

be MUSEE

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JULY - SEPTEMBER 2010

EXPLORE. DREAM. DISCOVER



**HERITAGE IN
OUR BACKYARD:**
*Rediscovering Our Community
and Natural Heritage*



musings

In Memory of Dr Goh Keng Swee:

Architect of Singapore's Economic, Defence and Education Policies

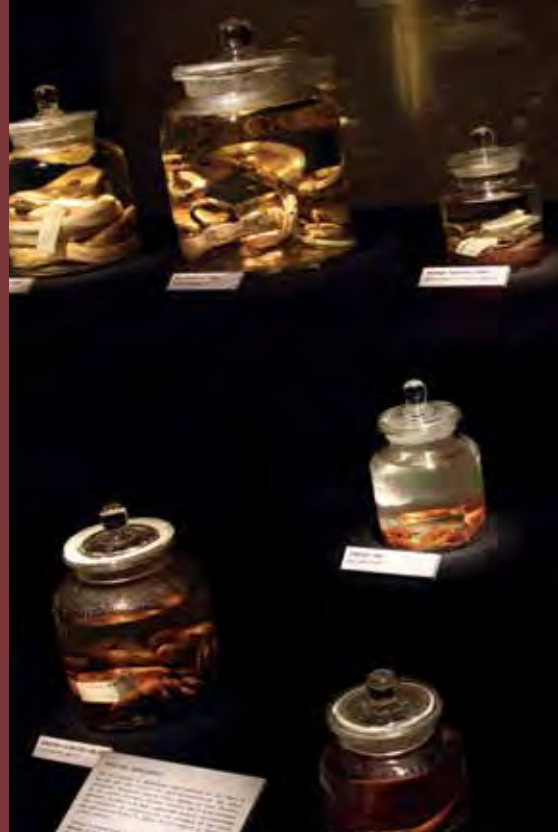
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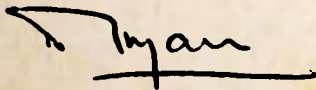
A visiting heritage consultant from Australia recently told me that he loved coming to Singapore as there were so many interesting heritage places to visit and world-class museums to enjoy. He was not far from the truth.

We have so much to be proud of and enjoy in Singapore where heritage is concerned, be it our architectural heritage, natural heritage or community heritage. Just like our society, our heritage is also multi-cultural and diverse, but in that diversity, there is also a bridge that connects us all and that is our shared memories, experiences and aspirations for ourselves, our families and our society.

And this issue of *BeMuse* celebrates this diverse heritage of ours and highlights the many hidden treasures lying in our backyard waiting to be discovered. You will soon realise that the tree biodiversity found in Bukit Timah Nature Reserve is comparable with that of the entire North American continent! And did you know that Balestier has some hidden treasures that you can discover? No, not food outlets and coffee shops, but real treasures of vanishing trades still in business, a monument that tells the story of love, patriotism and valour and an old film studio which used to produce P Ramlee movies, right here in Singapore – and yes, it is still standing.

I hope that this bumper issue – yes, there are 124 pages all in all, will add to your reading pleasure and will rekindle your curiosity to become a domestic tourist. Grab your camera and sunglasses, slap on your sunscreen, bring along your water bottle and wear comfortable clothing and shoes and yes, bring along a notebook and you are set to discover Singapore as you have never done before. And, if you survive the great Singapore outdoors with our high humidity levels and temperatures, then why not blog about your experience at www.mystory.sg. You can even share with us your heritage trails that you may have created along the way.

Till October, here's wishing our readers plenty of excitement with the exciting 45th National Day celebrations, the Singapore HeritageFest and the inaugural Youth Olympics Games.



Ms Thangamma Karthigesu

be MUSE

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COVER

Detail from traditional shophouse at Balestier Road.
Copyright: National Heritage Board

BACK COVER

Picture postcard of Sri Mariamman Temple by G.R.
Lambert. Courtesy of the Singapore Philatelic Museum.

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Manx
Manxus vulpecula
 One of the smallest of the cats, and one of the most common in a region of the British Isles. The manx was once common in the British Isles.

Did you know?

Some are thought to be wild and others domesticated. The word 'manx' is thought to be derived from the word 'manx'.

Protonia Monkey
Protonia

The fossil remains of *Protonia* is a small, shrew-like primate. It was first described by the British naturalist, Thomas Huxley, in 1858.

Did you know?

Protonia monkeys are thought to be the earliest primates to have lived on the island.

Leopard
Panthera pardus

Leopards are one of the most common of the big cats. They are found in a wide range of habitats, from the mountains to the plains.

Did you know?

Leopards are thought to be the most common of the big cats in the British Isles.

Macaca

The common name 'macaca' is derived from the word 'macaca', which is the name of the genus of the macaca monkeys.

Did you know?

Macaca monkeys are thought to be the most common of the big cats in the British Isles.

A view of the Hunters & Collectors exhibition displaying the natural history collection, 2009.



Funky Forest by Theodore Watson and Emily Gobeille is an immersive interactive ecosystem where children can manage the resources to influence the environment around them.

KINDERGARDEN: *Art for the Young at SAM*

Art Garden: Children's Season at the Singapore Art Museum opened with a bang on 14 May, allowing young visitors explore and appreciate the world in new and different ways through contemporary art. SAM at 8Q has been transformed into a magical 'art garden' filled with artworks inspired by nature, encouraging children to learn about art-making through play. To date, over 17,000 children, students and young-at-heart adults have hopped into this fun and interactive exhibition. The response from the public has been positive with many blogging on how much fun they had at the exhibition. If you haven't visited the Art Garden yet, here are five fun things you can do when you visit.

An Enchanted Tale – Step into *The Enchanted Forest* where sheep fly and animals roam freely, and be inspired to write your own creative story.

Blooming Flowers – Watch *Floribots*, an award-winning work featuring over 100 flowers, bloom before your very eyes. Learn to fold origami flowers and plant them on SAM's wall garden.

Cultivate a Funky Forest – Venture into the *Funky Forest* and discover how your movements can make streams 'flow' and trees 'grow'.

Books and Films – Catch a short film at our Moving Image Gallery or learn more about art through books at our Programme Space.

I like the Art Garden! – Post photos with captions of yourself at the *Art Garden* on the Singapore Art Museum's Facebook page and win one-of-a kind Art Garden merchandise!

Art Garden runs through 18 July 2010 at 8 Queen Street. Admission is for children aged 6 and below. Each child must be accompanied by an adult holding a valid exhibition admission ticket. For more information, please visit www.singaporeartmuseum.sg.

PRESERVATION OF MONUMENTS BOARD LAUNCHES TRAVELLING EXHIBITION

What if you could view the all too familiar Singapore landscape in a different light? Or hear the candid stories behind our National Monuments that few know about? You can do all this at the Preservation of Monuments Board's travelling exhibition, *Of Monuments and Memories*, which was launched on 26 May by Dr Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Education and Second Minister for Defence. Featuring 27 National Monuments spectacularly portrayed through the camera lens, *Of Monuments and Memories* highlights iconic buildings that have stood the test of time and continue to be symbols of Singapore's pioneers. The exhibition will be showing at City Square from 3-15 August and at VivoCity from 17-22 August. Please visit www.pmb.sg for information.

ASIAN CONNECTIONS AT THE SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

The Singapore Art Museum (SAM) welcomed a delegation led by Mr Chai Nakhonchai, Deputy Director-General of the Thai Office of Contemporary Art and Culture on 22 April. On 17 May guests from the People's Republic of China visited SAM, including Mr Jin Jianhong, Vice Minister, Propaganda Department of the Kunshan Municipal Party Committee and Chairman of the Provincial Civilization Office. Delegates from Taiwan visited SAM's galleries on 27 May, led by Minister Emile Sheng Chih-jen of the Taiwanese Council of Cultural Affairs, and on 9 June, led by Mr Chiang Chung-hung, Executive Director of the National Culture and Arts Foundation.

SAM SIGNS MOU WITH CENTRE POMPIDOU

On 20 May, Singapore Art Museum (SAM) Director Tan Boon Hui and Centre Pompidou President Alain Seban signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to strengthen cultural alliances in contemporary art between Singapore and France.

An immediate project arising from the MOU is the joint organisation and curation of *Video. An Art, a History 1965-2010. A Selection from the Centre Pompidou and Singapore Art Museum Collections*. The exhibition will be held from 27 May to 18 September 2011 at SAM and presents the Centre Pompidou's new media travelling exhibition in an expanded format that includes a Southeast Asian touch through SAM's collection of video works and installations by Southeast Asian artists. The SAM collection forms "an integral part of the history of video art" said Mr Tan. According to Mr Seban, a remarkable aspect of this joint collaboration is that not only "the museums work together but artists also come together...[and] lead to more dialogue between the cultures and promote future contemporary projects".

VIP VISITORS AT THE MALAY HERITAGE CENTRE

On 5 May, the Malay Heritage Centre (MHC) had the pleasure of hosting the Chairman of the Saudi Commission of Tourism and Antiquities, Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud. Hosted by Mr Zainul Abidin Rasheed, Singapore's Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, the Prince was given a private tour of the Museum for a deeper perspective on the Malay heritage and its

development from past to present. The MHC was also pleased to welcome the Oba (Sovereign) of Lagos, Oba Rilwan Akiolu on 19 May. Mr Zainul Abidin accompanied the Oba and his wives around the Museum to learn more about the vitality and richness of the Malay culture and heritage.

INTO THE PLAYLAND OF MUSEUMS

This year, *International Museum Day (IMD)* continues to grow in the hearts and minds of visitors with its *I Love Museums – Kids' Edition* programmes created for the child in us! With over 40 activities ranging from carnivals, performances, interactive corners and workshops at more than 20 museums, participants spoil themselves and their young ones over the 10-day festival from 14 to 23 May 2010.

Surprises and adventures abound: Kids and adults alike followed the trail of the towering rabbit Walter into the fantastical realm of *Art Garden* at SAM at 8Q, while others at the Marina Barrage flew kites of their own designs. The uninitiated widened their perspectives through a panoramic cartoon mural on Singapore's culture at the National Museum of Singapore, as well as at the Singapore Coins and Notes Museum where they tried their hands at creating a currency note complete with their self-portraits. The young-at-heart indulged in an afternoon of storytelling amidst their childhood playthings at the Mint Museum of Toys, while young visitors to the Singapore Philatelic Museum met adorable puppets who had them in stitches.

True-blue adventurers explored Peranakan enclaves and heritage, or embraced their dark side with a late night nature and history hunt on the *MIA Night Trail* stretching from the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research to Reflections at Bukit Chandu. Others spent an evening under the stars with the epic *Ramayana* presented by the Peranakan Museum, or experienced a day in the life of a soldier at the Army Museum. For the first time, a mini children's Play Museum with over 10 interactive installations was also created on the lawns of Memories at Old Ford Factory and Reflections at Bukit Chandu.

IMD topped off with a final bonanza, as visitors went on a whirlwind tour of museums island-wide for free all within a day during the *IMD 2010 Open House Day*. And here's a little secret: From 1 June 2010, all Singaporean and Permanent Resident students and teachers can gain free admission into the permanent galleries of NHB museums! Take a breather from your books and hit the museums today!



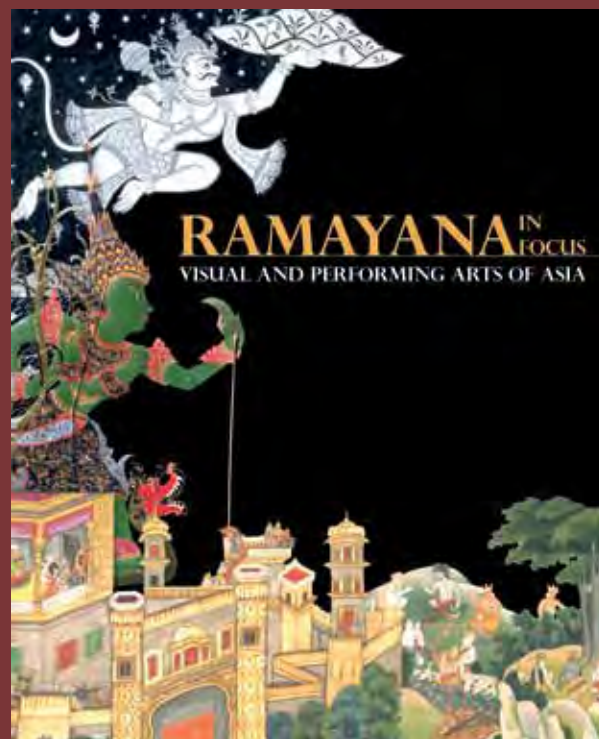
Artist Dawn Ng with children from Little Skool House International Pte Ltd, and rabbit *Walter*. A guerrilla style pop-up installation, *Walter* is a curious colossal bunny who pops up in common spaces across Singapore.

RAMAYANA IN FOCUS: *Visual and Performing Arts of Asia*

A Publication by the Research and Publication Unit of ACM

museviews

This richly illustrated volume captures the timeless epic *Ramayana* in literary, visual, performing and contemporary arts in different Asian cultures. The twenty-one essays from international scholars—including John and Mary Brockington, Mandakranta Bose, Paula Richman, Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof and Gauri Parimoo Krishnan (editor)—cover a wide range of topics: *Ramayana* in Sanskrit Hindu culture; Chinese and Japanese literature and arts; the royal murals of Phnom Penh and Bangkok; the delicate carvings on Javanese and Khmer temples; embroidered shawls from Bengal; traditional Indian paintings from Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh; the performing traditions of Wayang Kulit Siam in Malaysia, Sundanese Wayang Golek and Balinese Wayang Wong and Cak dance. There is even *Ramayana* in contemporary Indian advertisements, films and television serials and contemporary Indonesian films and politics. Readers will appreciate the beautiful art and vibrant history of the ancient epic. This book will appeal to the general reader and specialists interested in *Ramayana* studies, Asian literature, art and cultural history and contemporary culture in Asia.





ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

Leti ancestor image in squatting man pose

Wood, mother-of-pearl

Early 20th century

Leti, Southwest Maluku Islands

The squatting man is one of the predominant poses in Austronesian ancestral woodcarvings and can be found throughout the Austronesian migration zone, particularly in the Philippine and in the eastern half of the Indonesian Archipelagoes. Given its widespread use, the squatting man pose almost certainly dates back to the origins of the migration which spread Austronesian influence across much of Island Southeast Asia and the Pacific islands beginning roughly five to seven thousand years ago.

This particular image would originally have been mounted as the focal point of an elaborate “altar” where it was the subject of ancestor veneration ceremonies.

Leti is a small and extremely remote island in the Moluccas, formerly important as a source for nutmeg and mace during the heyday of the famous spice trade.



MALAY HERITAGE CENTRE

Malay Regiment Rifles

Nekara drum



The Malay Heritage Museum showcases the history of Malays in the region, Singapore’s own Malay heritage, the community’s social and economic development as well as their contribution and aspiration towards nation-building. The intricate artefacts, dioramas, murals and multimedia in all the 8 galleries promise an insightful experience into the stories of Singapore Malays from the past into the post-independence era.

the invading Japanese on Kent Ridge (Opium Hill) at Pasir Panjang to see their loved ones who were taking refuge at the Istana Kampong Glam. There were not allowed to enter the Istana by the residents until they had changed their uniforms into civilian clothes and buried their uniforms and rifles.

One of the main highlights of the museum is a set of *Mark III Rifles* which were uncovered at the rear entrance of Istana Kampong Glam on 2 August 2003. The rifles were thought to have belonged to soldiers of the Malay Regiment. It is said that members of the regiment had withdrawn to the Istana after their final battle against

Another interesting acquisition is the drum *Nekara*, which is part of a set of regalia that was central to the power of the Sultan of Lingga, Riau Island. Originating from the Royal Courts of Lingga, this drum is part of the ensemble that will be played during royal and religious ceremonies. The *Nekara* controls the tempo of the music and signals changes in its melody.





NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE
Hindi film poster of *Aurat* (Woman)

1953
 2009-02913

The Hindi film *Aurat*, which fetched its Singapore distributor two and a half million dollars in 1953 (Source: Chia Soon Ann, No: 000465 National Archives of Singapore), became the centre of a dispute between the distributor and the producer. Chia Soon Ann worked for his brother in law, Lim Chong Pang, who owned The South East Asia Film Company. Mr Chia was not only running the film theatres, Garrick and Sultan, but was also involved in sourcing for Hindi films.

The Company bought the film *Aurat* from Gian Singh and paid about ten thousand dollars for the rights to screen. They showed the film in Singapore and Malaysia and had about eight to ten copies running simultaneously. According to Mr Chia, everywhere *Aurat* was screened, it “knocked even the Shaw brothers, Malay Pictures Productions down to shame.” Following its commercial success, Gian Singh managed to get all the dubbing

rights for Malay, Mandarin and other languages. In order to dispute this, Mr Chia had to go to Bombay to deal with the fraudulent producers.

The Bombay studio system collapsed during the 1950s. Famous organisations such as Bombay Talkies and Prabhat Film Company dating to pre-war days stopped production in 1954 and 1953, respectively. Although new talents such as Raj Kapoor and Dev Anand had launched themselves as independent producers, the professionalism associated with established studios was slowly declining with the entry of the merchants.

Produced by Munshiram Verma and directed by B. Verma, *Aurat* was a reworking of the legend of Samson and Delilah and had as lead stars, Premnath and Bina Rai. Rumoured to have fallen in love during the making of this movie, they later married.



SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

Status
Jane Lee
 2009

Visitors to the Osage Gallery in Singapore may have encountered the dramatic centrepiece of artist Jane Lee’s solo exhibition there last year – an imposing installation soaring 5 metres high in the cavernous exhibition space. Aptly titled *Status*, the work has now entered the collection of the Singapore Art Museum.

Status is a compelling and contemporary take on the age-old medium of painting. Monumental in scale, the spectacle of *Status* defies the simplistic categorisation of media, as it crosses the boundaries of painting, sculpture and installation. No longer just a representational medium in Lee’s work, the skeins of red paint in *Status* have literally escaped from the conventional canvas to become their own frame. In this work, paint is a physical entity in its own right, demanding the viewer to approach it from different angles and

perspectives. *Status* is at once sensuous in all its rich colour, viscosity and textural variations, as it is imposingly commanding in its scale. Resembling a doorway or a hallowed portal, *Status* heralds new ways of thinking about and practising painting in this era of art.

Born in 1963, Singaporean artist Jane Lee has a background in both Fine Arts and Fashion. The recipient of the inaugural Singapore Art Exhibition Prize in 2007, Lee has participated in several notable exhibitions in the region and in Europe, including the 2008 Singapore Biennale where she presented the memorable *Raw Canvas*. In 2009, Lee had her first major solo exhibition at Osage Gallery (Singapore), which showcased her continued experimentation with painting as a medium as well as a subject.



I Want To Live Another Thousand Years (Aku Ingin Hidup Seribu Tahun Lagi)

museings

TAN SIU LI
ASSISTANT CURATOR
SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

IMAGES:
SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM



Agus Suwage
2005
Modified pedicab, cigarette butts, and watercolour and tobacco stain on paper
27 pieces, 75 x 55 cm each.
Singapore Art Museum

Photo: Agus Suwage/Studio Biru, 2005.



Portrait of Chairil Anwar.
(2005) by Agus Suwage.

Some works of art tell great stories. Other works of art have great stories told about them. It is rare to come by an artwork that accomplishes both, but one good example has recently entered the collection of the Singapore Art Museum. Agus Suwage's *I Want To Live Another Thousand Years (Aku Ingin Hidup 1000 Tahun Lagi)*, 2005, has finally come 'home' to Southeast Asia after its sojourn abroad in an European private collection.

A stunning series of 27 celebrity portraits, executed in watercolour and tobacco stains, *I Want To Live Another Thousand Years* speaks volumes about Suwage's practice and preoccupations. Just as interesting is the provenance of this work, which has its origins in a 2005 painting by Suwage of Chairil Anwar, a revolutionary Indonesian poet who died at a tragically young age in 1949. Suwage's brooding, monochromatic portrait, based on an iconic photograph of Anwar, features the poet in his signature pose – brows furrowed in an intense gaze, cigarette in hand. The cigarette – apart from serving as a 'prop', adding a bohemian cachet to Anwar's image – also attests to the fact that the poet was well-known for being a heavy smoker and leading a chaotic lifestyle, and this self-destructive tendency seemed to go hand-in-hand with his artistic and creative brilliance. Fittingly, Suwage's portrait of Anwar was made using charcoal, oils and tobacco stains. The inclusion of tobacco in the painting was an interesting and inspired move on Suwage's part, himself a heavy smoker back in 2005, constantly vowing to quit for the sake of his health and family but at the same time unable to deny that smoking often fuelled his creative output.

Intrigued by this body of work he had just embarked on and its attendant themes of celebrity, creativity, mortality – and conversely, the immortality bestowed upon one by art – Suwage developed a series of 27 portraits of deceased personalities, 27 being the age at which Anwar died. Each portrait has Anwar's hand holding its cigarette superimposed in front, a leitmotif which, by turns, gives rise to humour (when the juxtaposition is incongruous with the portrait behind, as in the case of the *Mona Lisa*), as well as surprise and double-takes (for instance, when the celebrity portrayed is not known for being a smoker).

The portraits were all based on widely circulated media images of the celebrities, and Suwage's interventions question the veracity of these media-disseminated images, while commenting on the contemporary cult of the celebrity. Several portraits also feature personalities whose fame came posthumously (such as painter Vincent Van Gogh), as well as public figures whose tragic deaths were as much a part of their personal legends as their brilliant contributions to politics and culture (much like Anwar himself). It is not surprising too that a fair number of the 'icons' portrayed are music legends such as Jimi Hendrix, Bob Marley, Jim Morrison, Kurt Cobain and Janis Joplin. Suwage is passionate about his music – the artist keeps a set of drums and guitars in his studio, and song lyrics feature frequently in his exhibition titles and catalogue entries.

I Want To Live Another Thousand Years was exhibited in the 2005 Bali Biennale, together with a white street seller's cart filled with thousands of cigarette butts – testimony perhaps to the amount of cigarettes required to create the artwork, and implicitly, the hours and effort 'burned' by the artist in undertaking this creative endeavour. The prominence given to cigarettes, smoking and tobacco in this work also has a particularly piquant resonance, given the inextricable link between tobacco and art in the city of Yogyakarta (where Suwage lives and works), where artists rely on wealthy tobacco merchants as patrons of art.



Agus Suwage.

In 2007, Agus Suwage translated this 'smoking' series into 27 new oil-on-canvas paintings, which concluded with a portrait of the late former Indonesian President Suharto. Differing from the original series in that they no longer feature the use of tobacco, and some of the celebrity portraits used are different, this new series was later split up and acquired separately. On completion of this new body of work, Suwage decided that this series had come to its end. However, he realised that in his new work, he had included a portrait of David Hockney, who was still alive. Suwage removed that particular portrait from the series after the exhibition, and the 'conclusion' of this series remained up in the air until a year later.

27 January, 2008: after a period of speculation about his ill health, former Indonesian President Suharto passed away. That very evening, Suwage decided he would conclude his series with a portrait of Suharto, who was renowned for his strongman regime. To date, Suwage's later series of 'smoking' portraits have been split up and acquired separately. They are very much in demand, for Agus Suwage is an established name in the art world both in Indonesia and abroad, and prices for his works at auction are soaring.

