kent Ridge Crescent, Singapore

119279

Tel: 6516 8817

www.museum.nus.edu.sg

Free admission



Museum Information and Exhibitions

Opening hours:

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

Monday: Visits by appointment for schools/faculties only.

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

Five artists – Lucy Davis, Kao Chung-Li, Kuniyoshi Kazuo, Nguyễn Trinh Thi, and Aya Rodriguez-Izumi — whose artistic practices question the governmentality between the lived and the non-living explore the impact of contemporary geopolitical realities recapitulated under the Asian Cold War through a re-historicisation of the past into the present.

Wishful Images resembles a collective attempt to relate lesser-known historical events through the persistent efforts of artists, recounted and re-articulated in various forms and mediums. Taking its cue from Ernst Bloch's concept of wishful images, the exhibition examines a constellation of unrealised possibilities, in which history, images, and politics triangulate.

NUS Baba House

157 Neil Road, Singapore 088883

Tel: 6227 5731

www.babahouse.nus.edu.sg

For opening hours and guided tour information, please consult the Baba House website at babahouse.nus.edu.sg/plan-your-visit. For enquiries, please email babahouse@nus.edu.sg

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

The Peranakan Museum

39 Armenian Street, Singapore 179941

Tel: 6332 7591

www.peranakanmuseum.sg

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



Singapore Art Museum

71 Bras Basah Road, Singapore 189555

Tel: 6332 3222

www.singaporeartmuseum.sg

The Singapore Art Museum focuses on international contemporary art practices, specialising in Singapore and Southeast Asia. The main building of the Singapore Art Museum



(located along 71 Bras Basah Road) is currently closed to prepare it for its next phase of development.

Wikicliki: Collecting Habits on an Earth Filled with Smartphones (Through 11 Jul)

Located at City Hall Wing, Level B1, The Ngee Ann Kongsi Concourse Gallery, National Gallery Singapore

The exhibition is titled after the constantly evolving work, <http://dbbd.sg/wiki>, by artist Debbie Ding. Maintained since 2008, Ding's work traces emerging issues around society's use of the internet, technology, design, architecture, linguistics and varied cultural topics. Could the museum endeavour to collect such an artwork that expands and grows with time? Wikicliki explores this question through a survey of six artists whose modes of working provide unique but interrelated entry points into a range of issues confronting contemporary practitioners in Singapore today.

STPI Creative Workshop and Gallery

41 Robertson Quay, Singapore 238236

Tel: 6336 3663

www.stpi.com.sg

Opening hours:

Mon to Fri: 10:00 am – 7:00 pm, Sat: 9:00 am –

6:00 pm, Sun: 10:00 am – 5:00 pm

Closed Public Holidays

FOM guided tours:

For the FOM guided tour schedule, to learn more about STPI's public programmes, special evening tours, and programmes in Japanese, Korean, Mandarin and French, please visit stpi.com.sg

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



Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall

12 Tai Gin Road, Singapore 327874

Tel: 6256 7377

www.wanqingyuan.org.sg

Opening hours:

Tues to Sun 10:00 am - 5:00 pm,

Closed on Mondays

FOM guided tours:

Please consult the Memorial Hall's website at <https://www.sysnmh.org.sg/en/visit/free-guided-tours>

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



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



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MONDAY 6 SEPTEMBER 2021

10 AM - Open Morning

11 AM - Monday Morning Lecture

Our Open Morning and Monday Morning Lecture will be conducted on the Zoom platform and open to both FOM members and the public



**Open
Morning**

Registration is mandatory
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