The Singapore Art Museum's acquisition of Suwage's earlier 'smoking' series came at an opportune time – the European collector who had acquired it in its entirety was willing to part with the work, but wanted the works to remain together as a set of 27. Given the popularity of the 'smoking' portraits, there was a high chance that had another collector, dealer or gallery acquired the series, the paintings would have been split up and sold off separately. The original buyer of the series was thus keen that the work should enter a Museum collection, so that it could be exhibited as a complete series to the public. Today, the entire set of 27 tobacco-stained portraits of 27 legends are in the safekeeping of the NHB's Heritage Conservation Centre.





A SURE DRAW: *The Istana Art Event*

museings

BY GERALDINE CHEANG
ASSISTANT MANAGER, PUBLIC EDUCATION
SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

IMAGES:
SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

It is hard to sketch an ugly picture when you have the stately white Istana building and its sprawling green front lawn right in front of you as your reference material. With its lush flora and endless fields of smooth, manicured grass, the Istana estate provides the perfect ambience and visual treat for drawing enthusiasts.

Held annually on the grounds of the Istana, the Istana Art Event is a collaborative effort between the Istana and the Singapore Art Museum to celebrate artistic talent and creativity in conjunction with the Istana's August Open House. There are three segments to the event – an on-the-spot art competition where participants express their artistic skills in response to a given theme; an arts and heritage village where participating institutions from the National Heritage Board (NHB) set up booths with fun and interesting arts and heritage related activities for visitors to the Open House; and an interactive installation piece by students of the School of Design and Environment (Architecture), National University of Singapore. A highlight of the event, this installation features creative contributions from students of all ages across Singapore.





Started in 2001 at an invitation by the Istana to organise an art event for its Open House, the Istana Art Event has grown from strength to strength over the years and is currently into its tenth year running. As part of the Singapore Art Museum's effort to give priority to impactful, large-scale programming and outreach in order to bring contemporary art to as many Singaporeans as possible, the Istana Art Event draws an average of more than 2,000 participants for its on-the-spot art competition and the art installation piece every year. The Istana's Open House attracts more than 15,000 visitors who enjoy the competition and installation artworks as well as NHB's arts and heritage activities.

“While the Istana Art Event is a platform to encourage artistic and creative expression, it is also an opportunity to let Singaporeans and visitors celebrate Singapore’s birthday the arts and heritage way. The theme of the art competition reflects that of National Day and all activities at the arts and heritage village are specially created to let participants understand more about Singapore’s history and culture through craft work and play.”

For this year's event, the Singapore Art Museum is introducing a special element to the installation piece by representing selected artworks by the student participants of the *Self-Portrait, Our Landscape* (SPOL) project.



Part of the Singapore Biennale 2011, the SPOL project is an integrated art and education programme developed by Matthew Ngui, the artistic director of Singapore Biennale 2011. This year-long drawing and animation workshop programme for primary and secondary school students was launched in March 2010, and has attracted over 4,000 student participants from 47 schools across Singapore. Based on an extended concept of the self-portrait, this programme aims to reflect how our youth see our environment and home. As the first phase of the SPOL project, students will draw their self-portraits but not use their faces as a subject matter. Instead, they could draw inspiration from their environment and community to express their self-identity.

The 2010 Istana Art Event promises to be a bigger and better event, so get your creative juices running and pick out a nice spot on the lawn when you head down to the Istana this year.

The Istana Art Event 2010 happens on 8 August 2010, 9:00 am – 5:00 pm. For more information please contact Ms. Avonda Lim at avonda_lim@nhb.gov.sg.



Street Hawkers of Singapore's Past

On January 23, 1931, twenty-five year old Ng Chen committed suicide. He was a laksa hawker living in Duxton Road. On hearing of this tragic incident, Seow Poh Leng, a concerned citizen, wrote an eight stanza poem in his article, "The Hapless Hawker: A Plea for Humane Treatment"¹. Making no claims to its literary merit, Seow hoped that his verse would "invoke the sympathy of the powers-that-be and of the public for voiceless, illiterate and the much-maligned Hawkers." First printed in the *Malaya Tribune*, the article is included in the *Report of the Committee Appointed to Investigate the Hawker Question in Singapore, 1931* (hereafter referred to as Report):

*"We came from Cathay, the land of ancient renown
To try and earn a living in this far-famed modern town
Though father and mother are old they still have to toil each day
My father selling bean-curd, mother selling "kway" [sic]*

.....

*Good-bye my parents dear, good bye my kith and kin!
Think not the step I take an unpardonable sin
I've not forgotten the lesson of filial piety' . . .
Rather than become a criminal and sully the family name
I drink this potion dark and prefer even death to shame."*



Barber
1938



Strasse in Singapore [Street in Singapore]
Ludwig & Rossel's *Reisebuchhandlung*, Singapore (Publisher)
c.1900

II

In the early 1900s, a cup of coffee with milk cost two cents on the street and three cents in a coffee shop. Satay sold on the five-foot way was about two cents a stick, and a bowl of Hokkien *mee* was ten cents. Every cent mattered then, because in 1908, a coolie earned about fifty cents and a rickshaw puller about two dollars a day. Rents for a cubicle on Sago Lane ranged from one and a half to four and a half dollars a month². In the 1920s, with a capital of fifty cents, one could make about twenty cents³. But this money was hardly enough and by the 1930s, with the depression, the plight of the street hawkers was bad. For instance, in 1935, Liew Ah Chow was in distress as he could not afford medical treatment for his daughter. As a cobbler, he made about thirty to forty cents a day. On this money, he could not afford the ten dollars that the General Hospital charged as medical fees.

Documents such as the *Report* show the ways in which the administrators viewed the hawkers – as a problem that needed to be addressed. It appears that the main objections to the hawkers, especially the food vendors, were that they caused health problems through serving contaminated food, littered streets, obstructed traffic, posed unfair competition to shop keepers, corrupted the lower ranks of the Police and Municipality and were suspected to having connections with the Secret Societies.

The authors of the *Report* recognised that the hawkers were essential and that it was a means of livelihood, especially for the new immigrants⁴. They helped to distribute goods including fruits and vegetables for the retailers and provided cheap and efficient services. So, according to them, a total abolishing of these hawkers was not ideal, but it was

important to reduce their numbers, keep them off the main streets and house them in dedicated shelters. Thus their recommendations involved controlling, regulating and monitoring the hawkers. One of the chief ways of doing this was through issuing of licenses.

The first proposal to license and set aside designated places for peddlers to hawk their wares was made in 1903 and it was at the behest of the Chinese Protectorate and the Municipality. The reason for this was that the Police found the hawkers a nuisance and an obstruction on the streets. In 1905 the Municipal Commissioner suggested that food hawkers must be registered. Following this, a series of regulations were instituted. This included licensing of Eating Shops and Coffee Houses in 1913 and the itinerant hawkers both by day and night in 1919.

The three institutions that were involved in 'solving' the hawker issues were: Police, the Municipality and the Health Officers. While the Health officers made stringent demands, the Police penalised offenders by seizing their goods and paraphernalia. Not all the rules were successful. Many stallholders who could not meet the health standards closed their shops. As a result, there was an increase in food hawkers on the streets. In 1931, at the time the *Report* was made, there were 6,043 licensed itinerant hawkers and an estimated 4000 unlicensed ones on the streets. There were six shelters housing 383 hawkers.

III

The colonial *Report* reveals the attitudes of the local elites and citizens such as Seow Poh Leng mentioned above. Included are the opinions of the members of the Chinese Chamber

of Commerce, Teochew guilds, and the Straits Chinese British Association among others. While some favoured and sympathised with the hawkers and questioned the efficacy of licensing, others demanded that the hawkers be removed.

Note for instance the opinion of R. Krishnan, editor of *The Indian* and representing The Indian Association⁵. He wanted the Indian ice-water seller off the streets. "I have no sympathy for him," he says. "If he cannot be removed instantaneously, there should at least be a policy aiming at a quick abolition of this kind of hawkers. . . . Get hold of any ice-water hawker and inspect his fingers. And what do we see? Inflammation of his nail beds and not infrequently pus exuding from them... And it is with such fingers that he prepares his syrups or produces "ice-balls" for innocent school children! Again he is the root cause of the dental caries and gastric disturbances of the school going children in Singapore at least that is the strong feeling of Indian parents."

Krishnan does not spare the tea and ginger bun sellers, curry puffsellers, vendors of agar-agar or the curd sellers, all of whom belonged to various Indian communities. This perception that the food preparer and seller is an agent of disease is unequivocally established in a language of modernity⁶. If it resembles the attitude of the colonial administrator, it is not a co-incidence. His fear of contamination is not restricted to the seller but to the consumer as well. In a language that reads like a public health nightmare, he writes of the practice of eating off the same plate, "Incidentally the habit of eating off the same dish or plate, as a "satay" sellers' table or at a Chinese stall contributes to the speedy spread of infections from one mouth to the other . . . that dreadful disease, syphilis, will easily, once the infection is passed, go the rounds by this means."

In contrast to this negative perception, the itinerant traveller and photographers cast the street peddler as an exotic being. Moving the peddler out of the street and into the studio, the photographer posed him with the tools of his trade. Although removed from the grit and grind of labour, the hawker is presented as an embodiment of work. The picturesque effect becomes even more pronounced in the commercial prints and postcards that began to be produced for bourgeois consumption.

If the colonial photographer sought to romanticise the hawker, the adventure seeker was not far behind. In a 1931 account, a street barber is described in the following manner, "The barbers sit along the sidewalks, and in addition to shaving your face, a barber scrapes your tongue, and the same water is used over and over again. He also, with funny little instruments, cleans your eyes, ears and nose"⁷. These remarks are revealing. Despite the fascination of the Orient, the traveller cannot help but reveal his own deep seated cultural attitude to dirt and hygiene.

IV

Who were the street peddlers? What became of them? These questions might never be fully answered as there are no first person accounts available. There are various types of sources that explore the economic and social conditions of street life in the late 19th and early 20th century. Among them are histories of the working class, accounts left behind



Itinerant hawker's license no. 6017, issued to Yeo Jeah Siang 1948

by travellers, and colonial records. Following the classic 1963 study by the anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, economists and city planners began to take notice of street traders⁸. Economists have examined street hawkers in urban cities such as Hong Kong and Jakarta among others⁹.

The studies of Singapore's street peddlers, especially food vendors, have to be located in the corpus of this larger discourse¹⁰. Visual records such as drawings, illustrations and fictional representations of the working class can also be considered. For instance, classic studies such as Samuel Victor Contant's 1936 work *Calls, Sounds and Merchandise of the Peking Street Peddlers* is a wonderful study which analyses the language the hawkers' use and carries charming coloured drawings.

The well known novel, *Rickshaw (Lo-T'O Hsiang Tzu)*, set in Shanghai in the turn of the century, offers a compelling portrait of misery and destitution of street workers and their lives¹¹. However, such an account of Singapore's street people in the early 20th century is yet to be written. Still, there exists, in the National Museum collections, a wealth of materials including photographs, postcards and some associated material culture such as tools and objects.



Street side hawkers selling bread c.1940
Donated by Mr. Thomas Kennett



Potter
Lim Lam San
c.1930
Gift of Lieutenant-Colonel Lim Eng Lian

Peddling of goods and services in the late 19th and early 20th century was tied to migration and kinship networks. Predominant among the street hawkers were the Chinese, Indians, Malays and some Jews. The Chinese were identified largely by their dialect groups included the Cantonese Hockchias, Hockchius, Hokkiens, Shanghainese and Teochews among others. They sold coffee, cooked food, fresh produce, fish, and meats such as pork. Among the Cantonese, there were also women who took to peddling goods, toys, and cigarettes. The Shanghainese sold silk.

Peddlers from the Indian communities sold bread, fried snacks, yoghurt, milk and iced-water. Among the people of the Malay Archipelago, the Javanese peddled curios and cloth, while the Malays sold satay. Although the hawkers could be found all over the town as some of were itinerant, many of them operated in the central areas. These areas specified by the municipal authorities included largely the southeast part of the island around the Singapore River. The hawkers tended to work along common dialect or language groups. For instance the Hokkiens who were the largest group of Chinese hawkers could be found everywhere especially around China Street, Hokkien Street and Telok Ayer Street. That they mostly operated in the municipal areas became a major sore point with the colonial administrators.

The exhibition, *Surviving the Streets: Peddlers and Artisans in Early-Mid 20th Century Singapore*, is about these people who made a living on the streets and five-foot ways. Their lives on the streets highlighted not only disparities between class and

race but also the conflicting perceptions between the colonial government and the people.

However, through their day to day economic transactions, these individuals forged lasting relationships among themselves and with the spaces in which they operated. That is, the exhibition attempts to define peddlers as not just producers of work. Instead through a selection of artefacts including tools and images of leisure, the display hopes to show that the street vendors were social beings who transformed the world they inhabited in meaningful ways.

Surviving the Streets: Peddlers and Artisans in Early-Mid 20th Century Singapore is an exhibition curated by the author. It is on at the Balcony, National Museum of Singapore from 28 June to 22 August 2010. More than a hundred artefacts drawn from the National Museum's collections are displayed along five themes: *The Street and the Image, Artisans and Tools, Postcards and Peddlers, Services, Leisure and Social Life*. Three video footages of craftsmen, two audio clips of interviews and a selection of folk songs are also included in the display.



Chinese Street, Singapore



Street procession during Thaipusam
Lim Lam San
c. 1930
Gift of Lieutenant-Colonel Lim Eng Lion



Barber.
Early 20th century.

Endnotes

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4. The five member committee chaired by W. Bartley included R. Onraet, J. Black, K. Raghunathan, Gaw Khek Khiam and S.Q. Wong.
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A GUIDE TO MEMORY LANE:

*Discovering Singapore through
NHB's Community Trails*

museings

BY MARCUS NG

IMAGES: NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD





INTERNET CAFE
TYPING, PHOTO DESIGN
MECH-ANN ENGINEERING HUB
EMPLOYMENT AGENCY
WORK PERMIT, EMPLOYMENT PASS
VISIT PASS, TRAINING

INTERNET

Tiger
福三和

Syed Alwi Rd

NASI LEMPAK 椰漿

McDonald's

24



This and facing page: Traditional trades and treats at shophouses along Jalan Besar and Balestier.

Tired of shopping and the downtown crowd? Eager for a fresh change of scenery that won't cost you a fortune and still get you home in time for dinner? Why not consider a weekend of exploration and discovery, right in your neighbourhood?

It can be easy to forget that Singapore isn't just all about high-rise living and good eating. Places like Yishun, Queenstown, Bukit Timah and Balestier may be familiar names on the map as well as homes and hangouts to many. But these residential heartlands of modern Singapore also house landmarks and living reminders of our shared history and the communities who helped shape the nation's unique sense of identity. Indeed, nestled amid the neighbourhood malls and rows of housing blocks are markets, schools, parks and places of worship that reveal the stories of the people who sank roots into a new homeland and struggled to build a better future for their families and fellow pioneers.

Sometimes, the best-kept secrets lie right under our noses, or at least in our very own backyard. Can you imagine finding a natural spring with piping hot water right here in Singapore? Or the former headquarters of China's revolutionary leader, Dr Sun Yat Sen, just off a historic road lined with charming art deco shophouses and bustling kopitiam? Who would have thought that one could grab a hearty lunch at Beauty World Centre and thereafter hop across the road to relive the horrors of the Japanese Occupation or visit a World War II battle site at the foot of an ancient rainforest?

MAPPING OUT SINGAPORE'S HISTORICAL HEARTLANDS

That's all very well and good, you might say. But where does one begin to uncover the heritage that is hidden in our heartlands?

Until about five years ago, there were few, if any, resources or guides to help budding explorers make head or tail of the island's sprawling townships and highlight sites of past significance. This bleak landscape began to bloom in July 2006 when the National Heritage Board (NHB) launched what would become a growing series of community trails that chart the history of selected districts across the island and document the places where Singaporeans past and present live, work and play.







Memories at Old Ford Factory at Bukit Timah Road. Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

The first two trails, which cover Jalan Besar and Balestier, were a joint effort between NHB and the Central Singapore Community Development Council (CDC). Some might liken these districts to an outdoor museum, but many of the sights and scenes traced by the community trails are very much alive and kicking, and the trails themselves were developed with the help of residents and shopkeepers who shared their memories of these neighbourhoods and the changes that had taken place over the years. Aside from physical markers that provide information about notable pitstops along the trails, NHB also published information booklets with detailed accounts of the sites and their histories, which can be accessed at <http://heritagetrails.sg>

Giving Singaporeans and tourists a handy guide to lesser-known corners of the city is just one side of the coin. NHB also hopes that the community trails would spur a sense of ownership and involvement among those who live or work at or near the places marked by the trails. On this note, the third community heritage trail, unveiled in July 2007 and focusing on Bukit Timah, emerged from a collaborative effort between NHB and students from National Junior College (NJC), with the former contributing greater historical depth to a series of four trails conceived by the students as part of a cultural mapping project to record the history and activities of the local community. Spanning the area between Memories of Old Ford Factory and Farrer Road, the Bukit Timah Trail shines the spotlight on historical sites such as major battlegrounds and social nodes where the local community gathers to eat, worship, learn and enjoy nature.

Singapore's oldest satellite town, named to commemorate the coronation of England's Queen Elizabeth II in 1953, was the next district to be mapped out for history buffs, when NHB launched the Queenstown Community Trail in 2008. The trail's launch followed the publication *10 Stories – Queenstown Through the Years*, a 172-page book that records the origins and transformation of a patchwork of swamps, cemeteries and farmland into a modern housing estate through the eyes of the town's longtime residents.

The newest community trail, a joint project between NHB and the Housing and Development Board (HDB), heads north to the wide open spaces of Yishun and the peaceful coastal settlements of Sembawang. Unveiled this May, the Yishun Sembawang Heritage Trail boasts Singapore's first outdoor heritage corner in the form of a Heritage Garden in Yishun Central, where residents can learn about the area's rich agricultural and military legacies, local stalwarts such as Lim Nee Soon and the abundant parks and nature areas that surround the townships.

A detailed booklet (which can be downloaded at <http://heritagetrails.sg>) accompanies each community heritage trail, showing locations of historic and social interest and providing maps of the area. But members of the public as well as teachers can also use the website to create their own customised trails by registering online. Users can then share the trails with their family, friends or students as well as post their observations, photographs and videos on the companion website, <http://mystory.sg>.

So the next time you have a weekend to spare, why not talk a walk or catch a bus to Singapore's neighbourhoods? With the NHB community trail guides, you are in no danger of losing your way. But you might find yourself getting lost (and loving it) in the stories and histories that bring to life places that you once overlooked.

THE BIG ROAD BECKONS

It may seem like just another street leading to the city. But Jalan Besar (which means 'Big Road' in Malay) was once one of the leading lanes in town. Built in the 1830s, the road cut through betel nut plantations and orchards owned by the Norris brothers and ran past swampland where lush mangroves and nipah palms grew. With increasing traffic in the 1880s, the local municipality expanded the track and named it Jalan Besar.

Today, Jalan Besar offers visitors a glimpse into Singapore's colourful history as a straits settlement for migrants from all over the region, who have left their mark in an eclectic mix of architecture and socio-economic activities. The shophouses that line much of Jalan Besar and its side roads have been granted conservation status by the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) for their unique character and historical value. But trades both traditional and modern continue to draw customers from all over the island to Jalan Besar's five-foot ways and bustling alleys.

For those new to the area, the Jalan Besar Community Trail provides a guide that brings walkers through landmarks such as a venerable football stadium, a Chinese art deco church, a majestic Sikh gurdwara as well as Chinese and Hindu temples by the Kallang River. In between stand rows of shophouses spanning more than a century of design, where explorers can indulge in culinary pit stops with dim sum, roti prata, Malay and Nonya kuehs and of course a freshly made cup of coffee at the many kopitiams that also serve an array of popular street food.

THE LEGACY OF SINGAPORE'S FIRST AMERICAN CONSUL

Launched at the same time as the Jalan Besar Heritage Trail, the Balestier Community Trail traces the history of a nearby district that began at almost the same time as the Norris brothers' estate.

Joseph Balestier was the first American Consul to Singapore and the husband of Maria Revere, daughter of Paul Revere, an American patriot famed for his midnight ride in 1775 to warn the American Revolutionaries of a British assault. After the American Revolution, Revere established a bell foundry that produced the Revere Bell, a gift of the Balestiers to St Andrew's Cathedral in 1943. The bell is now part of the National Museum of Singapore's collection.

In 1934, Balestier leased a thousand acres of land to grow sugarcane and called it Balestier Plain. The area was surrounded by swamps and plantation workers who feared the twin assaults of malaria and tigers sought divine protection by establishing a small temple that survives today as the Goh Chor Tua Pek Kong Temple. Shophouses that sprang up in the temple's vicinity offer examples of the streamlined Art

Deco architectural style that was popular in the 1930s, and many now house kopitiams (traditional coffeeshops serving food and of course, freshly brewed coffee), with chicken rice and roast duck being especially popular items. Other than food, Balestier Road hosts a large cluster of lighting and bathroom fixture shops.

Balestier Road's association with international personalities continued in the early 20th century when Chinese revolutionary leader, Dr Sun Yat Sen, established his Southeast Asian headquarters in a villa at Tai Gin Road, a small lane near the western end of the road. Also known as Wan Qing Yuan in Chinese, the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall was built in 1900 and acquired by Teo Eng Hock, a merchant who offered it to Dr Sun as a base. The villa, a national monument, now houses galleries depicting the life and times of Dr Sun and is currently being converted into a community heritage institution with improved exhibits and support by the NHB.

A TRAIL TO THE TOP OF THE HILL

The third community trail charts the history of a neighbourhood in the heart of the island. In contrast to the dense buildings of Jalan Besar and Balestier, Bukit Timah is a vast landscape of green hills and thriving suburban hangouts.

Today, Bukit Timah Road links areas such as Woodlands and Bukit Panjang to the city centre. But the road was originally built to provide access to the highest point on the island, the summit of Bukit Timah Hill which stands at 163.63 m above sea level. In 1845, Bukit Timah Road was extended to reach Kranji, making it the longest road in Singapore from north to south. Back then, the road was more like a track and it took nearly four days on horseback to travel its length!



Have a cuppa' at a kopitiam at Balestier Road.



All That's Left of The New World

An old gateway flanked by shophouses is all that is left of a former hotspot of music and revelry. But in the 1950s and 1960s, Jalan Besar lay out the welcome mat to locals who sought a night of food, fun and fancy footwork at the New World, an amusement park set up in 1923 by two Straits Chinese merchants, Ong Boon Tat and Ong Peng Hock. Boxing and wrestling matches, variety shows, Teochew and Hokkien operas, Bangsawan (Malay opera) and stalls touting all kinds of trinkets and treats awaited townsfolk in a time before television commanded the attention of the masses.

The Ong brothers later sold New World to the Shaw Organisation, which ran the place as a counterpart to its Great World Amusement Park at Kim Seng Road. After the 1960s, the three 'Worlds' (the third was Gay World) gradually lost their audiences to modern entertainment and in the mid-1980s, New World closed its doors for the final time.

Still, the road provided a way for businessmen and smallholders to set up pepper and gambier plantations in the interior, despite the risk of tigers and diseases. The origin of the name 'Bukit Timah' is still a mystery as no tin ('timah' in Malay) has ever been found in the area. Thus some believe 'Timah' is short for 'Fatimah', a Malay girl's name. 'Bukit' means 'hill' in Malay. Others think it was derived from a misspelling of the Temak trees (*Shorea* sp.) found in the hill's primary rainforests.

Today, much of the land around the main road has been developed into housing areas, schools, factories and shopping centres. But the primary forest around Bukit Timah has been preserved as a nature reserve since the late 19th century by colonial administrators who were concerned about overlogging and the depletion of local timber resources. An experience truly unique to Singapore is spending a morning hiking through a rainforest and emerging to chill out in a modern shopping complex in just minutes. Bukit Timah offers just that with Beauty World Plaza and Bukit Timah Plaza, while hungry trailblazers can tuck in at the nearby Bukit Timah Food Centre and Adam Food Centre.

Those who enjoy natural as well as human heritage can combine both interests at the foot of Bukit Timah Hill, where a plaque commemorates one of the fiercest battles of the Second World War in Singapore, when Lieutenant-General A.E.

A UNIQUE URBAN FEATURE

A notable feature of towns in Malaysia and Singapore, five-foot ways are said to have originated with a stipulation by Sir Stamford Raffles that shophouses must have a covered walkway of about five feet between the shopfront and the street. The five-foot ways thus became a convenient shelter against the sun and rain for pedestrians and a base of operation for many immigrant petty traders such as itinerant barbers, fortune tellers and snack vendors.



Balestier Road is famed for its *tau sah piah* (mung bean pastry) bakeries



A railway crossing over Bukit Timah Road.

Percival made a final stand against the Japanese invaders on 8 February 1942. To avenge the heavy casualties they suffered during the assault, the Japanese troops massacred the residents of a nearby village. Lieutenant-General Percival later surrendered to Japan's Lieutenant-General Tomoyuki Yamashita at the former Ford Motor Works factory, a national monument which has been restored and run by the National Archives of Singapore as Memories at Old Ford Factory, a World War II Interpretative Centre. The galleries within show actual war artefacts such as the board room and replica of the table where the surrender took place, personal belongings of Singaporeans who played a role in the resistance movement as well as a garden where wartime food crops are grown.

THE STORY OF THE QUEEN'S TOWN

In contrast to the slow transformation that Bukit Timah experienced over more than a century, Queenstown underwent a rapid makeover in the 1950s and 1960s that turned squalid urban slums into a spanking high-rise housing estate. This massive post-war exercise in social and urban planning is recounted in the Queenstown Community Trail, which relates how former swamps, farmland and cemeteries were converted into seven neighbourhoods, each with its own modern amenities and character.

Many older residents would recall Queenstown's heyday as a bubbling hub of commerce and recreation in the 1960s and 1970s, and the community trail seeks to give younger islanders a glimpse into community and public housing life in Singapore's first satellite town and Housing and Development Board (HDB) estate. Starting from the town centre, the trail will be a walk down memory lane for many who recall the full houses at the centre's three cinemas, the Tah Chung emporium and the crowd favourite Golden Crown Cantonese restaurant. Hungry theatre patrons would emerge from screenings of Cantonese dramas to dine at the Commonwealth Cooked Food Centre, whose organised, hygienic food stalls represented a sea change from an earlier world of itinerant hawkers plying the sidewalks.

A landmark that continues to draw both the young and old is the Queenstown Community Library, the nation's first branch library. A hit with residents who thronged and made full use of the double-storey building's services when it opened in 1970, the branch library provided access to books and other literature in a time when few could afford reading.

Numerous houses of worship dot the estate, showing Queenstown to be a microcosm of Singapore's multi-ethnic nature. A 1962 chapel at Margaret Drive serves a Cantonese-speaking congregation. Further down Margaret Drive lies Masjid Jamek Queenstown, a social and religious centre for Muslim residents since 1964. Across the street from the Queenstown MRT station, Stirling Road is home to Tiong Ghee Temple, a shrine with a history that predates the estate, and the True Way Presbyterian Church, which traces its origins to a missionary who arrived in Singapore in 1918.

Meanwhile, Hindus are served by the Sri Muneeswaran Temple at Tanglin Halt Road, erected in 1932 by labourers working on the nearby Malayan Railway track, which is



A cart for thirsty strollers

Thirsty explorers of the Balestier trail can find respite at a small cart on the corner of Boon Teck Road, which offers free water and tea to passer-bys. This water kiosk is long-standing charitable service by the nearby Thong Teck Sian Tong Lian Sia temple, which began providing the refreshments in the 1940s when the temple was located at Kim Keat Road and continued when it move to Balestier in the 1970s.

located right next to the unmistakable origami-like canopy of the Church of the Blessed Sacrament.

DISCOVER THE SECRETS OF SINGAPORE'S NORTH

NHB's latest community trail swings far to the northern reaches of the island, bringing explorers to the diverse and often surprising townships of Yishun and Sembawang. Here, one can find Asia's first multiplex, a watering hole that's truly hot and a choice of tree-lined parks fringing either the Straits of Singapore or the quiet waters of Lower Seletar Reservoir.

A bus or taxi-ride might be necessary if you don't fancy a long walk or bicycle ride, but the sights of the Yishun Sembawang Heritage Trail are well worth the effort. The two towns share a history that goes back to a time when nomadic, boat-dwelling Orang Seletar roamed the area, making a living out of coastal mangrove forests where seafood and hunting opportunities abounded.



What's brewing in Queenstown?

Singapore's world-famous Tiger Brewery is now located at the western tip in Tuas, but did you know that the island's very first brewery was based in Queenstown at Alexandra Road? Founded in 1931 by expatriate Germans, the former Archipelago Brewery Company bottled beer until 1990, when the production line moved to Tuas under the ownership of Asia Pacific Breweries. Only the former brewmaster's quarters remain, now converted into a restaurant.

The opening of a naval base in Sembawang in 1938 unleashed a mini economic boom as nearby villages cashed in on the opportunity to provide goods and services to the military installations. Migrants from other parts of Singapore as well as India also arrived to add new facets to the community.

The trail starts off at Yishun Central, where a Heritage Garden recounts the more recent history of the area from its days as vast gambier and pepper estates in the 1800s to the development of the new towns in the late 1900s. Up to the 1970s, this corner of Singapore was dominated by farms and small villages. The name Yishun is derived from Lim Nee Soon (1975-1936), the 'Rubber and Pineapple King' of Singapore who owned many plantations in the area and also contributed greatly to the community as a leader and philanthropist.

Built in the late 1970s, Yishun is a satellite town that eventually became a nexus in the north, thanks to the completion of an MRT station in 1988 and the opening of the Northpoint Shopping Centre and Yishun 10 Cineplex in 1992. The latter, with its 10 screening halls offering lavish comfort and unprecedented choice, was Asia's first Cineplex, and thanks to the MRT line, drew crowds from not just Yishun but many other parts of Singapore.

Beyond the housing estate lies a wealth of natural heritage. Walk along Gambas Avenue and you will find the only hot spring in Singapore's mainland. Discovered in 1908, the spring's water, measured at 65°C, was deemed suitable for drinking and local soft drink company Fraser & Neave even built a bottling plant to package the water in 1933. Today, a

small concrete base with pipes is all that remains, but people from the neighbourhood still drop by to soak their feet in the water which is believed to have healing properties.

A short distance from the town central is Yishun Park, where original vegetation such as fruit trees and rubber trees from former villages and plantations have been retained to give visitors a taste of kampong life. Further afield is Lower Seletar Reservoir, which offers excellent fishing and kayaking opportunities as well as gorgeous views at sundown.

If you choose to head northwards instead, you will pass by the cottage-like Old Admiralty House, the only national monument in the area and the former residence of the Commander of the British Far East Fleet. Turn into Admiralty Road East off Sembawang Road and you will find stately black and white colonial bungalows lining the way, and should you resist the temptation to linger, rest and refreshment can be found at Sembawang Park at the very end of the road.

But even at the end of the road, there's still room to turn around and take a second, or even third, look at the landmarks and landscapes that the community trails bring to light and life. For each trail offers a bounty of destinations and a depth of stories few can fully absorb with just one walk. And as these neighbourhoods continue to grow, change and adapt to the times, there will always be fresh tales to tell and new faces to meet with each trip through these trails that retrace the journeys of our forefathers and Singapore's pioneers through our very own eyes.



Black & white colonial bungalow at Sembawang.

LEARNING THROUGH LOOKING:

The Natural History Collection of the Former Raffles Library and Museum

museings

BY CLEMENT ONN
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ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

IMAGES:
ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM





When I was asked to write this article, I was told to focus on the natural history collection¹ of the former Raffles Museum and how they showcase a different aspect of Singapore's (and the region's) heritage. At this point, I must confess that I am no specialist in the field of natural history or biodiversity. However, as a student of museology, I have taken the liberty of expanding my topic to include the roles of collectors – both institutional and individual – and how they have contributed in building the Raffles Library & Museum's natural history collection.

Through archival notes and published materials, this article will share stories behind how some specimens were found, the key personalities involved in the collection and why they have collected these specimens. On a larger context, the article also looks into the history of collecting as a natural form of human activity and it will end by examining the importance of a natural history collection today.



Front view of the Raffles Library & Museum

FROM CABINET OF CURIOS TO NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTION

During the Renaissance period that emerged in the early 16th century, there began to appear – initially in European courts – collections of a special type, known as *kunstammer* or cabinet of curiosities. The term literally refers to a ‘cabinet’ or a room filled with various types of ‘curios’ (objects) whose categorical boundaries were yet to be defined. These collections included antiquities, works of art, scientific instruments, books, paintings, religious or historical relics, exotic items from faraway lands and particularly natural history specimens. The historian, Irmgard Musch has commented that the aim was to bring together – at least in representative form – the most complete collection possible of all things knowable and worth knowing, to record them and thus to make them easier to grasp².

Famous owners of cabinets of curiosities included Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria, Munich (1528-1579); Flemish physician Samuel van Quiccheberg (1529-1567); Archduke Ferdinand II of Austria (1529-1595); Grand Duke of Tuscany, Francesco I de’ Medici (1541-1587); Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II (1552-1612); Danish physician Ole Worm (1588-1655); and Dutch pharmacist Albertus Seba (1665-

1736). Most of their collections laid the foundation of European museums today. In assembling their collections, these men were actually following a trend of their time.

The Renaissance was also known as the age of discovery as several nations and peoples engaged in intensive explorations of the world. In each voyage, new geographical and scientific findings were made and the ideal cabinet of curiosities defined an attempt to produce an overall and encyclopaedic picture of this world, the cosmos. However, this cosmological view of the world began to lose importance after 1600. In the 17th and 18th centuries, cabinets of curiosities were replaced by more specialised collections often triggered by scholarly curiosity based on scientific ‘objective’ principles. The new aim was less to reflect, in representative samples, the whole cosmos than to cover comprehensively a chosen area of speciality. Through description, comparison and ordering of their pieces, collectors strove to reach an empirical and scientific understanding of nature. It was even considered as a duty of every educated person to watch and study the time in which he lives and to participate in collecting natural history specimens or objects from foreign material cultures.

From the 18th century onwards, Europeans were increasingly interested in nature and societies beyond the Western world. This led to the establishment of academic societies, such as the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences (1778) and the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1784), whose activities included the study of natural history, people and their material cultures. These institutions often encouraged laymen to collect for the sake of science and to share their research and donate their collections.

By the mid 19th century, riding on the expansion of colonial empires, European and American collectors were making their way to Southeast Asia in search of exotic plants, animal specimens and ethnographic objects. Scientists, voyagers, entrepreneurs and amateur collectors played an important role in building the large natural history and ethnographic collections of museums around the world. There were motivations enough for collecting – whether to act as an intellectual stimulus, to satisfy an investigating spirit, or to display wealth and erudition. And of course, collections owned or donated to academic institutions also raised the social prestige of their owners. Natural history museums, which evolved from

cabinets of curiosities, also played an important role in the emergence of biological and environmental studies.

THE BIRTH OF THE RAFFLES LIBRARY & MUSEUM

To bring this long museological tradition into the local context, Singapore's oldest museum owes its birth to an eminent British colonial administrator, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781-1826), who was also a passionate naturalist and collector of natural history specimens. Raffles' interests in natural history are well known, culminating in his founding of the Zoological Society of London in 1826, from which arose the London Zoo. Before he set foot in Singapore, he pursued these interests during his career in Penang, Malacca, Java and Sumatra. His own scientific interests were largely zoological and later he collected all things Javanese.

Raffles' *History of Java* (1817) is an amazing assortment of miscellaneous knowledge. Writing to his friend, Dr Thomas Horsfield, (1773 - 1859) an American physician and naturalist, he constantly mentioned his latest finds and informed Horsfield of the shipping of his collections back to London. He wrote:

"Among my baggage and collections sent home by the Borneo are a few cases of animals (not very important but some new) and two cases of insects belonging to Lady R. If you would occasionally look at the latter it may be useful & my friend Mr. Evans to whose care they are consigned will gladly transfer them to you if you will under-take the charge – there is also a case or two of snakes and 5 barrels of animals in spirit – none however important – one contains the Bornean Orang Ootan³..."

Raffles' letters reveal that he was a man of omnivorous learning but had little time, with an 18th century faith that believed it is possible to learn everything⁴. It was he who, in 1823,



A view of the Raffles Library & Museum gallery displaying the natural history collection

proposed setting up a museum and library in Singapore as a repository for specimens deemed relevant to the flora, fauna and peoples of the region. In another letter to Dr. Horsfield, he mentioned that:

"I am at present engaged in founding an institution at Singapore for the cultivation of the Chinese, Siamese and Malayan languages & the moral & intellectual improvement of the natives, in which there will be separate department for scientific purposes including a professor of natural history – as patron and founder of this institution I shall have to form a committee or corporation in Europe & we shall then have the means of at all times collecting information regarding these countries – the particulars I will hereafter send you when they are printed – I am glad to see your botanical collections are so well arranged and that you so soon propose publishing⁵."

Unfortunately, Raffles left Singapore the same year and it was not until 1849 that the institution – named in his honour – was established by the committee of the Singapore Institution (present-day Raffles Institution). After

several relocations, the Raffles Library & Museum finally found a home at Stamford Road and was officially opened on 12 October 1887.

COLLECTORS AND CURATORS: CHARTING THE SPECIMENS OF THE RAFFLES MUSEUM

The Raffles Library & Museum was established in a period when the rise of disciplines such as anthropology and archaeology coincided with the expansion of colonial empires. Natural history was still the dominant discipline and took centre stage in the Raffles Library & Museum (RLM). Until its renaming as the National Museum in 1969, the RLM had established itself as a well-known scientific institution with a particularly comprehensive zoological collection. Almost all its curators were specialists in natural history⁶. In contrast, most of the ethnological materials acquired in the early years of the museum were haphazardly acquired with sketchy records and little information on the objects.

In 1893, RLM curator Dr Karl Hanitsch (1860-1940) reported the need for more systematic collecting with clear objectives and accurate documentation, as these were evidently lacking at the time. However, due to various other complications such as limited funds, manpower and storage space, the museum continued to rely on ad hoc donations and purchases whenever the opportunity arose.

One of the earliest attempts to systematically collect objects was in September 1924. Then RLM director, Cecil Boden Kloss (1877-1949), along with his assistant, N. Smedley and Dr. H.H. Karny, Assistant Entomologist of the Zoological Museum in Buitenzorg (present day Bogor) in Java, organised an expedition to the Mentawai islands off the west coast of Sumatra. The expedition included 12 'native' assistants who did most of the work – catching insects, trapping animals and gathering samples of plants and seeds. Among them was a Malay plant collector from the Botanical Gardens in Singapore and a number of Karny's assistants from Java. Together, they spent two months on the islands gathering over 1,500 specimens. Most of these were natural history specimens now housed now in the collections of the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research at the National University of Singapore. Among the items collected were about 150 ethnological objects which eventually came to the Asian Civilisations Museum. This small but significant collection of objects remains largely intact today. The majority of the pieces collected are everyday items of local manufacture: hats, containers, tools and weapons.

The museum's *Annual Report* (1926) mentions that three cases of ethnological objects gathered by the expedition were put on display in the galleries and at least 23 monographs were published on the natural history specimens gathered through the *Bulletins of the Raffles Library & Museum*. In his introduction to the *Spolia Mentawiensia* series, Kloss noted that the islands were not very pleasant collecting grounds⁷, describing them as mostly swamp with paths that were often impassable owing to floods. Moreover, in spite of systematic employment of quinine and other precautions, all the members of the party except himself contracted malaria. Kloss added that the expedition enjoyed the protection of a military escort although this was 'happily largely unnecessary'.

BUILDING A REGIONAL NETWORK

The Raffles Museum curators continued to build up the collection by organising expeditions around Southeast Asia – often jointly with staff from the Selangor Museum and Perak Museum.

Thus a large number of specimens were acquired and deposited at the Raffles Museum. The Raffles Museum also conducted specimen exchange programmes with other institutions in Malaya, Indonesia, England, America, the Netherlands and India. One of the most significant exchanges was arranged in 1926 by H. C. Robinson, then director of the Federated Malay States Museums. He sent the bird and mammal collections of the Selangor Museum in return for the Raffles Museum's insect collection.

Aside from the staff's tireless collecting activities, many individual collectors have also contributed to the museum's collection. William Louis Abbott (1860-1936), a native of Philadelphia, was considered as one of America's greatest naturalists. In 1899, Abbott commissioned the construction of a 65-foot schooner, *The Terrapin*, in Singapore. Over the next 10 years, he visited almost all of the Southeast Asia island groups on *The Terrapin*. After each expedition, Abbott would return to Singapore to have his collections shipped off to Washington, D.C. He donated over 6,000 objects to the Smithsonian Institution, most of which were zoological specimens. A small portion of his collection was donated to the Raffles Library & Museum. Many were collected in collaboration with Kloss. Today, most of Abbott's zoological collection remains intact in the Smithsonian and the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research (RMBR), Singapore. A group of proboscis monkeys from West Kalimantan, Indonesia and a Malaysian Giant Terrapin donated by Abbott in 1905 and 1907 respectively are still on display in the RMBR gallery. These specimens were borrowed in 2009 for display at *Hunters & Collectors – the Origins of the Southeast Asian collection*, a special exhibition at the Asian Civilisations Museum.

Another prominent individual who contributed to the Raffles Museum's zoological collection was Tom Harrison (1911-1976), a British polymath and then Director of Sarawak Museum from 1947-1966. His friendship with the then director of the Raffles Museum, Michael Tweedie, fostered many working opportunities between the two museums. It was

recorded in the Raffles Museum's Annual Report that he brought a large collection of over 900 bird skins from the Kelabit Plateau in the interior of Sarawak⁸. Both Harrison and Tweedie made a preliminary examination of the collection and drafted a report on this. It is unknown, however, if this report was ever published.

ANONYMOUS ASSISTANTS

There is another class of unsung heroes who helped to build the museum's collection. They were usually local assistants hired by collectors during their expeditions. Using local assistants was extremely important for both institutional and individual collectors. They acted as guides to the unfamiliar terrains and as interpreters to language and cultural barriers. This fact is often undermined or even neglected in return for a more objective scientific report or a more romantic and adventurous account by collectors in those days. Tweedie made a gratuitous note with regards to hiring local assistants and their contribution in the museum work.

“When I arrived in Singapore in 1932 to fill the post of Assistant Curator, zoological collecting and taxonomy was the museum's main activity, but its scope was limited. The retiring Director Cecil Boden Kloss and his successor F.N. Chasen interested themselves solely in mammals and birds. The Curator, N. Smedley, who retired at the same time as Boden Kloss, had concerned himself mainly with the museum's collection of reptiles. Entomology was covered by H.M. Pendlebury at the museum at Kuala Lumpur. So I had care of the reptiles, the fish and all of the invertebrates.

The collectors on the staff were Ibans from Sarawak, intelligent, energetic men and born naturalists. They and I would go together sometimes on day excursions, sometimes camping for a week or more, and they were soon far more adept at finding centipedes, scorpions and the like than I was. Under their patient and sympathetic tuition my Malay vocabulary steadily progressed⁹.”



A photograph depicting the spoils of a hunting trip with a 'native' collector. Photographs possibly taken by Cecil Boden Kloss in the early 1900s.

The encounters between the local assistants and collectors also included many interesting stories. In an expedition to the Batu Puteh and Ulu Batang Padang Mountains in Perak, Cecil Wray, a Pahang Resident of the State Council, reported of a strange creature that lurked the area. He wrote:

“Later on we again heard the Datoh exhorting the Sakeis to be vigilant during the night; we could not understand why, but on inquiry, were told that on this mountain lives a peculiar animal, which prowls about at night: the body is that of a rhinoceros, but it has the head of a tiger. We were particularly told if one should visit the camp not to look at it, for it always chased and tried to kill anyone who looked at it, whereas if no notice was taken it passed on quietly. The Penghulu assured us that lots of people had seen this curious beast and many had been chased.¹⁰”

A BLEND OF SCIENCE AND ARTISTIC SKILL

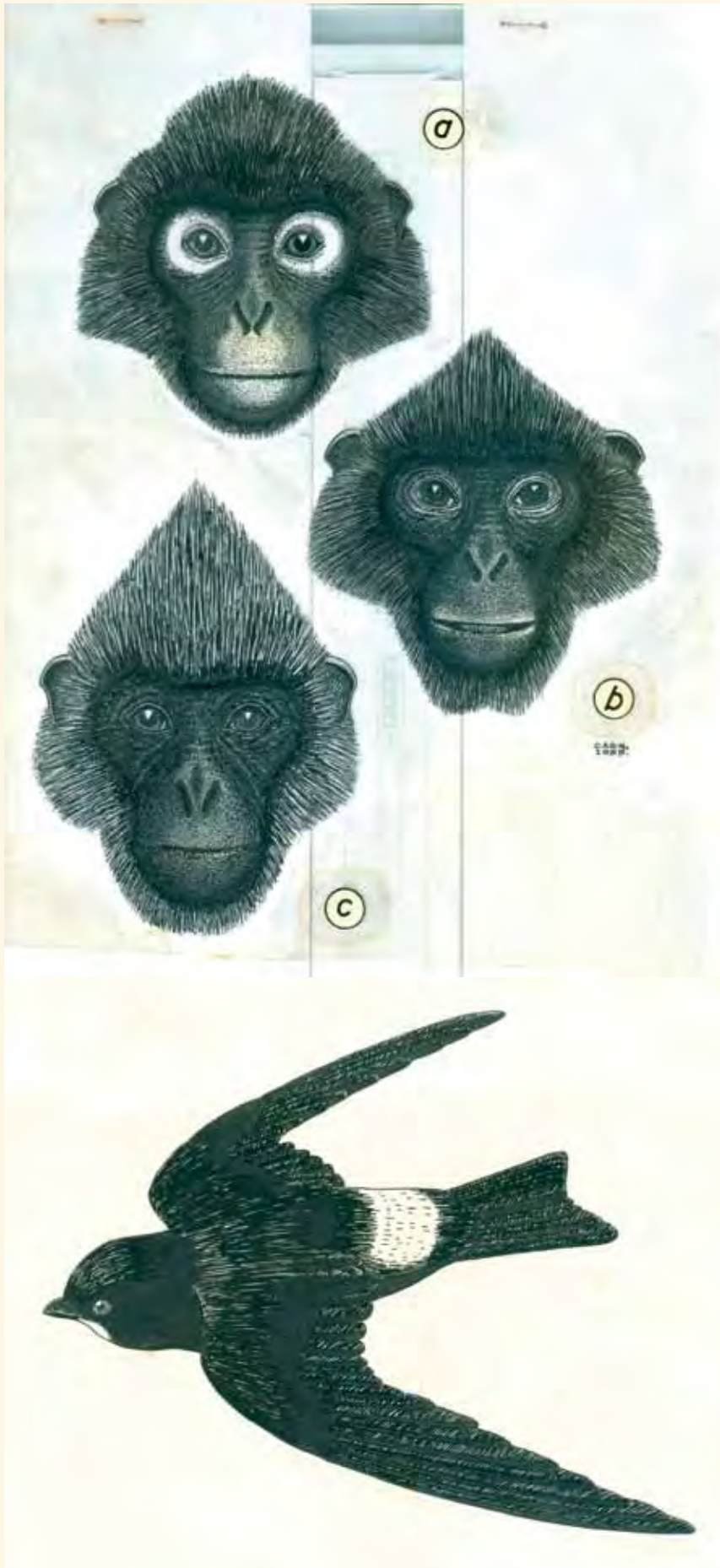
Collecting natural history specimens might appear to be fun and exciting on the surface but it has practical problems as well. Storage space and conservation matters are usually the main concerns when it comes to natural history collections even today. While fossils, seashells and bones were not subject to major decay, other natural specimens require complex conservation measures.

Curators and specialists had to have basic knowledge of other relevant disciplines such as medicine and taxidermy. Aside from publishing scientific reports, curators also published guidebooks to assist amateurs and special interests groups. Cecil Boden Kloss, himself a well-known taxidermist, wrote an instruction manual for preparing mammal skins¹¹.

Publications formed a part of every natural history collection and also served as commentaries on them. Kloss understood the importance of publications and had hence started the *Bulletins of the Raffles Museum*, which provided access to specialised subject matter and enabled readers to debate and acknowledge the work

produced by the museum curators. The *Bulletins* quickly became one of the premier scholarly journals in its time, publishing many important papers on Southeast Asian zoology. The illustrations in the *Bulletins* also served to supplement collection of natural specimens, closing any gaps and making up for any deficiencies with pictures. Illustrations of the specimens could act as a substitute or supplement for specimens that were difficult to preserve or only partially collected.

However, to produce an illustration of a specimen is not an easy task. Musch has commented that “when a collector or naturalist commissioned an artist to draw specimens of interests to him, and in a second stage even to transfer them onto a plate for the press, the plant or animal in question underwent considerable abstraction and distillation on its way to becoming a scientific illustration¹².” Carl Alexander Gibson-Hill, Director of the Raffles Museum (1911-1963) is known to act as both naturalist and artist. It is also interesting to note that he liked to make his own drawings in pen and ink, choosing not to rely on the Museum’s resident artist. He preferred to depict his subjects in black and white instead of colour for he noted that:



“[Colour illustrations] are pleasant to draw, but the blocks are expensive (for publishing), and they are frequently not as helpful as many beginners (bird watchers) imagine them to be. Black and white work places the emphasis on the arrangement of light and dark tones in the plumage. This is far more constant under varying climatic conditions than the colour itself¹³.”

We can see from Gibson-Hill's illustrations that a specimen was regarded as a representative of its species and its appearance was systematised. In most natural history illustrations, individual traits not typical of the subject's kind were minimised and the scientifically significant ones were accentuated. The elements important for human identification of the specimens are better rendered and considerably clearer in the picture than in the actual specimen itself. Musch commented that this pictorial abstraction technique applied by artists of natural history illustrations may also be understood as one way of taming the multifariousness of nature¹⁴.

The natural history collection enjoyed its prominence until 1969 where its fate took a sudden turn for the worse. The Raffles Museum was renamed the National Museum and new directions were set for the institution to cater for arts, history and anthropology. The natural history collection was moved out to the Singapore Science Centre and was later transferred to the University of Singapore's Bukit Timah campus and the collection became known as the Zoological Reference Collection in 1972. However due to space constraints and bad storage conditions, some specimens were damaged and it took a tremendous effort by the curators to prevent more losses. In 1986, the collection finally got a permanent home in the Kent Ridge campus of the National University of Singapore. Two years later, the university decided that the time was ripe to establish a research centre for biodiversity and hence oversaw the birth of the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research.

A set of natural history illustrations drawn by Carl Alexander Gibson-Hill.

A RACE AGAINST TIME: PRESERVING AND PRESENTING NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Today, the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research (RMBR) has well represented collections of animals – some of which are among the best in the world. To date, the RMBR has around 566,500 specimens¹⁵. Most of these items are irreplaceable, priceless and historically significant specimens.

Among the museum's mammal collection, the primates (a taxonomical group that includes monkeys and apes) which total 867 catalogued specimens are probably the best represented. The RMBR also has large collections of rats, squirrels and bats. The mammal collection has 315 species and around 15,000 specimens.

The RMBR is also one of the finest reference museums for Southeast Asian birds, with approximately 1,060 species and some 31,000 specimens, including a fine collection of eggs and nests. Even with legal constraints on bird collecting, a few good specimens are still donated from time to time by members of the public nowadays. These are usually casualties of the migratory season.

Presently, there are about 70,000 specimens in the RMBR's entomological collection. While many specimens are mounted on pins, others are preserved in vials of alcohol. Microscopic taxa like mites are mainly mounted on glass slides. All entomological specimens have been sorted according to their various taxonomic levels.

At an international level, despite of their ever-growing importance, natural history collections, like most other aspects of the museum world, are suffering from a serious decline in resources¹⁶. Along with the wider impacts of globalisation and economic inflation, most museums today are under serious budget constraints, inadequate funding, declining numbers of trained professionals and lack of young people who want to work in museums. It was reported that the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., lost 30 federal scientist positions in the last decade¹⁷.

The challenge of future museums lies on how these institutions manage to find ways of continuing to develop the research potential of their collections while learning how to live with reduced resources. In Owen's report, Robert Gropp, a representative of the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) commented that natural history collections are bleeding slowly. Many museums are losing staff positions due to cuts to their operating budget. Gropp predicts that slowly but surely they will lose resources until an administrator determine that it is best to close the facility¹⁸. These implications have resulted scientists and curators working in a museum in a race against time.

To make matters worse for natural history museums, the world is in the grip of a biodiversity crisis. Keith Thomson, an Emeritus Professor of Natural History at Oxford University, has warned that "as the whole ecosystems continue to be lost because of human activities, the need for natural history collections is more important than ever. These collections provide essential research in the biological sciences; serves as a vast library about what organisms have lived and are living on Earth; and contribute to public education in an easily accessible venue¹⁹."

Research in biodiversity is of particular urgency. Professor Peter Ng, Director of the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research, has remarked that "Southeast Asia is one of the world's biodiversity hotspots, though it has received much less attention compared to the Amazon, West Africa and the Great Barrier Reef. But how can we protect the diversity of this region if we do not conduct the necessary research to understand it in the first place²⁰?"

With natural history museums in Washington, New York and London drawing millions of visitors each year, there is demand from both the public and scientists of this region for a proper natural history museum in Singapore. Commentators and letter writers to the newspapers have noted that the current premises of the RMBR do not allow it to realise its full potential in education and research²¹. The museum has received tremendous public support

since recent media reports highlighted its vast but little-known collection. This call for a new facility was heard from an undisclosed member of the public who pledged S\$10 million for a natural history museum²². The plan to build a new natural history museum in Singapore is in the works and more funds are being raised to fulfil this vision. The new museum will aim to be the focal point for regional biodiversity research and education and it will be accessible to other universities, national agencies and nature lovers.

The modern museum is a constantly evolving entity. Julian Spalding, a former director of the Glasgow Museums, has observed that museums "will continue to have a duty to accumulate knowledge, but their authority will be based more in the future on their openness towards and commitment to learning, not on the weight of their knowledge to date²³." Given today's technological advancement, anyone with access to the Internet can obtain or claim any required form of information. Hence, museums would have a better chance of captivating the attention of a wider audience if they used as their starting point the ignorance we have all shared, and must share. In other words, museums need to preserve the past not merely for nostalgic reasons.

Nostalgia is personal; it dies with each individual and generation. The past only merits preservation if it has something to teach the public of today. Museums are about learning through looking. Hence, it is the museum's job to make its collections meaningful to audiences. Modern museums have to find more dynamic ways of integrating the public with the research functions of collections. Natural history collections do not just mirror the planet's biodiversity – they help to sustain it. For many museum visitors, the countless rows of stuffed or pickled specimens on display in the galleries are a reminder of what's at stake.

Selected Timeline of the Raffles Library and Museum²⁴

1823 – Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles and Dr Robert Morrison (1782-1834) come up with the idea of a scientific institution devoted to the study of natural history and history of the islands of the Malay Archipelago. Raffles departs for Bencoolen (present day Bengkulu, Sumatra) on 9 June. Work plans for the scientific institution are handed over to a board of trustees to oversee the project.

1827 – The institution building, known as the Singapore Institution, is erected but stands vacant for eight years.

1837 – The school library begins to build its collection of books. The management committee contemplates the formation of a museum in connection with the library.

1849 – The museum slowly begins to take shape. The Library receives an official gift of two gold coins from the Temenggong of Johore, presented by Governor Colonel W.J. Butterworth, who supports the management committee in pressing for the establishment of a museum.

1850 – The management committee reports that the museum is a valuable addition to the library and gradually sees a series of official gifts from neighbouring government officials. The Straits Settlements government announces the museum's participation in the Great Exhibition in London the following year.

1851 – The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations is held in London. It is the first in a series of World's Fair exhibitions of culture and industry.

1873 – Singapore participates in the Permanent Exhibition of Colonial Products in South Kensington, UK. Formal paperwork is put through for the establishment of the Raffles Library and Museum.

1874 – The Raffles Library and Museum (RLM) opens its doors to the public. The first Annual Report of the RLM is published. Issues reported frequently over the next century are: lack of space, lack of proper accommodation and too much work for the curator-cum-librarian.

1881 – Growing interest from the public and scientific society at large towards the library and museum. Scientists passing through Singapore begin to visit the museum and zoological specimens are sent for identification by experts.

1882 – After several relocations, the RLM is shifted to the foot of Fort Canning at Stamford Road.

1887 – The museum is officially opened on 12 October 1887 by Frederick Weld, Governor of the Straits Settlements.

1895 – Entomologist Dr Karl Richard Hanitsch (directorship 1908–19) appointed Curator and Librarian of the RLM. His principal research is in entomology (the study of insects), but he also works on other natural history specimens such as sponges, birds, amphibians and mammals. A large part

of his publication is on insects, in particularly, cockroaches. Hanitsch becomes director in 1908 and holds the position for eleven years. During his tenure, RLM's zoological collection prospers from expeditions around the region. The ethnological collection is also enhanced by donations and acquisitions from Agricultural Trade Shows around the region. Before his retirement, Hanitsch starts a collection of portraits, plans and pictures of old Singapore to celebrate the centenary of the founding of Singapore by Raffles.

1902 – Valentine Knight joins as assistant curator and taxidermist for the zoological collection, a post he holds till 1921. He is responsible for many taxidermy masterpieces during his service.

1911 – Growing interest in the museum from the local communities. In 1908, the museum sees over 10,500 visitors over the two-day Chinese New Year holiday and by 1918, some 17,472 visitors pass through the galleries.

1919 – Entomologist John Coney Moulton (directorship 1919–23) succeeds Dr Hanitsch as director. He was Curator of the Sarawak Museum (1909–15) and founding editor of the *Sarawak Museum Journal*. Moulton reorganises the natural history collection, giving the insect collection a proper display and reviews the chaotic and haphazardly arranged ethnological and archaeological collections. Moulton emphasises the museum's educational role and plans a series of guides to the different sections of the zoological collections. He resigns in 1923 to become Chief Secretary to the Government of Sarawak.

1921 – Frederick Nutter Chasen appointed assistant curator to take over from the retiring Valentine Knight. Chasen has a strong interest in birds and museum work.

1923 – Zoologist Cecil Boden Kloss (directorship 1923–32) takes over directorship from Moulton. In the early 1900s, Kloss travelled with American naturalist William Louis Abbott to the Andaman and Nicobar islands. He also worked under Herbert C. Robinson, Director of the Federated Malay States Museums. Kloss and Chasen make a strong team: they established the museum's zoological collection and boost the quality of research. Kloss retires in 1932, remembered as an ardent collector, skilful taxidermist, fine shot and a first class photographer.

1924 – Kloss and staff of RLM conduct the first systematic collecting expedition on material culture specimens from the Mentawai islands.

1928 – Kloss produces the *Bulletin of the Raffles Museum*. The first paper in the inaugural issue is written by Dr Hanitsch.

1930 – The museum's popularity continues. More local residents seek information from a commercial or scientific point of view on the museum. 300,000 visitors come annually.

1932 – Frederick Nutter Chasen (directorship 1932–42) is the natural choice as Kloss' successor. Chasen, the most reliable authority on Malaysian birds and mammals, authors more than 60 articles. He is also consulted regularly by every international expedition to the area. Sadly, he dies at sea attempting to flee Singapore on the eve of the Japanese invasion. Michael Wilmer Forbes Tweedie joins as assistant curator (1932–41) He was interned during the Japanese Occupation.

1935 – RLM receives three grants from the Carnegie Foundation, which are used to refurbish the museum galleries and cabinets, produce new research publications, fund more fieldwork and archaeological expeditions and employ additional staff. H.D. Collings joins to assist with the non-zoological collection. He has practical training in archaeology and experience in excavating prehistoric sites in Europe.

1942 – During the Japanese Occupation, RLM is headed by Professor Hideo Tanakadate, a volcanologist, and a handful of British scientists, who work with the Japanese to protect the research integrity and collection of the library and museum. Carl Alexander Gibson-Hill joins on the eve of the Japanese attack and is present when Professor Tanakadate enters the museum. He is interned together with other museum staff.

1945 – World War II ends. The museum is handed over to Gilbert Archer, Officer-in-charge of Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives of the British Military Administration. RLM was one of the few places not looted prior to the Japanese occupation.

1946 – Michael W.F. Tweedie (directorship 1946–57) takes over directorship from Gilbert Archer. His first challenge is to rebuild the building and reorganise some of the much neglected museum collections. The zoological and anthropological galleries are rearranged to focus on materials from the Malay Peninsula. Tweedie also recognises the need for greater specialisation of curators and the increased importance of the ethnographic collections. He creates the positions of 'Curator of Anthropology' and 'Curator of Zoology'. Tweedie also conducts many expeditions around

Southeast Asia. H.D. Collings is appointed Curator of Anthropology and C.A. Gibson-Hill Curator of Zoology.

1957 – Carl Alexander Gibson-Hill (directorship 1957–63) is appointed director. The last expatriate director of the Raffles Museum, Gibson-Hill is a medical doctor by training and a self-taught ornithologist and photographer. A keen naturalist and dedicated scientist, Gibson-Hill's scholarship soon embraces Malaysian history and archaeology as well. He is found dead in his home in Singapore just before he is to relinquish the post of director in 1963. Graduates of the University of Malaya – Eric Alfred and Christopher Hooi – join as Curator of Zoology and Curator of Anthropology respectively.

1960 – The museum and library split with the latter forming the National Library adjacent to the museum building. In 2005 the National Library is relocated to Victoria Street. The museum is renamed the Raffles Museum.

1965 – The Republic of Singapore is born.

1969 – Raffles Museum is formally renamed the National Museum in the interest of emphasising a sense of national identity.

1972 – The zoological collection is transferred out of the National Museum and subsequently shifted to several locations before it comes to rest at the National University of Singapore.

1993 – The national collection is devolved to start new national museums; the Asian Civilisations Museum inherits the ethnology collection; the Singapore Art Museum inherits the national art collection; and the Singapore History Museum (now known as the National Museum of Singapore) inherits the historical material collection showing evidence of Singapore's pre-modern, colonial and post-Independence past.

Endnotes:

- 1 The term 'natural history collection' refers to the collections of both animal and plant specimens.
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- 5 Raffles, T.S. "A letter from Stamford Raffles to Dr. T. Horsfield at Singapore, 20th Apr. 1823", *Correspondences between Thomas Stamford Raffles and Dr. Thomas Horsfield*. Collection of the library of the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, Leiden, Netherlands, 1812-1823.
- 6 For more information, please refer to the timeline of the Raffles Library & Museum. It includes a list of selected events and museum staff who actively have been studying and collecting natural history specimens around the Southeast Asia region.
- 7 *Bulletin of the Raffles Museum*. Singapore: Raffles Museum, 1928.

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- 10 Wray, Cecil. *Account of an expedition to the Batu Puteh and Ulu Batang Padang Mountains*. Singapore: Singapore & Straits Printing Office, 1987.
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- 16 Thomson, Keith. *Natural History Museum Collections in the 21st century*. Washington: American Institute of Biological Sciences, 2005.
- 17 Owen, James. Are Museums' Specimen Collection Going Extinct? London: National Geographic News, 3 June 2004.
- 18 Owen, James. Are Museums' Specimen Collection Going Extinct? London: National Geographic News, 3 June 2004.
- 19 Thomson, Keith. *Natural History Museum Collections in the 21st century*. Washington: American Institute of Biological Sciences, 2005.
- 20 *Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research Newsletter*. Singapore: Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research, number 1, 15 June 2001.
- 21 Vaughan, Victoria. "Natural History needs more room in Singapore." *Straits Times*. 4 Jun 2009.
- 22 Tan, Dawn Wei. "\$10m gift for natural history museum." *Straits Times*. 24 Jan 2010.
- 23 Spalding, Julian. *The poetic museum: Reviving historic collections*. Munich: Prestel, 2002.
- 24 Please note that this is not a comprehensive timeline of the Raffles Library & Museum but selected milestones of events and some key museum staff who had contributed to collecting natural history specimens.

LIVING TREASURES IN THE TREETOPS:

A Fresh Look
at Singapore's
Banded Leaf
Monkeys

museings

BY ANDIE ANG

IMAGES: ANDIE ANG, MARCUS CHUA & DANIEL KOH





Travelling along the arboreal forested highways with graceful four-limbed locomotion is an enigmatic acrobat in a black coat of fur: The Banded Leaf Monkey.

Visitors to local parks and nature areas such as MacRitchie Reservoir and Bukit Timah Nature Reserve (BTNR) would be familiar with the sight of sizeable troops of monkeys foraging by the trails. Known as the Long-tailed Macaque (*Macaca fascicularis*), this opportunistic primate has managed to thrive despite widespread disturbance of its habitats, its omnivorous habits and tolerance of humans. A few regard the macaques as nuisances, but to others, their presence adds a rare touch of the wild and wonderful to life in the urban jungle, and many weekend warriors savour the opportunity to see this versatile survivor of Singapore's natural heritage.

Not many people, however, are aware of another monkey that dwells in the deeper parts of our nature reserves. Unlike the long-tailed macaque, this creature seldom descends to the ground and would find human treats unpalatable and indeed, harmful, to its health. And though it was once found all over Singapore, it now survives only in small patches of forest in the heart of the island.

SHY AND SCARCE VEGETARIANS

A study in black and white, the Banded Leaf Monkey (*Presbytis femoralis*) is a startlingly pretty animal with midnight fur and ivory bands traversing the underside of its body and limbs. A diversity in hairstyles is often observed; while the scruffy, unkempt look is the most popular, an upswept Mohawk hairdo is also not rare.

Unlike the long-tailed macaques, which happily snack on insects and bird's eggs when given the chance, the banded leaf monkey advocates strict vegetarianism, consuming primarily fruits and immature leaves. However, typical Singaporeans that they are, they are extremely picky about their diet. Depending on the season and the availability of favoured fruits, the monkeys travel long distances in order to procure suitable food, which contrary to popular belief is not always abundant everywhere in the forest. Thus, their survival may hinge on the continued existence of sufficient and uninterrupted expanses of forest that would allow the monkeys to locate their preferred food sources. The constraints of living in land-scarce Singapore is as much a reality to them as anyone else; the leaf monkeys share their minuscule forest plots with Singapore's two other native



Banded leaf monkey with infant. Photo: Andie Ang.



Banded leaf monkey. Photo: Daniel Koh.

primates: the aforementioned long-tailed macaques and the rare Sunda Slow Loris (*Nycticebus coucang*), a wide-eyed, fluffy thing that comes out only at night to feed on fruit, nectar and insects.

Shy by nature, the banded leaf monkey is almost always the first to crash away into the depths of the jungle upon seeing a human. This comes as no surprise, given that these monkeys were frequently trapped as pets and poached for the cooking pot by people many decades ago. In those earlier, more innocent days, scenes of banded leaf monkeys leaping in an orderly line across the forests emitting calls that can be heard kilometres away were common throughout the island.

Up to the 1920s, banded leaf monkeys were still reported to be widespread in various areas including Bukit Timah, Changi, Pandan, Tampines, and Tuas, where industrial estates and shopping malls presently stand. Deforestation for urban development led to the relentless

“We must do whatever we can, together with the rest of the world, to slow down the loss of biological diversity. Let’s try to do something to conserve the banded leaf monkeys because it is a very powerful symbol of what we are trying to do in Singapore to conserve the endangered species, both of plants and trees as well as mammals.”

- Professor Tommy Koh, Ambassador-at-Large, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chairman, National Heritage Board. Professor Koh was speaking as guest-of-honour at ‘An Evening Dedicated to Conserving Singapore’s Biodiversity,’ a seminar organised by the National University of Singapore on 16 April 2010.

shrinking of their habitat, confining them to isolated woods in the BTNR and the Central Catchment Nature Reserve (CCNR); a decline which, unfortunately, did not stop there. On October 1987, an elderly female believed to be the last banded leaf monkey in the BTNR was mauled to death by dogs as she climbed down a tree. She now rests in peace at the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research (RMBR), a formalin-drenched

reproach in charcoal and horn. With the subsequent construction of the Bukit Timah Expressway (BKE) right across the two reserves, habitat availability for wildlife dwindled as the remaining two green lungs of Singapore were disconnected, arresting biodiversity exchange and leaving the CCNR as the last refuge of the banded leaf monkeys in Singapore.

TAKING STOCK OF OUR NATURAL HERITAGE

Singapore's incessant march towards greater development in the past century has also contributed to a severe decline in the diversity of her native wildlife species. Some are sadly believed to be beyond rescue, such as the Cream-coloured Giant Squirrel (*Ratufa affinis*). This cat-sized rodent was first described from Singapore in 1821, but only two individuals were last sighted by 1995. Previously described by Sir Stamford Raffles as being abundant in the forests, this species is probably already extinct in Singapore.

On a similar note, some 30% of the total native vascular plant flora (namely flowering plants, conifers and ferns) is presumed nationally extinct, with another 30% regarded as critically endangered in Singapore. This deterioration in local species richness and abundance is a call for urgent action in research and measures to conserve the endangered species that still survive in Singapore, lest they go the way of the cream-coloured giant squirrel.

The banded leaf monkey was first described from our nation in 1838 and is considered Critically Endangered in Singapore. Based on fur colouration and other physical characteristics, some scientists believe that the banded leaf monkey may be a subspecies unique to Singapore, differing from populations in neighbouring Johor, Malaysia. As a key representative of our natural heritage, the banded leaf monkey deserves a high priority in conservation. However, the difficulty in tracking and observing these enigmatic primates has been a major factor deterring researchers from studying them. Little is known about their natural history and ecology, except that their population size was estimated at just 10 in the 1980s and approximately 20 in the 1990s.

RECENT DISCOVERIES BRING HOPE

My strong interest and love for primates propelled me to carry out a Master's research project on the banded leaf monkey in Singapore, 15 years after the only other study done on this elusive species. With generous funding from the Ah Meng Memorial Conservation Fund by Wildlife Reserves Singapore and logistical support from the National Parks Board, I spent nearly two years trudging through the tangled expanses of the forest.

But this effort has finally paid off. We estimate the present local population to consist of at least 40 banded leaf monkeys, two times greater than previously believed. We have also provided the first report on their reproductive biology and infant development, and found encouraging signs that the population may be recovering. In addition, food plant species have been identified through feeding observations, the first preliminary analysis of their feeding ecology. This provides valuable information on the species of trees the monkeys require to adequately feed and thrive.

Furthermore, we have clarified the taxonomic debate on whether the Singapore population is the same subspecies as that in Johor through genetic studies of their faeces. Contrary to prior belief, the banded leaf monkeys in Singapore and Johor are likely to be the same subspecies, elevating hopes of possible translocation and reintroduction of the species



The greater mousedeer, a recent rediscovery. Photo: Marcus Chua.

in both localities in order to ensure their long-term survival. A comparative study on the different populations of the banded leaf monkeys is therefore essential towards a deeper understanding of their population ecology. With a research grant from the Jane Goodall Institute in Singapore, I will be continuing my research on the banded leaf monkeys, this time on those found in Malaysia.

Despite depressing news of various species going extinct over the years, some heartening rediscoveries in Singapore's natural heritage do help to lift the spirit a little. For instance, during my research on the banded leaf monkey, we rediscovered several plant species previously thought to be locally extinct. And in 2008, Marcus Chua, a fellow student at the National University of Singapore, rediscovered the greater mousedeer (*Tragulus napu*) with signs of a breeding population in Pulau Ubin during his field research. These are the results of a continuous effort in scientific research into local biodiversity, and demonstrate the importance of regular studies and monitoring in order to provide timely updates on species abundance and distribution. Hope is not all lost!

The preservation of our natural heritage requires concerted efforts from each and every individual of the society. The findings of my research on banded leaf monkeys, which were possible thanks to the support of both the public and private sectors, are evidence of this. Contributions from and collaborations between researchers, educational institutions, government bodies and non-governmental organisations can enhance the quality of biodiversity research and increase the appreciation of our national treasures, many of which are uniquely Singapore's. Strong public support and interest is also vital to conservation efforts, as citizens become aware and more appreciative of Singapore's natural heritage and the need to strike a balance between urban development and maintaining the health and biodiversity of our remaining forests.

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THE RAFFLES MUSEUM OF BIODIVERSITY RESEARCH: A REPOSITORY FOR THE REGION'S NATURAL TREASURES

Located at the Faculty of Science of the National University of Singapore, the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research (RMBR) has its origins in the Raffles Museum founded in 1849 to house the natural history and ethnographic collections of Sir Stamford Raffles. The natural history collection was later passed to the RMBR when the Raffles Museum was renamed the National Museum in 1969.

Today, the RMBR is home to a Zoological Reference Collection that is one of the largest assemblies of Southeast Asian fauna in the region, with at least 500,000 catalogued specimens. The collection is a valuable research tool for local and overseas academics as well as students who study the biodiversity and ecology of the Asia Pacific region.

More information about the RMBR and its public viewing gallery is available at: <http://rmbn.nus.edu.sg>





RAINFORESTS BY THE SEA

Celebrating Singapore's Mangrove Forests

museings

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Mangrove forests are the “rainforests by the sea”. Found in the tropics, these forests, which grow at the interface between land and sea, consist of unique flora and fauna assemblages specially adapted to tolerate fluctuating salinities, muddy and anoxic soils¹. In Singapore, the general public can get ‘up close’ to local mangroves in Pasir Ris Park, Pulau Ubin, Pulau Semakau and Sungei Buloh Wetlands Reserve, an ASEAN Heritage wetland site.

At first glance, walking through a place like Sungei Buloh Wetlands Reserve could lead to the mistaken conclusion that the biodiversity of mangrove forests is mainly restricted to homogenous trees and pesky mosquitoes. cursory glances such as these have done little to promote the usefulness of mangrove forests and the rich biodiversity that lies beneath its deceptive exterior.

A FRAGILE ECOSYSTEM

Throughout Singapore's history, it has been unfortunate that few have had the foresight to see past the seemingly ‘dirty’ exterior of mangrove forests and have thus unfairly labelled them as wastelands.

Since the 1960s, coastal habitats including mangrove swamps have been cleared en masse for the construction of residential and commercial sites, prawn ponds and land reclamation. These unique habitats which are home to a myriad of organisms have also been used as sites where industrial effluents are discharged and solid and metallic anthropogenic wastes are dumped^{2,3,4}. In 1820, one year after the founding of modern Singapore, mangrove swamps covered about 13% of Singapore's fringe areas². Today, these unique habitats represent less than 0.5% of Singapore's land area, concentrated mainly along the northern fringes of the country².



The mangrove forest – a unique ecosystem residing on the border of land and sea.

The mangrove forests which remain are often very small and severely fragmented. The mangrove forests of today are no longer large enough to support big carnivores such as the tiger, which could be seen freely roaming the island in the early 19th century. The patchy distribution of trees along the most seaward portion of the mangroves have also resulted in a large amount of tree-falls due to strong winds and the strong waves produced in the wake of large ships travelling near the mangrove forest².

Small and fragmented mangrove forests do not bode well for the long-term sustainability of what is left of Singapore's mangrove forests. Besides an increasing tree-fall rate, establishment of young mangrove trees has become increasingly difficult as there are less mature trees around to shield the young seedlings from strong waves that enter the mangrove forest during a rising tide. Should Singapore's mangrove forest remain unprotected and unconserved, Singapore may be losing a portion of her mangrove forests every year, along with their unique biodiversity and invaluable environmental services.

PROVIDING A SERVICE TO MANKIND

Mangrove forests contain plants and animals which provide man with useful materials, food and valuable coastal protection. Even till today, entire coastal communities in countries such as Thailand can be sustained through reliance on mangrove forest products⁵.

Controlled burning of mangrove tree wood can also provide charcoal which has applications more widespread than just barbeque starting. Charcoal is highly absorbent and is widely used in removing bad odours from air and water and to absorb harmful gases in the stomach in the unfortunate case of diarrhoea or severe stomach aches⁶.

Many people would be surprised that the ubiquitous 'atap-chee' in Singapore's beloved dessert – the ice kachang – is the seed of the Nipah, a palm tree that grows only in mangrove forests. The sugary sap from the stalk of the nipah inflorescence (or flower cluster) can also be used to make vinegar and palm sugar (Gula Melaka), while the large fronds can be weaved into anything from baskets to kampong house roofs⁶.

However, plants are not the only organisms in a mangrove forest with medicinal benefits. Haemocyanin in the blood of the horseshoe crab has been widely used by doctors as a diagnostic tool to detect harmful gram-negative bacteria⁶.

The mangrove forest is also a rich fishing ground that provides seafood ranging from the cheap to the very expensive (think of local delicacies such as drunken prawns and chilli crabs). Prawns from the family Penaeidae such as the tiger prawn as well as the mud crab (*Scylla spp.*) are common inhabitants of mangrove forests. They share a common home with other organisms like the flower crab (*Portunus pelagicus*), the



Bruguiera gymnorhiza, a mangrove plant that is more than just a pretty sight – it is able to absorb and accumulate pollutants from surrounding soils and water bodies. Photo: Jean Yong.

Teochew vinegar crab (*Episesarma spp.*) and the sea hum or blood cockle (*Anadara granosa*) which provide humans with a diverse source of food.

The usefulness of mangrove forests does not stop at the organism level. The mangrove forest structure has been found to play an important economic role in aquaculture, sediment accretion, coastal protection, carbon sequestration and removal of toxic chemicals⁷⁻¹³. Collectively, the ecological services provided by mangrove forests can amount to about USD\$1.6 billion per annum; and humans get it all for free¹³.

A team of scientists have found that the biomass of several commercially important species of fish was more than doubled when adult fish habitats in the sea were connected to mangroves¹⁰. It is also estimated that 80% of the world's fish catch are directly or indirectly dependent on mangrove habitats as many fishes utilise mangrove swamps as nursery areas for their young⁷. The dense networks of mangrove roots serve as protected places where fish larvae can seek refuge from predators, giving them a better chance for survival.

The extensive roots of mangrove trees not only serve as a place of refuge for small nekton (swimming organisms) but also enable them to hold sediment and thus, prevent coastal erosion³. These roots also buffer nearby coastal communities from the full force of tidal waves during natural disasters such as tsunamis^{13, 14}.

In lieu of the pressing need to abate global climate change, mangrove forests should not be sidelined for their ability to function as carbon sinks. A study on the carbon sequestering ability of mangrove forests in the Universiti Sains Malaysia has found that 4.5 million hectares of mangroves can absorb the carbon emissions of about five million cars⁶!

Furthermore, mangrove forests are nature's 'detoxification' agents. Mangrove plants, have been reported to sequester toxic chemicals such as water-borne pollutants and heavy metals, and store them in aboveground biomass^{15, 16}. The mangrove tree, *Bruguiera gymnorhiza*, is not only a pretty sight, but is able to bio-accumulate pyrene, while its 'sister' species, *Bruguiera sexangula* is able to absorb cadmium¹⁷. However, mangrove trees of the genus *Bruguiera* are not the only ones able to clean up the environment. On your next visit to Singapore's mangrove forests, look out for *Xylocarpus granatum*. This mangrove tree with a 'cannon-ball' fruit is also a hyper-accumulator of pollutants including boron, iron, copper, manganese and zinc¹⁷.

A RAY OF HOPE

Much has been said about the ecological services mangrove forests provide not only to humans but to the ecosystems connected directly and indirectly to it. As such, it would be in our best interest to halt the current continuing loss of Singapore's mangrove forests.



TURNING THE TIDE FOR SINGAPORE'S MANGROVES

In recent decades, Singapore's remaining mangrove habitats have enjoyed a reprieve of sorts after earlier decades of retreat. This hopeful trend arose as both citizens and the government came to see and appreciate the role of mangrove forests as natural habitats that deliver vital ecological services as well as contribute to education, tourism and enhancing the quality of life and leisure in a largely urban city-state.

One of the earliest results of this drive to find a balance between development and conservation was Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve. This wetland of old prawn ponds surrounded by rich mangroves was discovered to be a haven for migratory shorebirds by nature lovers in 1986, and following a proposal to conserve the area, the Parks & Recreation Department (the precursor to the National Parks Board) took over the development and management of the wetlands, which was officially opened by then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong on 6 December 1993. Sungei Buloh was later gazetted as a nature reserve in 2001 and was named Singapore's ASEAN Heritage Park in 2003 as a protected area of high conservation value.

A lush mangrove forest is also among the highlights of Chek Jawa Wetlands at the eastern tip of Pulau Ubin. Originally slated for urban development, this coastal wetland was revealed to be a biodiverse mix of habitats

for many rare plants and animals following surveys by the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research. Thousands of Singaporeans subsequently visited the shore and this led to calls to preserve Chek Jawa. As the land was not urgently required for development, the Ministry of National Development announced a 10-year deferment of land reclamation at Chek Jawa in January 2002 and the National Parks Board opened in July 2007 the Chek Jawa Wetlands which features a coastal boardwalk, viewing tower and visitor centre in a historic Tudor cottage originally built in 1930s by the Chief Surveyor of Ubin, Langdon Williams.

Meanwhile, residents of Tampines and Pasir Ris get to enjoy mangroves almost at their doorstep, thanks to an initiative by the National Parks Board to preserve a 5 ha patch of mangrove around Sungei Tampines and Sungei Api Api, where a successful mangrove regeneration project began in the early 1990s.

The lessons from this project were later translated to Pulau Semakau in the Southern Islands, where the National Environment Agency operates an offshore landfill that doubles as a nature destination, thanks to an effort to replant two plots of mangroves that had to be removed during the construction of the landfill. Today, Pulau Semakau continues to harbour thriving mangroves and reef flats with abundant bird life and marine creatures.



Sungei Api Api mangroves. Photo: Ria Tan.



Mangrove boardwalk at Pasir Ris Park (where Sg Tampines is). Photo: Ria Tan.



The foliage and fruit of the *Bruguiera hainesii* mangrove tree. Photo: Jean Yong.

Singapore's mangroves can be preserved and even, encouraged to grow, should successful mangrove restoration schemes be put in place. However, mangrove restoration can be a notoriously challenging project especially if the restoration committee has not been properly trained in mangrove management practices such as mangrove zonation.

Despite the small land area of Singapore's mangroves, the mangrove forest can be roughly divided into different zones with distinct plant species found at different areas in the forest. For example, plants from the *Ceriops* genus can be found closer to the land while mangrove trees from the genus *Rhizophora* are more suited for life near the open ocean¹⁸. In the past, mangrove restoration projects in various countries made the mistake of planting incorrect mangrove plants in the different zones of the mangrove forest, resulting in much preventable plant death and a loss of capital.

However, there have been shining examples of successful mangrove restoration efforts on Singapore's own shores. Restoration of mangrove forests at Sungei Api Api in Tampines and on Pulau Semakau have resulted in a more robust mangrove ecosystem in these two locations (see box on pg. 56).

To aid in educating future mangrove conservationists on the importance of recognising the species of mangrove plants best suited for life in the different mangrove zones, the National Institute of Education's National Sciences and Science Education Academic Group has produced a Comparative Mangrove Guide Sheet (see pg. 61). This guide sheet, coupled with continuous mangrove research contributions and educational outreach programmes could help increase the current understanding of Singapore's mangroves in terms of its ecology, biodiversity and conservation needs.

Right: Propagules (fruits) of *Bruguiera hainesii* at different stages of maturation. Photo: Jean Yong.

The purpose of education on mangrove biology is however not merely restricted to conservation needs. The recent discovery of two rare mangrove species in Singapore highlights the importance of education in the area of mangrove biodiversity. Without prior knowledge of what kind of plants can be found in Singapore's mangrove forests, these two new species (and many more in the future) might just have gone un-noticed!

Careful morphological and chromosomal analyses revealed that the local *Kandelia candel* (a small tree called Pisang Pisang) is of a distinct species from other *Kandelia* species found in East Asia. As such, the plants of these species were renamed *Kandelia obovata* Sheue, Liu & Yong; adding another new species to Singapore's mangrove record. Another cause for celebration would be the discovery of the last two *Bruguiera hainesii* in June 2003. These two plants were found in Sungei Loyang and Sungei Jelutong (Pulau Ubin) respectively. Although shining a ray of hope into the plight of Singapore's mangrove ecosystem, these findings serve to highlight the vast amount of biodiversity remaining in Singapore's mangrove forest which need our protection. If nothing is done to conserve the little of what remains of Singapore's mangroves, the rich biodiversity and natural heritage within these truly amazing habitats might soon become a thing of the past.





Fruit of *Sonneratia caseolaris*, a mangrove tree that is now rare in Singapore. Photo: Jean Yong.

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A comparative mangrove guide-sheet would allow easier identification of mangrove plants in the field. The purpose of education on mangrove biology is however not merely restricted to conservation needs. The recent discovery of two rare mangrove species in Singapore highlights the importance of education in the area of mangrove biodiversity. Without prior knowledge of what kind of plants can be found in Singapore's mangrove forests, these two new species (and many more in the future) might just have gone un-noticed! Photo: Jean Yong.



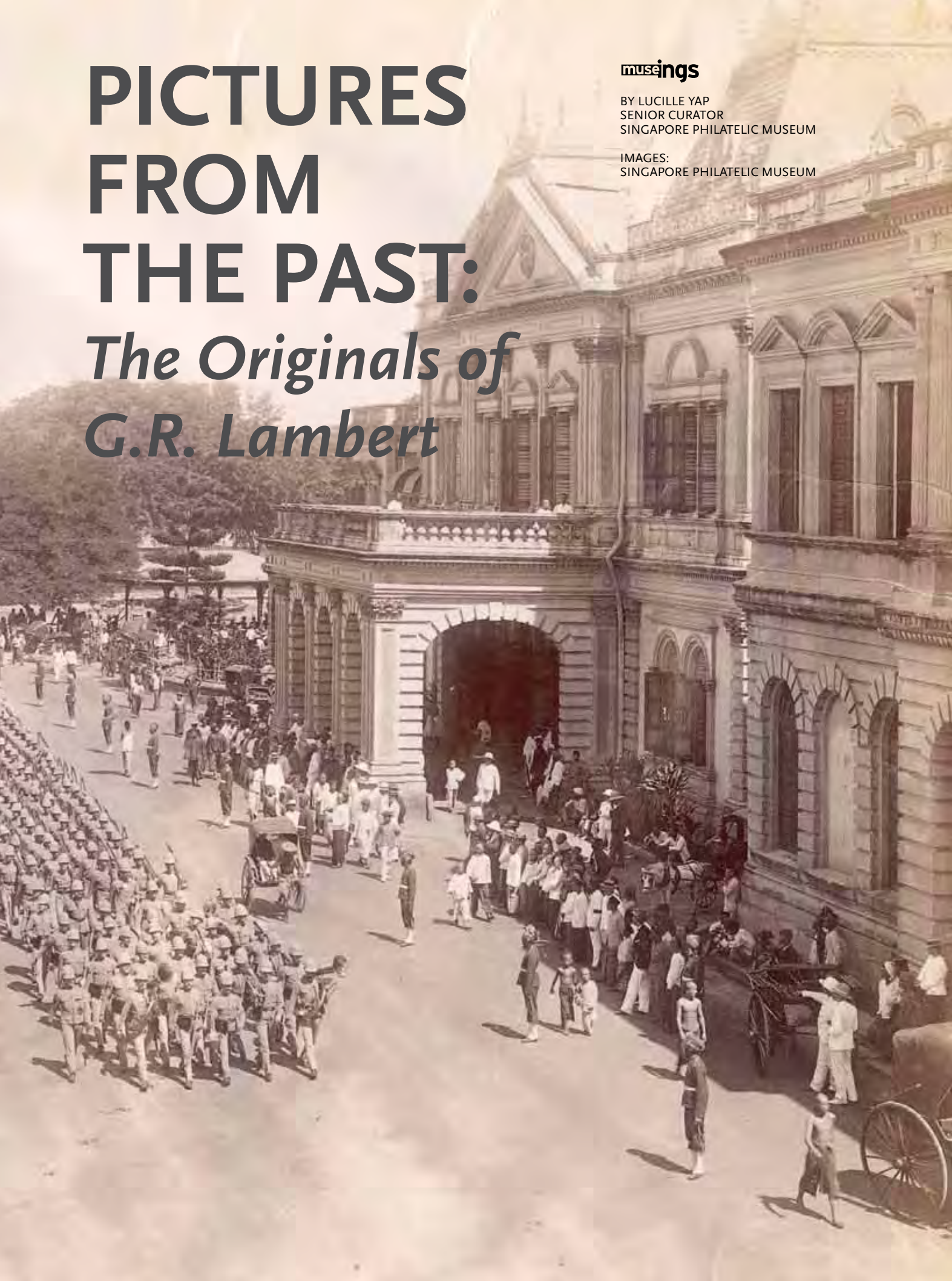
Parade passing the Municipal Offices in celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee on 22 June 1897.

PICTURES FROM THE PAST: *The Originals of G.R. Lambert*

musings

BY LUCILLE YAP
SENIOR CURATOR
SINGAPORE PHILATELIC MUSEUM

IMAGES:
SINGAPORE PHILATELIC MUSEUM





Kolek (a kind of Malay boat) race at the annual New Year regatta, circa 1900s.

G.R. Lambert (b. 1846) from Dresden, Germany, is a name closely associated with the early photographic history of Singapore. He was one of the earliest commercial photographers who had made a name in Singapore and the neighbouring regions, and was amongst the first to establish a permanent photograph studio in Singapore in the 1880s.

The photographic company he set up, G. R. Lambert & Co., had the most extensive inventory of contemporary views of Singapore, the Malay Peninsula, Borneo and Sumatra. Comprising about 3,000 subjects, it was known to be one of the finest collections in the East. G. R. Lambert & Co. also maintained a high reputation for artistic portraiture.

G. R. Lambert & Co.'s works are valuable historical records of the growth and developing topography of Singapore as a British colonial centre. The impressive stock of photographs and postcards produced by G. R. Lambert & Co. is today treasured as archival photographic documents providing a visual reference of what Singapore was like more than a century ago.

CAPTURING IMAGES OF THE COMMUNITY

The first mention of G. R. Lambert & Co. was an advertisement placed in the *Singapore Daily Times* by Mr Lambert in April 1867 to inform the community of Singapore that he had opened a photographic firm, G. R. Lambert & Co., on No. 1, High Street. But he seemed to have left Singapore, only to return a full decade later, in May 1877, and a similar announcement was placed again in the local press.



G.R. Lambert. Image Courtesy of Prof Cheah Jin Seng



Singapore Club and the Post Office with Cavenagh Bridge at the back. This photograph was taken before 1906. The Victoria Memorial Hall clock tower, which was completed in 1906, could be seen in later photographs.

From his return until the end of World War I, G. R. Lambert & Co. produced high quantities of large format original photographs (8 x 10 in or 20 x 27.5 cm) featuring landscapes and people of Singapore for sale to the public. These photographs can be easily identified by the company's logo which was dry-stamped on the lower right-hand corner of each photograph.

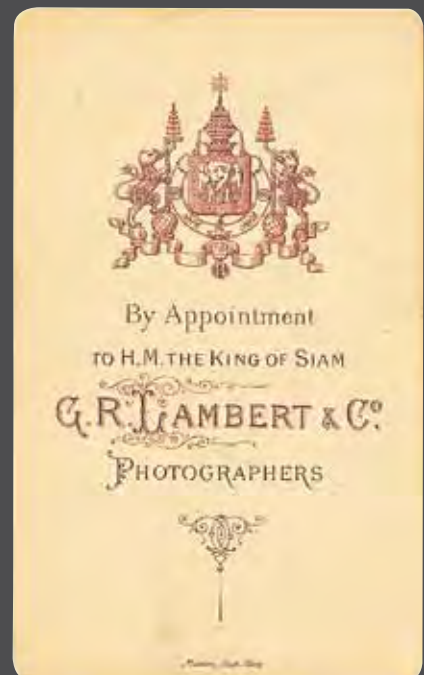
G. R. Lambert & Co. was also extensively patronised by the British colonial authorities to record political occasions and official visits. The firm was not only famous in Singapore but also in the region. It was also appointed as official photographers to the King of Siam, and also the Sultan of Johore. This appointment was proudly printed on the back of a photograph taken in Singapore in 1894.

At the end of the 19th century, G. R. Lambert & Co. had become by far the largest and most successful photographic studio in Southeast Asia. The company operated from the head office at Gresham House, Battery Road and branch studio in Orchard Road, and had overseas branches in Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, and Sumatra.

It is difficult to make any accurate assessment of Mr Lambert's own photographic contribution as his presence in Singapore was sporadic. The firm was managed by Mr Alexander Koch, who had entered the business as an assistant around 1883-1884. Mr Koch's position as manager was later taken over by Mr H.T. Jensen, who ran the business from around 1908-1910. The company was subsequently managed by a number of managers who were operating more as caretakers. The company closed down in 1918.

FROM PHOTOGRAPHS TO PICTURE POSTCARDS

At the turn of the 20th century, G. R. Lambert & Co. and other professional photographers were challenged by the rise of family photographers and amateur



Announcement of the appointment by King of Siam. Image Courtesy of Prof Cheah Jin Seng



G. R. Lambert & Co's original photographic studio in Gresham House next to the Medical Hall at Battery Road, circa 1902

photographic societies. As a result, they quickly diversified their photographic business into the production of postcards and the servicing of amateur needs.

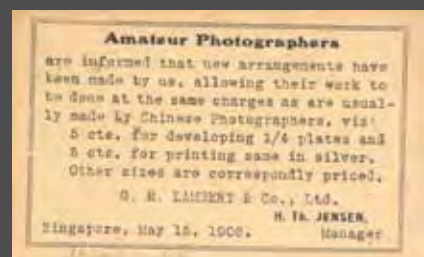
The new century ushered in a profitable postcard craze which reached its greatest height of popularity from 1906 to 1913, a period which collectors refer to as the Golden Age of Picture Postcards.

The large photographic business and the vast catalogue of photographs which G. R. Lambert & Co. produced fuelled the lucrative picture postcard trade. It was said that the company had a turnover of about quarter of a million cards a year.

The first picture postcard of Singapore was produced in 1897 by G. R. Lambert & Co. It was not the same as the photograph postcards we have today. They were in fact real photographs pasted on the blank sides of printed postal stationery postcards.

The outbreak of the war in Europe in 1914 brought a complete halt to the picture postcard collecting craze and effectively brought an end to the Golden Age of Singapore Picture Postcards (1906-1913). G. R. Lambert & Co. ceased operation when the war ended in 1918.

From 2 August 2010 to 2 January 2011, the Singapore Philatelic Museum will display a collection of photographs and picture postcards by G.R. Lambert & Co donated by Mr Koh Seow Chuan.



Advertisement of services catering to amateur photographers printed on the back of postcard.



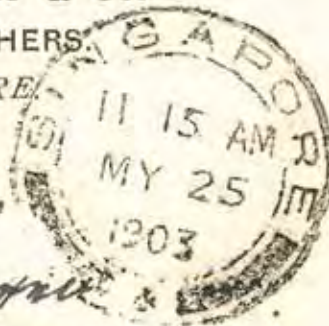
A postal stationery postcard with a detachable reply portion. The photograph was pasted onto the back of the reply portion of the postcard.



Singapore 5. Sept. 1899
 Liebe Tante Minna: Bin gestern
 hier angekommen & loge im Hotel.
 Diese interessante Stadt wohl alle
 Völker hier vertreten wunderbar.
 Schöne tropische Vegetation, bin
 ausserordentlich entzückt von all dem Geschehen.
 8^{1/2} Meilen fahre ich weiter nach Bangkok, von dort melde
 mich Herzl. Eltern beim Hefte Otto

Double postcard used in 1905 showing panoramic view of the Singapore waterfront.

G. R. LAMBERT & Co.
 PHOTOGRAPHERS
 SINGAPORE



G. R. Lambert & Co.
 Terkauer Alex. Koch
 P/a. Herrn Dr. Börsler
 Zwischau
 i. S. Sachsen
 25. Molyestri.
 Germany

Vignette of Boat Quay, new harbour and Johnston's Pier, used in 1899.



The largest of the 18,000 or so islands that make up Indonesia, Sumatra is also one of the largest islands in the world, with a rich cultural diversity and has some of the earliest settlements in the region. Yet it remains largely in the wake of a broader interest in Javanese culture in the world of international exhibitions. Despite its geographical proximity, Sumatra is even less well known to Singaporeans, many of whom have not ventured much further than the shores of Lake Toba or the southern islands such as Bintan.



Sumatra: ISLE OF GOLD

museings

BY HEIDI TAN
SENIOR CURATOR, SOUTHEAST ASIA
ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

IMAGES:
ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

A CENTRE FOR CULTURAL EXCHANGES

Sumatra's position along the Straits of Malacca has resulted in a cultural legacy that illustrates how various streams of influence took place. Over the past two millennia, Indian, Chinese, Islamic, regional and European influences prevailed at different times.

The material cultures presented in the exhibition *Sumatra: Isle of Gold* include Bronze-Age objects of the early Austronesian communities, Hindu-Buddhist materials of the maritime kingdom of Srivijaya (7th-13th centuries), Chinese materials both imported and locally made, court arts of the coastal Islamic sultanates such as Aceh, Jambi and Palembang, Riau-Lingga and Siak. Artefacts that show interactions with remote cultures such as Batak and Nias and objects made in response to European influence during the colonial period, one also included.

INDIAN INFLUENCES - THE LEGACY OF ANCIENT HINDU-BUDDHIST KINGDOMS

Indian sources from the 3rd century BCE and later mention of *Suvarnadvipa* or 'Gold Island', which probably included the region and later Sumatra. Although gold was mined in Sumatra, natural resources such as benzoin (a fragrant resin used in perfumery and ritual offerings), camphor (another aromatic resin obtained from a forest tree) and by the 15th century, pepper, were highly sought after by overseas markets. These goods were traded for prized imported commodities such as Indian printed cloth and Chinese ceramics.

Hindu-Buddhist traditions probably arrived from India during the early centuries of the Common Era. The writings of the Chinese monk and pilgrim Yi Jing, provide some of the earliest evidence of the Srivijaya kingdom and Buddhist centre at Palembang during the late 7th century. Additional evidence for this kingdom arises from several inscriptions in the Indian Pallava script such as the Kota Kapur stele (dated 686CE) from Bangka Island off the east coast of Sumatra. The stele's location indicates an extensive network rather than a state with defined borders. It also provides evidence for the use of Indic scripts as the foundations of Old Malay and other local written languages.



Large ritual vessel. Bronze. C.500 BCE. Kerinci, South Sumatra. Collection of the National Museum of Indonesia.

Palembang's authority declined following Javanese attacks during the late 10th and 13th centuries, and the invasion of Indian Chola armies in the early 11th century. Eventually, the Malayu kingdom took control, but was forced to give way to the East Javanese kingdoms of Singhasari and then Majapahit during the 14th century. Malayu eventually withdrew inland to the Padang highlands, leaving behind an artistic legacy that reflects strong Javanese influences and the practice of Tantric Buddhism.

Trade with India also left its mark in the textile traditions of the wealthy elites. Large Indian trade cloths of the 17th century - the precursors of later batik designs - were worn by aristocrats, whilst the sumptuous *songket* weaving tradition produced shimmering cloths of gold that are still highly prized today.

CHINESE INFLUENCES

It is difficult to pin-point when Chinese traders and settlers first arrived in Sumatra. Chinese ceramics dating from the early centuries of the Common Era onwards have been retrieved from private collections. Archaeological evidence now shows that China traded directly with other countries as early as the 9th century. An Arab dhow that was salvaged at Belitung Island off southeast Sumatra carried a cargo of some 60,000 objects. These included mainly ceramics, as well as extremely rare gold and silver items thought to be official gifts for the courts in Iran (Persia).

Chinese presence in the region increased during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Large expeditions by imperial envoy Zheng He cultivated tributary trade with Southern Ocean (Nanhai) countries during the 14th century. Migration from southern China increased particularly during the Colonial period when the Chinese ran businesses and worked for the administration as supervisors, tax collectors and tin miners.

Chinese settlement in coastal areas, especially Palembang, spawned successful alliances with the ruling elites. Inter-marriages resulted in the Peranakan, or 'local born' communities notable for their unique material culture that combines Chinese, local and European influences. Chinese lacquer-makers for example, were encouraged by the court to settle in Palembang where they became renowned. By 1813, one thousand Arabs and Chinese lived in Palembang. Their artistic traditions thrived as one of the court arts alongside ivory-carving, textiles and weapon-forging. Traditional symbols such as the phoenix and dragon (representing the Chinese empress and emperor, respectively), the fish (a symbol of fertility), the Chinese characters for happiness (*fu*), wealth (*lu*) and longevity (*shou*), and Buddhist emblems were in turn often adopted by other communities as decorative motifs.

THE ARRIVAL OF ISLAM

Islam was established in Sumatra during the 13th century through trade with Muslim merchants and the founding of the first Islamic kingdom at Samudra-Pasai in Aceh. Most of the coastal sultanates derived their heritage from Malayu, the ancient seat of the Srivijaya kingdom. They became wealthy through international trade conducted at coastal ports and the courts became centres for cultural exchange with Mughal India, China, Europe, Iran and other countries in West Asia.

Diverse cultural influences are evident in the different styles of Islamic architecture, textiles and the court arts patronised by the different sultanates. These items became royal regalia, the treasured heirlooms or *pusaka* that enhanced the legitimacy of rulers. They also included gifts from overseas which over time acquired legendary fame for their protective powers.

Foreign imports and skills from the Islamic World were highly valued. Silk and gold thread from India and China were used for royal garments, whilst Ottoman Turkish craftsmen sent to Aceh in the 16th century left a legacy of



Stele with Inscription. Stone. Dated to 686 CE. Kota Kapur, Bangka Island. Collection of the National Museum of Indonesia.



Shoulder cloth with garuda motifs. Silk weft ikat and gold thread (*songket*) weaving, Bangka. Early 20th century. Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum.



Gold necklace. Sheet gold. North Nias. Late 19th or early 20th century. Collection of Mark Gordon.



Keris. Gold, iron, wood, diamonds, rubies. Riau Lingga. Before 1991. Collection of the National Museum of Indonesia.

jewellery-making techniques. Diamonds and precious stones were imported from Persia and were brought from Kalimantan by Bugis traders. Keris-forging was introduced by the Javanese in the 13th century as well as by Bugis traders from South Sulawesi who travelled extensively and settled in the port areas of Sumatra.

REGIONAL EXCHANGES BETWEEN THE COAST AND THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

Regional exchanges of cultural influence also took place between remote communities in the interior and coastal trading centres. Highland communities required metals for tools, jewellery and ritual objects, porcelain, salt and cloth. Coastal traders sought gold and natural products from the forests, and relied on the highlanders to transport these commodities via rivers or difficult land routes to the coast.

The Batak of Sumatra's northern islands have ancient Hindu-Buddhist connections with early Indian settlers who moved into the interior from coastal regions. By the 19th century they had adopted Islam from Minangkabau and Aceh. However religious practices still combine ancestor worship and animistic rituals. These streams of influence are reflected in the motifs and designs of their jewellery, sculpture and other ritual objects.

Although more remote, the islanders of Sumatra's west coast such as the Nias community also traded with their neighbours. Gold was an important part of the jewellery tradition patronised and worn by the Nias nobility. The nobles distinguished themselves from commoners and slaves by commissioning gold jewellery, which is also seen in the carved adornments on wood figures of the ancestors.

IDEAS FROM THE WEST

Europeans had known about Sumatra since Marco Polo's visit to the island's northern coast en route from China in the late 13th century. The Portuguese and Dutch arrived in the region during the 16th and 18th centuries respectively. However it was not until the 19th century that Dutch influence was consolidated in Sumatra. In 1824 the Anglo-Dutch Treaty signed between the Dutch and the British finally resolved conflicting interests in the region, including the role of Sir Stamford Raffles, who had been Governor of Bencoolen (1817 - 1823). One of the terms of the treaty resulted in the exchange of Sumatra for Dutch interests in the Malay peninsula, including Singapore.

European trade for the most part was done with coastal communities, who sourced the much wanted pepper, gold, camphor and benzoin from the hinterlands. However, European influence also left its mark both on the courts as well as remote tribal communities. Christianity found its way to the Batak highlands from the 1860s onwards and Lake Toba, the ancestral homeland of the Batak, only first visited by Europeans in the late 19th century.



Ancestor figure riding a horse. Stone. Toba Batak. 18th century or earlier. Private collection. Photo by Eky Tandyo.

Local arts and crafts were also influenced by European interests. Objects collected during scientific expeditions and commissioned specially for large international exhibitions held in Europe during the late 19th century, included pieces made in European taste. The legacy of collecting was maintained through museums, the new cultural storehouses. The 'colonial gaze' or way of perceiving local cultures still underpins some museum displays today, and could be said to be yet another stream of cultural influence that fostered the rich heritage of Sumatra.

From 30 July till 7 November 2010, the exhibition Sumatra: Isle of Gold at the Asian Civilisations Museum is the culmination of a collaborative project between the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, the Netherlands, and the National Museum of Indonesia with the support of provincial museums in Sumatra. The show has travelled from Jakarta to Leiden before coming to Singapore. The Asian Civilisations Museum has adapted the show to include more pieces from its own and private collections.



Two Changsha ware bowls. Stoneware. Belitung Island. Early 9th century. Collection of the National Museum of Indonesia.

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The publication *Sumatra. Crossroads of Cultures*. (Eds. Francine Brinkgreve and Retno Sulistianingsih, KITLV Press, Leiden, 2009) was published in association with the exhibition held in Leiden in 2009. It will be on sale at the ACM museum shop together with an exhibition booklet *Sumatra: Isle of Gold*.

TAGS&TREATS

Works by Vincent Leow



Through a prolific and alternative art practice rooted in debates over the contemporary Singapore identity, Vincent Leow occupies a significant place in the development of contemporary art in Singapore.

Coming from the mould of artists such as Cheo Chai Hiang and others like Tang Da Wu and Amanda Heng, Leow stands in the group of artists that in the 70s and 80s began to ponder the role of audience reactions and responses in relation to their works, interested in engaging some form of dialogue with the audience.

Part of this new generation of artists then who started adopting as a medium to be called art, Leow and his peers focused on the idea and concept behind it, not the execution of the work— the speculation behind a work, rather than the rendering of actual appearances (Sabapathy, 2000).

Being born in 1961, amidst the throes and tumultuous times of Singapore's pre & post-independence era, Leow's formative years coincided with Singapore's very own, a dramatic period of where in a mere two decades rapid modernization as well as nationalism was taking place, against a backdrop of transnational economics and global commodity diversification.

Numerous scholars and writers have observed the pluralisation of the cultural climate of the 1980s, which were brought about by the forces of modernization, created disruptive conditions that ironically facilitated the emergence of new art movements and artistic possibilities, spurring younger artists like Leow to engage in critical self-questioning and new forms of expression (Lim, 2008).

In 1988, this creative energy focused and culminated in The Artists Village (TAV), established (rather symbolically) in one of the few rural areas left in the increasingly urbanised Singapore, in Lorong Gambas (Ulu Sembawang), as an open studio environment for experimentation and discussion. At its peak, it had some 35 artists living and working on the site, and another 50 others participating in exhibitions held there.

Leow today, commenting on this period, noted that in this atmosphere of being introduced and exposed to so many different types of art forms and expressions was almost like an experience of rediscovering art all over again – rebelling against the idea that art was not just about creating a finished object like a sculpture or painting, but that it was about the expression of ideas and about the process of creation.

Finding traditional carving and sculpturing limiting in its slowness in being able to express his artistic ideas, Leow's experience at TAV made him realize that performance art and painting were more immediate and spontaneous. His artistic output during the two years the collective was based in Lorong Gambas, reflect this spontaneity.

Works such as *Lucky Strike*, *Yellow Circle*, *Cut Throat* and *Two Men* (all done in 1989) express this gestural and spontaneous quality. Together with the strong colours, unruly brushstrokes as well as the violent nature of the paintings, Leow's works from this period are highly-charged with strong emotion and anger, challenging the relatively safe temperament of the field of painting in Singapore thus far. Collectively, they also contain "a rogue element in painting", strongly going against the dominant modes and styles of painting in Singapore at that time, which were lyrical and formalistic abstraction or realist/naturalistic genres (Poh, 2007).

Vincent Leow
Andy's Wonderland
stainless steel in edition of 8
200 x 120 x 150 cm
2006
Singapore Art Museum collection



Vincent Leow
Two Men
1989
oil on board
244 x 122 cm
Singapore Art Museum collection

Leow continued to explore this spontaneity in his work through few but iconic performances that explored the idea of the commoditization of art such as *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous: The Three-Legged Toad* (1992) and *Coffee Talk* (1993).

Leow left Singapore at 28 to spend some three years at the Maryland Institute, College of Art in Baltimore pursuing his MFA. His US studies would offer a more systematic exposure to modern and contemporary Euro-American art that reinforced the foundation that would further his personal artistic development.

Works that came out of this period were such explorations that had singular subjects, reminiscent of the still-life tradition, but with Leow exploring the material and texture of paints and the canvas itself, questioning the very definition of painting itself. *Yellow Field* (1990) has both the scale and rich textural surface of classical landscape paintings that are of this monumental scale, but Leow's version of this explores stretching an everyday object, a t-shirt, into a landscape painting of a runway.

Others such as *Milk* (1989), *Shield The Lamp* (1990), all containing a still-life of a singular object, allowed Leow to explore within the painting medium and its technicalities. One of these works, *Buoy* (1990), characteristically fulfills Leow's wish that his artworks take on a life of their own after he is done with them, has an added dimension to its intent of exploring texture and the painting surface. Wasps had decided to build their nest right on the canvas, right above the centre of the buoy itself, adding a third dimension to the artwork's surface.

Leow's time in the US, and exposure to mass media and pop culture inspired other works that included such elements. A series of works that continued to explore the surface of the image resulted in layering of polka dots on them, something Leow would intermittently use even in his later paintings (*Dumbo*, 1991, as well as *Red & White*, 2000). Leow commented this was an idea of viewing the world through the pixels of a television screen.

Leow also began to explore the satirical use of whimsical symbols and icons, in the form of everyday animals such as rabbits, elephants,



Vincent Leow
Yellow Field
1990
oil and mixed medium on canvas
180 x 250 cm
artist collection



Vincent Leow
Dumbo
1991
oil on canvas
210 x 240 cm
Singapore Art Museum collection



Vincent Leow
Mountain Cow Factory
1998
150 x 180 cm
mixed media on canvas
private collection



Vincent Leow
Hawk
 2006
 stainless steel in edition of 5
 240 x 150 x 150 cm
 Singapore Art Museum collection

giraffes and fish, as his voice, in works such as *Silverfish* (1990) and *Aladdin & Genie* (1994), to establish social statements he wanted to make. *Silverfish* underscored both the commoditisation and capitalist culture of mass culture and its production, while *Dumbo* and *Aladdin & Genie* were commentaries on politics - both the rabbits and the elephant were used by Leow to represent political parties. This refined and developed social commentary and voice contrasts distinctly to his earlier raw, gestural paintings. Leow continued the idea with his famous *Mountain Cow Factory* series (1998) which had a Warholian quality, of vibrant bright colours, and of reproducing multiples with just the different background colour. The series of multiple cow prints were paired with life-sized sculptures of cows that were then placed in non-art places.

The use of animals in Leow's art has another place in his Andy series of artworks, featuring a half man half dog creature which has featured prominently in his work until today. The notion of the hybrid or mongrel, half man-half animal, was an idea that Leow had explored concurrently even in his TAV days. Used like an alter ego device, Leow's development of Andy became full blown as a natural evolvement of the use of animals as symbols in his work.

Inspired by a postcard of Andy Warhol from which Leow named his pet dog in Warhol's honour, the Andy series of narratives evolved the satirical voice into a burlesque style that placed 'Andy' in different situations and bodies. These standalone paintings that would individually be a situation in which Leow would comment on social issues, were colourful, bright, almost fairytale-like, evoking the sense of a creation of a mythical and magical setting - the very vibrant *Andy Addiction* (1996) with Andy placed on a candy-red background that looks almost good to eat, or the mischievous *Bombs Away* (1996) that had Andy naughtily defecating bombs on an otherwise sunny day.

These creatures have been written about previously as hybrids: i.e. part human, part animal, part monster-like, that would help Leow define his identity as an Asian artist both with Western art training, as well as living in a country with both East-West ideologies mixing together, toying with the idea of hybridization as a form of mongrel-ization through this alter-ego Andy. However, another reading of this effort to re-create mythology, as Leow has noted his aim is with Andy, is not a hybrid but rather a forgetting and erasing of the past by creating a new set of myths and stories, by starting with a blank slate and "tabula rasa" state, as architect Rem Koolhaas once famously said of Singapore.

Andy would reappear with characteristic anarchy in Leow's paintings throughout his career, grinning within the sacred, sanctified compositions of classical and iconic masterpieces in art history (Renaissance Andy series), with Leow intentionally 'cross-breeding' high and low art sources, then popping out into real life in the form of life-sized sculptures that would feature most significantly in 2007, in the Singapore Season exhibition 'Andy's Pranks & Swimming Lessons', and the Singapore Pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007. *Andy's Prank(s)*, *Hawk*, and *Andy's Wonderland* (all 2006) are (literally) polished life-like representations of Andy, harking to the collectible culture of comics and cartoons that are immortalized, in real life, through their representation as figurines and toys.

Sadly, Andy the actual dog on which the series of works were based on passed away at the age of 14, and the series takes on a poignant and commemorative significance.

Death, says Leow, is the only way to start afresh.

His latest works echo his sentiments vehemently, but also silently. Blacked out portraits (*Portrait and Hand*, *Hawk Portrait @ Salam*, all 2009) seemingly retreat from the creation of another identity (re: the Andy series), to the erasing of it. All that is left, are traces of the person through their hands. Contrasting against colourful backgrounds, these portraits hark back to the classical painting tradition of portraits, but also are inspired by the *Memento Mori* genre of classical paintings that remind mankind of mortality, the futility of vanities.



Vincent Leow
Portrait and Veil
 2009
 oil on canvas
 100 x 80 cm
 artist collection

Having spent a year teaching in an art university in the Middle East, Leow's latest works created from his time spent there explore the notions of identity and legacy, and of commemoration and tribute, but with a somewhat more sombre and elegaic tone in relation to mortality and death, in part inspired by Andy's actual death.

The painting genre inspired by *Memento Mori* tends to be a reminder of the vanity of earthly glory and pleasure, but in Leow's case, he inverts the very nature of portraiture painting to question that very vanity.

The *Conversations with a Femur Bone* installation, created based on life-sized human femur bones, suggests the baggage of memories too that death leaves behind for the living, heavy and unwieldy – yet still injecting Leow's

trademark playfulness, conjuring up the ghost of the half man half dog Andy, who would view bones more as a treat. The same black out of details continues in his work commemorating the everyday and banal, through the cast of clay feet of strangers celebrated on monumental plinths, as well as ceramic headbusts lacking specific facial details placed in a cemetery, state-park installation setting.

These more metaphorical and abstract works denotes a departure point for Leow, yet is still part of his development of ideas that play with fiction and the fantastical.

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SUPERMIGHTY!

Meet and Marvel at the Heroes of Asia

musings

BY NICOLA KUOK
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ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

IMAGES:
ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

For centuries, children all over the world have been captivated by enthralling epics and heart-warming folktales of Asia's great heroes and heroines.

As tiny tots, who among us did not get into friendly squabbles with the neighbourhood kids over who got to play the coveted role of the Monkey King from the Chinese epic *Journey to the West*? Inevitably the victor would get to stage mock battles wearing a paper crown and waving a broomstick around as his golden cudgel.

These heroes created moments of magic in our childhood. Perhaps now we may feel a pang of regret when we see how times have changed. The storybooks and granny tales of yesteryear have been replaced with computer games and network cartoons. But one thing is for certain - time has not tarnished the memory of our beloved literary heroes. Centuries after these stories were first told, they continue to delight us today.

Curated for children between the ages of 5 to 10 years old, *Supermighty! Heroes of Asia* is a colourful display of historical artefacts and contemporary materials that draw upon the region's rich heritage of fantastic legends and epic myths. The exhibition text, written in a first-person narrative, introduces children to the featured heroes, provides a summary of their adventures, and the Asian value that the character exemplifies.



An epic tale over 2,500 years old, the *Ramayana* tells the tale of the heroic Monkey God Hanuman who helps Prince Rama to rescue his kidnapped wife, Sita. A figurine of Hanuman from Varanasi, India. c.1995.



Supernighty! features specially commissioned illustrations of Asian heroes, such as the five Pandava brothers from the *Mahabharata*. This Indian epic tale narrates the struggle of the Pandavas (clockwise from top: Bima, Yudishtira, the twins Nakula and Sahadeva, and Arjuna) against their rivals, the Kauravas.

Children who are not able to read yet can still enjoy the exhibition which is peppered with endearing illustrations, colouring activities, discovery captions and hands-on interactive stations that encourage experiential learning.

Among the stories featured in this exhibition are the epic tales of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* from India, *Journey to the West* and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* from China, the *Persian Shahnama* (Book of Kings) and the *Khamsa* (Quintet) of Nizami from West Asia, and the Mousedeer stories and the tale of Java's Prince Panji from Southeast Asia.

The stories were selected based on their timeless appeal, as well as their moral and cultural values which have touched the lives of audiences around the world for centuries now. Today, they still inspire the

cultural traditions of Asia including the fine arts - as seen in many of the artefacts on display in this exhibition; the performing arts - in traditional storytelling, *wayang* or puppetry performances, theatre and dance; and popular culture such as contemporary comics, cartoons and toys.

Through the exhibition, young visitors will learn that heroes come in all shapes and sizes. Whether tall or small; male or female; divine-beings, humans or humble animals - heroes are loved for their many different exemplary qualities. Viewers will find that the inner wisdom of the wily mouse deer Sang Kanchil of Indo-Malayan forests is no less impressive than the mighty strength of more traditional battlefield heroes like the Sasanian King Bahram Gur, whose exploits are retold in the *Khamsa* (Quintet) of the 16th century Persian poet Nizami.

There are many thrilling adventures to be told; some that end happily ever after and others that end in disappointment and tragedy. One such example may be found in the *Iskandarnama* - an epic that recounts the heroic exploits and military victories of Iskandar (an Iranian king loosely based on Alexander the Great) who seeks out immortality at the Fountain of Life but fails in his quest and dies a mortal man.

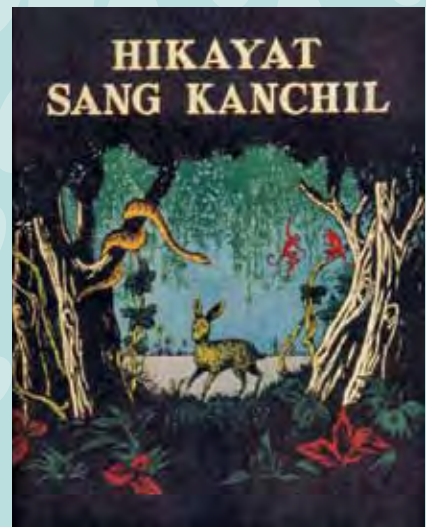
With so many great characters to meet, *Supermighty!* is sure to bring out your inner hero. At the very least, this fun and family-friendly exhibition will warm and entrance the hearts of visitors of all ages.



An illustration from the *Ramayana* showing the blue-skinned prince Rama and his faithful friend Hanuman.



A contemporary Chinese opera costume for the role of the warrior maiden, Mulan. This intricate costume is made of blue silk embroidered with silver threads to lend the appearance of chain mail armour.



The unlikely hero Sang Kanchil, is a plucky little mouse deer who is always on hand to save his friends from the fearsome creatures of the forest. *Hikayat Sang Kanchil* (The Mousedeer Tales). Singapore. 1953.

Catch Supermighty! Heroes of Asia at the Shaw Foundation Foyer at the Asian Civilisations Museum from 24 July 2010 till 13 February 2011. Admission is free.

219 Years On – Spot the Difference



Left: Mulan featured in the *Lienuzhuan* (the Book of Exemplary Women) from Ming Dynasty China, 1779. The tale highlights the adventures of a filial maiden who takes the place of her elderly father to serve in the Chinese army.

Right: A similar scene from a children's book featuring the Walt Disney animated version of Mulan in 1998.



Iskandar's campaigns and quests lead him to far-off lands including China where he meets a beautiful Chinese princess.

Manuscript painting from the *Iskandarnama*. Shiraz, Iran. 1580 - 1590.



Bahram Gur overpowers a fearsome dragon in its dark cave as his courtiers nervously await the outcome of the battle.

Manuscript painting from the *Haft Paykar* (Seven Beauties). Shiraz, Iran. 1570 – 1580 – a tale of the Sasanian king, Bahram Gur who marries seven princesses from seven different climes. Through their counsel and parables, he learns to be a wise ruler.



An illustration from the exhibition depicting the three heroes of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. From the top: Guan Yu, Zhang Fei and Liu Bei.

Football is widely considered the most popular sport in the world. From 11 June to 11 July 2010, people of different nations and cultures will be watching the FIFA World Cup – the most prestigious and anticipated football event in the world. The last World Cup tournament held in 2006 drew an amazing viewership of 26.3 billion.

In fact, the appeal of football goes back thousands of years. Archaeologists have unearthed evidence of earlier versions of football played by ancient civilisations across the globe, including Ancient Rome, Greece and China. However, modern football was first played in England in the 19th century. It is believed to have originated in public schools for boys as an extra-curricular activity to bring about discipline and foster team spirit.



FOOTBALL FEVER!

**Kick-off @
Singapore Philatelic
Museum**

museings

BY MISHALLE LIM
ASSISTANT MANAGER, SPECIAL PROJECTS
SINGAPORE PHILATELIC MUSEUM

IMAGES:
SINGAPORE PHILATELIC MUSEUM





Cuju was played by Chinese soldiers as part of their fitness training more than 2,000 years ago. It later became a favourite game of both men and women from the upper class of Chinese society.



Ancient Greeks and Romans of both genders played ball games to keep fit.



The ancient Mayans of Central America enjoyed a ball game which required players to hit the ball with their shoulders, arms, shins and hips. Sometimes, the ball was substituted with the head of an unlucky enemy.

THE MASS APPEAL OF MOB FOOTBALL

In medieval Britain and France, large-scale and often riotous ball games were popular with the masses. They were played by many players, sometimes numbering in the hundreds, with few restrictions. Divided into teams, the participants had to get the ball to its destination with their hands and feet. The unruliness of the games caused King Edward II (1284 to 1327) of England to officially ban them in 1314.

In 1477, King Edward IV (1442 to 1483) explicitly forbade the playing of football and other games as they were distracting the people from practising archery which was deemed a necessity in wars. Despite royal disapproval, mob football continued to be enjoyed by the people until the 19th century when a new version of the game emerged.

THE BIRTH OF MODERN FOOTBALL

British public schools in the 19th century catered to the aristocrats and the nouveau rich. The students harboured a sense of social superiority over the staff which sometimes made controlling them a nightmare. Compulsory games were introduced to bring about some discipline and divert the excess energy of the hormonally charged teenagers. Unsurprisingly, traditional football with its chaotic and boisterous nature became popular. Games were held to improve staff-student relations, forge school unity and promote the notion of putting the institution before oneself.

Each school had their own football rules that were at first passed down orally. The sport became more organised with the formation of houses, colours and contests. The first set of rules was written in 1846 at Rugby School in Warwickshire.

Former public school boys spread the game to Oxford and Cambridge when they entered university and promoted the sport in the army. Some even went on to set up their own football clubs, with each having their own rules. Some favoured a rugby style of playing while others forbade touching the ball with the hands. During matches, the first half of the game could be played under the rules favoured by one club while the second half would adhere to the rules of the other club.

Researchers have found that organised football matches were held outside the world of public schools as well. These games, which often involved betting, took place all over Britain.

In 1862, representatives of leading football clubs met to standardise the football rules. Those who preferred a dribbling version of the game set up the Football Association (FA) on 26 October 1863. Those who favoured a rugby-like version withdrew from the meeting and went on to form the Rugby Football Union in 1871. Football, as we know it today, became referred to as *association football*. The FA Cup, launched in 1871, is the oldest national football competition. Today, the rules of the game are determined by the International Football Association Board.

KICKING OFF EVERYWHERE

Football quickly found its place in rapidly industrialising Britain. Men from all social classes enjoyed it and played against one another. The football pitch became a legitimate venue for the working class to take a shot at the elite. Football had even begun to surpass the popularity of rugby. One of the reasons was that it was just as masculine but less rough than rugby. Young men simply could not afford to be absent from work due to injuries! Britons



Jules Rimet (1873–1956): The longest serving President of FIFA, having headed the organisation from 1921 to 1954. The French lawyer is credited as the man who made the World Cup a reality.



This 2008 stamp from Austria shows Andreas Herzog scoring the winning goal against Sweden during a World Cup qualifier on 6 September 1997. The entire goal scene, which lasts about 3 seconds, is captured on a single stamp using lenticular technology. With 103 international appearances, Herzog is Austria's most-capped footballer.

who travelled overseas, especially to parts of the British Empire, brought the game with them. As the popularity of football grew, particularly in Europe and South America, other countries began to set up their own football associations.

BIRTH OF THE WORLD CUP

In the early 1900s, some national football associations wanted to create an international body to discuss the future of football. They were interested in organising an international football competition. As a result, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association, or FIFA, was formed in 1904. Its founding members were France, Belgium, Denmark, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

FIFA held the first World Cup in Uruguay in 1930. Since then, FIFA has organised a World Cup tournament every four years, with the exceptions of 1942 and 1946 due to World War II. This year's World Cup attracted a record 205 national teams in the preliminary rounds, with 32 countries vying for the crown in the finals in South Africa.



This set of special velvet stamps was issued by Singapore in 2004 to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of FIFA.



Maradona played in the World Cup four times and scored the 'Goal of the Century' against England in the 1986 championship. The former Argentine captain shares the honour of being FIFA's *Player of the Century* with Pele. He is the coach of the Argentina team for World Cup 2010.



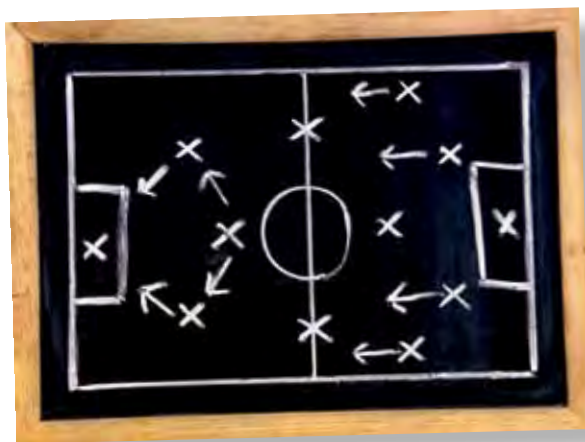
The king of 'total football', Johan Cruyff can play any position on the field depending on who has the ball. He brought the Netherlands to the World Cup Final in 1974 and was named the best player of the tournament.



Franz Beckenbauer, also known as the *Kaiser*, is regarded as the best German footballer of all-time. He played in three World Cup tournaments and led West Germany to victory in 1974. Beckenbauer was also the coach of the World Cup winning German team in 1990.



1966 World Cup print originally signed by Geoff Hurst. He is the first and only player in Cup history to score a hat-trick in the Final. Courtesy of Sporting Memorabilia in Singapore.



(Right) Shirt and boots with Pele's original signatures (Courtesy of Sporting Memorabilia in Singapore). Rated as the best footballer ever, Pele has played in four World Cup tournaments and won a record three times for Brazil. He is the youngest scorer in World Cup history – at 17 years and 239 days. Pele was named *Athlete of the Century* by the International Olympic Committee and *Player of the Century* by FIFA.





At the National Stadium in Kallang, the Lions' victory and the cheer of the fans gave rise to the term 'the Kallang Roar'. (Collection of Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore)

FOOTBALL IN SINGAPORE

In the late 19th century, the British in Singapore formed sporting clubs and regularly competed against one another. The first football match recorded on the island was played in 1889 by British engineers at a pitch in Tank Road. The game was subsequently introduced to British subjects and students in British schools, before it became a favourite sport among the locals.

A predecessor of the Football Association of Singapore, the Singapore Amateur Football Association (SAFA) was registered in 1892. Formed 29 years after the Football Association in England, it is possibly the oldest football association in Asia. The SAFA held the first Singapore Football League in 1904. The early football scene in Singapore was dominated by Europeans. But by the 1920s, local teams such as the Singapore Chinese Football Association and the Singapore Malays Football Association began to make their mark. They often competed with overseas teams to packed stadiums. Once, the best players from both associations literally brought the house down when they beat Australia 4-2 at Anson Road Stadium.

"Singapore's passion for football never waned, even when the threat of war loomed. In 1941, the island's team beat Penang to clinch the Malaysia Cup for the fourteenth time. The Malaysia Cup was one of the most anticipated football competitions in Singapore. It was started in 1921 as the Malaya Cup by officers of the British battleship, HMS Malaya. Many Singaporeans still remember the days when the whole nation would put aside whatever it was doing to cheer for the national team, fondly called 'the Lions'."

However, 1994 was the last year Singapore won the Malaysia Cup. In 1995, Singapore's football administrators withdrew from the tournament to focus on developing its own league. This did not sit well with local fans. Nevertheless, the S.League was born in 1996. Today, 12 teams, featuring a mix of local and foreign talents, vie for the S.League title.



S.League Shirt of Fandi Ahmad (courtesy of Sports Museum, Singapore Sports Council). Fandi Ahmad won the Malaysia Cup for Singapore in 1980 and 1994, and led the country to win the silver medal at the Southeast Asian Games thrice. The football superstar has ventured where no Singaporean has gone – in 1982, he was offered a place at Ajax Amsterdam, the club of the legendary winger Johan Cruyff. He signed on with Dutch club FC Groningen from 1983-1985 and has also played with Indonesia's Niac Mitra and the Kuala Lumpur Football Association, helping the team win the Malaysian Cup three years in a row from 1987-1989.



A visiting football team known as the 'Colombo Barefooters' played against the Singapore Chinese team in 1928. (Collection of Singapore Sports Council, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore)

***The special exhibition Football Fever!
is held at the Singapore Philatelic Museum
from 8 June till 29 August 2010.***



IN MEMORY OF DR GOH KENG SWEE: ARCHITECT OF SINGAPORE'S ECONOMIC, DEFENCE AND EDUCATION POLICIES



THE PASSING OF DR GOH KENG SWEE (1918–2010), WHO LAID THE FOUNDATION STONES OF SINGAPORE'S ECONOMY AND DEFENCE FORCES, HAS LEFT THE NATION WITHOUT ONE OF ITS MOST WELL-RESPECTED CITIZENS.

The National Archives of Singapore (NAS) wishes to remember and honour Dr Goh for his instrumental role in establishing the Oral History Centre within NAS in 1979. In the words of Mr Kwa Chong Guan, Chairman of the NAS Board:

“We salute and remember Dr Goh for his foresight in establishing an Oral History Centre within the National Archives of Singapore. With his support and guidance the establishment has grown to become the premier Oral History Centre in the region. We are delighted to have had the honour of interviewing Dr Goh in 1980 and look forward to releasing the interview for public consultation, in honour of Dr Goh, and to help a new generation of Singaporeans understand Dr Goh better. (May 2010)”

museings

BY KEVIN KHOO
ASSISTANT ARCHIVIST
NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE

IMAGES:
NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE



A portrait of Dr Goh, taken during a press conference in 1967.
Source: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA)



Dr Goh (far left) during a visit to the proposed site for Jurong Industrial Estate, 1960. Source: MICA

Apart from his oral history interview, Dr Goh's memory has been preserved in a rich collection of oral history interviews, speeches, photographs and video recordings possessed by the National Archives of Singapore (NAS). NAS holds over 4,000 photographs of Dr Goh, 700 video clips and some 350 transcripts of public speeches of Dr Goh. These materials are available to the general public for viewing.

Dr Goh was among the most important members of Singapore's founding generation of leaders. He played a critical role as Minister of Finance in the crucial early years from 1959-65 and from 1967-70 laying the groundwork for Singapore's subsequent economic development. Though on hindsight Singapore's economy could appear to follow a clear progressive path, at that time, the task to build an economy was fraught with grave uncertainty, as Dr Goh said in this 1969 speech:

"When my [PAP] government first assumed office on June 3rd 1959..... businessmen and industrialists, far from hailing this event as a happy augury for the future, felt for the most part that the end of the world was around the corner. The stock market collapsed and there was a flight of capital out of Singapore. Several people fled the country. [But] In a short space of ten years, we brought about a transformation of the business climate." ¹

Among Dr Goh's many achievements in helping to bring about this transformation was his role in establishing the Economic Development Board (EDB) in 1961, the Jurong Industrial Estate in 1962 (which he promoted in spite of severe public criticism, though it turned out to be the right move) and the Development Bank of Singapore (DBS) in 1968. These institutions have made, and continue to make, vital contributions to Singapore's economic success.

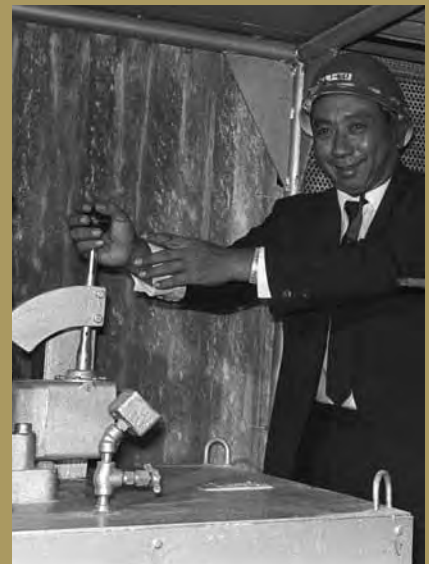




The unpromising ground and distance of Jurong from Singapore's town and port led the project's detractors to term it "Goh's Folly". However the Jurong Industrial Estate turned out to be a great success. By 1976, 650 factories were in operation in Jurong, which became central to independent Singapore's industrialisation efforts. Source: MICA

Dr Goh was also responsible for developing the economic strategy that is crucial to explaining Singapore's economic takeoff. Between 1959 and 1965, he advocated an import-substitution strategy and positioned Singapore as a manufacturing centre supplying the common Malaysian market. Following Singapore's independence in 1965, Dr Goh realised the futility of keeping to this plan and began promoting an export-oriented developmental strategy. By adopting this export-oriented strategy, he went against influential economic theories circulating in the 1960s and 1970s which asserted that state protectionism and heavy government expenditure was necessary to spur growth in emerging economies.

Dr Goh formulated policies which resulted in Singapore adopting an open economy that encouraged free trade, competition and foreign direct investment by multinational corporations, while encouraging economic thrift and prudence by the Singapore government and people.² Dr Goh was also convinced that successful economic development depended on the determination, initiative, enterprise and self-reliance of a people and that good government should encourage these qualities. He outlined these convictions in a speech to the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in 1969:



Dr Goh launching operations at the National Steel and Iron Mill, the first factory established at the Jurong Industrial Estate, 1962. Source: MICA

"We in Singapore believe in hard work. We believe that enterprise should be rewarded and not penalised. We believe that we must adjust ourselves to changing situations. We believe in seizing economic opportunities and not let them go past us. Finally, we believe in self-reliance.....These are human qualities that have helped to transform an island-swamp into a thriving metropolis. They are the traditional virtues of Singaporeans and so long as we retain these virtues, we can face the future with confidence." ³

Dr Goh's convictions were proved correct and his thought remains a cornerstone of Singapore's economic policy.

Following Singapore's separation from Malaysia in August 1965, Dr Goh handed the Ministry of Finance over to his successor Mr Lim Kim San and took up the position of Minister of Defence. As Minister of Defence, Dr Goh was tasked to secure Singapore's national borders from both internal and external threats. A government gazette released in October 1965 stated that his field of responsibility included "Security, Law and Order, Defence, National Service...People's Association, Vigilante Corps".⁴ Dr Goh's most immediate and important task as Defence Minister was to build a credible Singapore armed forces, literally from scratch, in double quick time. Dr Goh was convinced that a strong Singapore army was necessary to secure the country's independence:



*"British military protection today has made quite a number of our citizens complacent about the need to conduct our own defence preparations. These people assume that this protection will be permanent. I regard it as the height of folly to plan our future on this assumption and, indeed, the only rational basis on which we, as an independent country, can plan its future is on the opposite assumption....Nobody, neither we nor the British can say when this will be....[but] whatever the time may be, it would be useless then to think about building up our defence forces."*⁵

Dr Goh succeeded in this daunting challenge, and in the process laid the foundations of one of the most important and successful Singapore state institutions in a mere six years. Many ideas and institutions on which the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) is built were put in place during Dr Goh's tenure, for instance a conscript army and compulsory national service for young men.⁶ He believed that Singapore citizens should participate directly as soldiers in their country's defence to reinforce their sense of responsibility to the national community and to strengthen their bonds with one another as countrymen. Dr Goh thought that this was especially important as Singapore as a new nation populated by migrants of diverse origins and particularistic interests did not possess a strong national consciousness:

*"Throughout man's long history, defence of the community has always been regarded as a noble duty. In the process of integrating loose collections of people into a nation with a strong sense of identity, military service has played a significant role. From the Greek City States of the fifth century B.C. to the twentieth century continental super powers, we have seen how the development of the national consciousness has been so often centred around service in the defence force... In Singapore, we are not yet a close knit community, so many of our people are of recent migrant origin. All this goes towards creating a sense of values which is personal, self-centred with anti-social tendencies where a conflict arises between personal interests and social obligations. These are the values of a rootless parvenu society. We cannot hope to remove them overnight, but in the process of creating a stronger national consciousness among our people, we will find that military service will play an important role.."*⁷



Dr Goh touring a lubricant blending plant established by Shell at Woodlands in 1963.
Source: MICA.

When Dr Goh gave up his defence portfolio in 1979 he left Singapore with a well rounded citizen army containing commando units, armoured battalions and an air force ⁸ – the core of a modern army – when previously Singapore had nothing.

Besides defence and economic matters, Dr Goh also made significant contributions to Singapore in the field of education. Between 1979 and 1985 he was put in charge of the Ministry of Education where he introduced important reforms. The influential *Goh Report*, released in 1979 under Dr Goh's supervision, examined the challenges facing the education system and detailed recommendations that would profoundly influence its future direction. Notably, the current practice of 'streaming' in schools was introduced through the report, with the purpose of helping all students develop their potential more fully, in particularly the weaker students. ⁹ As Dr Goh explained:



“Our system of education, lasting twelve years, has been tailored to suit the brightest 12% of students. The inevitable result is high wastage rates in our schools, both primary and secondary. Automatic promotion was practiced in primary and secondary schools up to 1975 and 1977 respectively. This means that as the slow learners moved from lower to higher classes, they understood less and less of what was being taught. Automatic promotion for Primary and Secondary schools was abolished in 1976 and 1978 respectively and retentions enforced on a large scale. This did not produce the results hoped for. Retention inflicts a psychological trauma on the child and when this is repeated two or three times, it would be an exceptional child who does not lose interest in learning, suffer a loss of self-esteem and self-confidence and develop character defects as a consequence of these. ...We must accept the principle of teaching children of different leaning capacities at different rates. The Report recommends different streams of education to suit the slow, average, above average and outstanding learners.” ¹⁰



Dr Goh visiting Singapore Vigilante Corps trainees at the Mandai training area, 1966. Source: MICA



Dr Goh touring the newly opened factory facilities of Avimo, a British weapons manufacturer, at Jurong Industrial Estate, 1975. Source: MICA



A portrait of Dr Goh taken in 1984, when he was Singapore's First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education. Source: MICA

Dr Goh was appointed Deputy Prime Minister between 1973 and 1979, and from 1980 to 1985 he was made First Deputy Prime Minister, the position from which he retired from public life in 1985. Between 1980 and 1985, he was made Chairman of the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS), where he spearheaded major organisational and professional improvements. He also came up with the idea in 1981 that Singapore's national reserves should be managed by a specialised and professional investment management body that led to the formation of Singapore's Government Investment Corporation (GIC) in which he served as Deputy Chairman between 1981 and 1994.¹¹



Apart from these achievements, Dr Goh was responsible for initiating or founding a diverse mix of other Singapore institutions, reflecting his remarkably broad range of interests. He championed the establishment of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (setup in 1968), the Jurong Bird Park and the Singapore Zoological Gardens (opened in 1971 and 1973 respectively), and the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (setup in 1978). He conceived the idea of transforming the island of Pulau Blakang Mati, which was renamed 'Sentosa' in 1968, from a military base into a tourist and leisure resort – an idea which has come to full cycle recently with the opening of the Sentosa Integrated Resorts in 2010. He also laid the groundwork for the creation of the Singapore Totalisator Board which was established in 1988.¹² Following his retirement, the government of the People's Republic of China sought out Dr Goh's expertise and appointed him as its economic adviser on coastal development and tourism in 1985. Dr Goh was the first foreigner to be appointed to such a role – a testament to the international recognition he had garnered for his accomplishments.

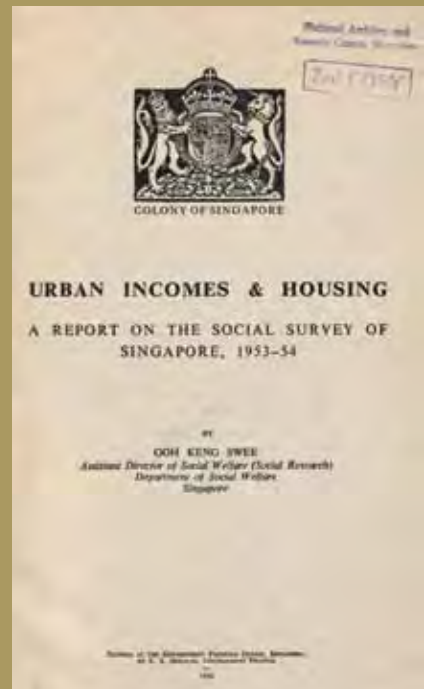


Dr Goh was not only an exceptional Minister. He was a humble and humane person, compassionate for the needs of the less fortunate and deeply interested in social issues. He had in fact started his career as a social researcher at the Social Welfare Department (SWD), which he had chosen to join at the end of the Japanese Occupation in 1945, although the SWD was then a small organisation with little prestige in the civil service. As a young officer in the SWD he played a central role in organising the People's Kitchens during the British Military Administration (1945-46). The People's Kitchens provided very low-cost but nutritious meals which ensured that fewer people went hungry during those difficult years.

Though a relatively junior officer at the time, his keenly analytical mind and wry wit were already evident. This is a passage taken from the preface of a *Report on Urban Incomes and Housing* which Dr Goh prepared in 1956 when he was Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Social Research) at the SWD:

*“I should like to make clear at the beginning the essentially limited scope of the work. Those looking for a penetrating analysis of Singapore’s social problems, covering all aspects in one broad and majestic sweep will look here in vain. This study does not go further than describing some of the things which a team of investigators discovered and reported in the course of five months of field work. Further, it is in the nature of sample surveys to be primarily concerned with the numerical estimation of quantities and relations between quantities....the task of presenting and explaining figures, even when successfully accomplished, does not result in the production of exciting literature. There is, further a class of people to be considered who, doubtless as a result of their early experience in mathematics in school, recoil with horror when confronted by a row of figures. I have great sympathy for such people and have reduced the use of figures in the text of the report to a minimum...I have tried, I hope successfully, to resist the temptation of speculating outside the range of the Survey evidence. Those with fewer inhibitions than myself are welcome to try their hand at this game.”*¹³

To gather fresh data for this report, Dr Goh and his researchers personally interviewed the head of each of the 6,804 households sampled.¹⁴ Dr Goh’s method, which stressed detailed field work, gave him and his team a first-hand feel of the ground which led to new insight into the issues studied. As Ms Tan Siok Sun, his daughter-in-law and biographer wrote, “GKS and his researchers ate with the trishaw drivers who they discovered rented not rooms, but beds in the Chinatown area. He learnt that a single bed would be shared by two ‘tenants’, one doing the day shift and the other the night shift”.¹⁵



The cover of the *Urban Incomes and Housing Report* prepared by Dr Goh as a young Assistant Director at the SWD, published in 1956. Source: National Archives of Singapore.

Despite the high office to which he rose and his exceptional talents, Dr Goh always remained a man of simple needs, lived a simple and frugal existence, and was ever ready to humble himself to relate with and aid his fellow men. His wife Dr Phua Swee Liang recalled,

*“In his dealings with people, Keng Swee makes no distinction between race, religion, gender, wealth, or power provided they are genuine and decent. Regardless of how simple a view or need might be, he would lend a ear if it is expressed honestly and truthfully. His compassion and thoughtfulness for the common man have always moved and touched me...He has always led a simple and frugal life whether in his official capacity or in private life... Whenever he was warded in hospital, he would tear each tissue paper he wanted to use carefully into halves. He would then put one half back into the box for future use and use the other half. He would often chide me for being a wastrel when he saw that I used the whole sheet and added, ‘its taxpayer’s money’...[but] when the Dover Road Hospice asked for a donation of S\$5,000 to purchase an electronic wheelchair for a patient, he wrote the cheque without a second thought.”*¹⁶

His daughter-in-law, Ms Tan Siok Sun also recalled,

*“Many who worked with him {Dr Goh} feared him, even those with high intellect and who were clearly competent in their respective fields. His reputation preceded him and followed him to the various ministries that he was put in charge of. Yet these same people respected his towering intellect and the common refrain was that he was a great mentor, and a remarkably patient teacher.”*¹⁷

His outstanding human qualities won him the esteem of even his political adversaries, like the late David Marshall, the famous lawyer, first Chief Minister of Singapore, and critic of the Singapore government. Marshall paid this warm tribute to Dr Goh in an Oral History Interview he conducted with the National Archives of Singapore in 1984:



*“Keng Swee wasa man of ‘sea-green’ integrity, a man of personal charm and warmth if you got close to him, very humble. Genuinely, no showmanship about it, genuinely humble....he speaks to the high as well as to the low....with the same approach. He had an extraordinary....total freedom from arrogance, from superiority, from any inferiority; he just was....a natural human being. And to me, a perfect human being....it’s so much part of the air he breathes....to serve his country and his fellow human beings. And never a lie from him, never any malice from him. ..always treating me with courtesy and consideration. Never because I was a political opponent, treated me withunpleasant [ness]....never at all.”*¹⁸



Dr Goh in his later years, in his capacity as Deputy Chairman of Singapore's Government Investment Corporation, 1986. Source: MICA.

ENDNOTES

1 Speech by Minister of Finance, Dr Goh Keng Swee, at the combined annual dinner of the Singapore Manufacturer's Association and the 9th Pioneer certificate presentation ceremony held at 'Tropicana' on Friday, 13th June 1969. Source: Ministry of Culture, Microfilm No. NA 1250, Open Access/Available Online: <http://www.a2o.com.sg>

2 An early example of Dr Goh's initiative to promote MNC investment in Singapore – the Jurong Shipyard Company was a joint venture between the EDB and Ishikawajima-Harima Industries (IHI), then one of the biggest ship-builders in the world: Text of the speech by the Minister for Finance, Dr Goh Keng Swee, at the foundation stone ceremony of Jurong Shipyard Ltd, on February 20, 1964. Source: Ministry of Culture, Microfilm No.: NA 1247, Open Access/Available Online: <http://www.a2o.com.sg>.

See also, Speech by Dr Goh Keng Swee, Minister for Finance, at the 8th Pioneer certificate presentation ceremony, the 7th Anniversary of the Economic Development Board and Opening of Made-in-Singapore products exhibition on 1st August 1968 Source: Ministry of Culture, Microfilm No: NA 1249, Open Access/Available Online: <http://www.a2o.com.sg>

And, talk in the series "The Crucial Years" by the Minister for Finance, Dr Goh Keng Swee, broadcast over radio and television Singapura on Saturday, 30th March 1968. Source: Ministry of Culture, Microfilm No: NA 1249, Open Access/Available Online: <http://www.a2o.com.sg>

3 Speech by Minister of Finance, Dr Goh Keng Swee, at the swearing-in committee of the new committee of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce on Saturday, 15th March 1969. Source: Ministry of Culture, Microfilm No. NA 1250, Open Access/Available Online: <http://www.a2o.com.sg>

4 Singapore Government Gazette - Subsidiary Legislation Supplement, Friday, October 8, 1965. Sp.No. S158, p.273

5 Dr Goh speaks to Parliament on Singapore's need for a national defence force: Speech by Minister of Defence, Dr Goh Keng Swee, in Parliament on the 23rd December 1965. Source: Ministry of Culture, Microfilm No. NA 1247, Open Access./ Available Online: <http://www.a2o.com.sg>

6 Speech by Minister of Defence, Dr Goh Keng Swee, in Parliament on the 23rd December 1965. Source: Ministry of Culture, Microfilm No. NA 1247, Open Access./Available Online: <http://www.a2o.com.sg>

7 Speech by Minister of Defence, Dr Goh Keng Swee, at a passing out parade of PDF officer cadets (Interim Intake 1) at No.1 PDF (training depot), Beach Road, on Tuesday 29th November 1966. Source: Ministry of Culture, Microfilm No. NA 1248, Open Access/Available Online: <http://www.a2o.com.sg>

8 Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First*, p.41

9 Report on the Ministry of Education 1978 – Prepared by Dr Goh Keng Swee and the Education Study Team (Delivered on the 10th February 1979). Source: Ministry of Culture, Microfilm No: N/A, Open Access/Available Online: <http://www.a2o.com.sg>

10 HANSARD, Revised Structure of Education, Parliament No.4, Session 2, Sitting 1, 27th March 1979

11 Government Investment Corporation, Singapore Website: "Milestones" http://www.gic.com.sg/aboutus_story_milestone1.htm (Last Accessed: 1st June 2010)

12 Tan Siok Sun, Goh Keng Swee – *A Portrait*, (Editions Didier Millet: Singapore, 2007), p.159-182

13 Dr Goh Keng Swee, *Urban Incomes & Housing – A Report on the Social Survey of Singapore, 1953-54*, Printed at the Government Printing Office, Colony of Singapore, 1956. p. i

14 Ibid. p.17

15 Tan Siok Sun, *Goh Keng Swee – A Portrait*, (Editions Didier Millet: Singapore, 2007), p.73-74

16 Phua Swee Liang, "Goh Keng Swee – Public Figure Private Man" (Goh Keng Swee Foundation, 2010)

17 Tan Siok Sun, *Goh Keng Swee – A Portrait*, (Editions Didier Millet: Singapore, 2007) – see preface

18 David Saul Marshall, Oral History Interview, Acc 000156, Reel 5. Open Access/Available Online: <http://www.a2o.com.sg>

SHANGHAI WORLD EXPO 2010:

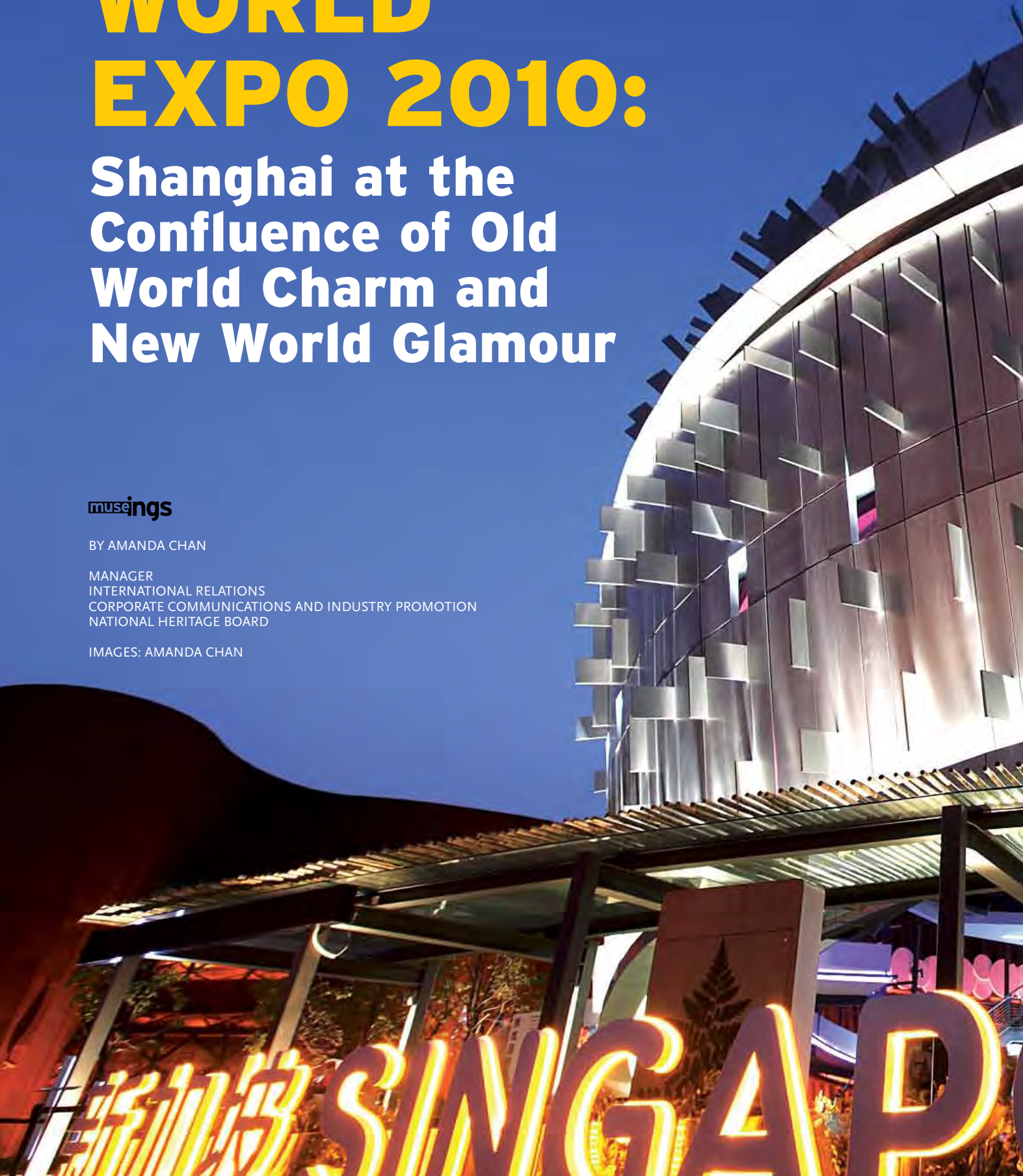
Shanghai at the Confluence of Old World Charm and New World Glamour


museings

BY AMANDA CHAN

MANAGER
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS AND INDUSTRY PROMOTION
NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD

IMAGES: AMANDA CHAN



A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of the Singapore Pavilion at night. The building's curved facade is composed of numerous vertical, metallic panels, each with a small, rectangular light fixture protruding from it. The lights are illuminated, creating a rhythmic pattern of light and shadow. The sky above is a deep, dark blue. In the foreground, the large, illuminated letters 'ORE' are visible, glowing with a warm orange light. The overall scene is a vibrant display of modern architecture and lighting design.

Sitting on a 3000 square metre plot, the Singapore Pavilion evokes the imagery of a musical box. From the motif on its façade to the choreography of its dancing fountain, from the interplay of sight and sound within to the vibrant display of tropical flora on the roof, it conjures an orchestra of elements to delight your senses. – from *Notes from An Urban Symphony*, Singapore Tourism Board.



The organisation of the Expo is meticulous – reflected in such useful directional signage to show the way to the nearest entrances. This signage shows the direction to entrance no. 7 and 8 – entrance no. 7 being the entrance nearest to the Singapore Pavilion.



To ensure ease of accessibility to the Expo site, only designated Expo cabs such as this can drop passengers at the nearest entrances of the Expo; saving visitors precious energy which they need for walking through the sprawling Expo grounds!

Mention Shanghai and an image that plays like a 1940s monochrome movie unravels – romantic sepia scenes, timeless dancehall tunes floating from a gramophone, dashing men and beautiful ladies strolling arm in arm along the Bund. Fast forward 70 years and Shanghai's old world charm is still ever alluring; perhaps even more so now. The nouveau riche has laced the city with a new glow and a fresh shine since the transformation of the Pudong area in Shanghai from a sleepy countryside into a dynamic economic powerhouse in the 1990s. Shanghai has become ever more glitzy, sparkling, dazzling!

It therefore appears timely that Shanghai, the Paris of the East, should initiate itself into this new world order by playing host to the 2010 World Exposition (Expo). The very first Expo took place in London, United Kingdom in 1851. It attracted the participation of 25 countries and drew over 6 million visitors. One and a half century later, in 2010, the Expo has moved to the other side of the world – to the East and to one of the “now cities” – Shanghai. This Expo will go down in our history books as a record-breaking one; it is the first Expo to be held in a developing country; it aims to bring 70 million visitors to its grounds over the 184 days from 1 May 2010; and it will see the participation of over 190 countries and 50 international organisations.

Indeed, an Expo of such a scale should not come as a surprise. After all, China has since more than a century ago dreamt of hosting the Expo. After the tumultuous early history of modern China followed by the labour pains of economic development and social progress, the day has finally come for China and Shanghai to deliver a show of such epic proportion. Shanghai and China have both come of age and the time has come for China to embrace the world and for the world to formally acknowledge the debut of China in the global new world.

The theme of Expo 2010, “Better City, Better Life”, encapsulates the global desire for a better, sustainable way of life in an increasingly urbanised environment. United Nations statistics indicates that an increasing proportion of the world population is living in cities – from 2% in the 1800's,



Shanghai shouts its welcome (上海欢迎您) in neon. Just one look at the sign and one can expect Shanghai to be a city of life and vibrancy!



田子坊 (Tianzifang)

Formerly a nondescript street, this neighbourhood was re-birthed as a bohemian enclave following redevelopment in 1998. While some of the original residents continue to lead their daily lives in the meandering alleyways, a new generation has also peppered this quaint neighbourhood with creative, entrepreneurial flavours. Artists' workshops, galleries, hand-made craft shops, relaxing tea corners and watering holes can be found alongside the backyard of the cosy abode of some long-time residents.

One can spend hours just exploring the many alleyways in Tianzifang. A surprise waylays the unsuspecting sojourner!



A quintessential part of the Chinese dining experience – every meal should be washed down with Chinese beer/liquor! 青岛啤酒 is one of the favourite brews in China.



This department store, 永安百货 has been in existence since the 1920s. Exuding its grand dame old world charm in modern Shanghai, it reminds me of its counterpart in Singapore, situated in the similarly charming former Nam Tim Hotel in Chinatown.



Signs of everyday living – laundry hung out from the window, just above a to-be-opened avant garde tea corner on the ground floor and an elderly resident, bent over the outdoor sink, preparing the family's meal in Tianzifang.

to 29% in the 1950's and today's figure of over 50%. As cities become a preferred place to live in, the world has to find sustainable ways of life in the cities while allowing mankind to seek new opportunities and maximise possibilities. While the common desire is for cities to prosper economically, for innovation in science and technology to enhance the standards of living, the social aspects of development are just as critical - appreciating diversity in cultures and increased interaction within and between communities.

In the light of this theme, Singapore has put up its pavilion on the theme of "Urban Symphony". Singapore's participation in this Expo is also a milestone for our nation - it is the largest scale of participation at any Expo for Singapore. Shaped like a musical box, built with recyclable building materials and incorporating environmentally friendly features, the pavilion tells the Singapore story over two floors and a rooftop garden showcasing Singapore as a beautiful City in a Garden. Visitors will appreciate how Singapore balances progress with sustainability and how different cultures and communities live, work and play in harmony, just as in a symphonic performance, in modern, cosmopolitan, yet traditional Singapore.

To provide a rich and diverse visitor experience at different times over the 6-month period of the Expo, a thematic change to the Singapore Pavilion takes place every two months. For the start of the Expo, during the months of May and June, the theme of the Singapore Pavilion was the Nanyang Connection. This theme explores the historical and cultural links between Singapore and China and the impact these links have in present-day Singapore-China relations.

The National Heritage Board (NHB) is proud to be part of the Singapore Pavilion from 17 May to 6 June; presenting the story of the early Chinese Pioneers, Chinese Modern Ink Painting and the Peranakan Chinese. Singapore's strategic geographical location helped to attract early migrants who were driven by political, economic and social circumstances in their home countries to carve out new lives and fortunes in a land of opportunity. Besides Southeast Asia, Singapore attracted migrants from China, South Asia and West Asia in addition to other regions. The island became a confluence of different cultures and religions; creating an interesting, vibrant and colourful new home for these early migrants. Inter-marriages between different ethnic groups were not uncommon and new, unique cultures such as the Peranakans arose from such unions.

In its Expo gallery, NHB showed how with the best qualities from their motherland, infused with a dose of Nanyang flavour, the Chinese diaspora in Singapore concocted a unique culture which is distinctively Singapore's, contributing to the dynamic and diverse multi-cultural environment in Singapore. While adapting to life in their new homeland, the Chinese diaspora remain connected to their motherland. Besides sending precious remittances, the Chinese diaspora also stood up in times of need - contributing money, their efforts and even their lives to the Chinese Revolution and the Sino-Japanese war efforts. As they built their lives in this new land, there arose amongst them successful entrepreneurs and professionals, such as Dr. Lim Boon Keng (1869 to 1957), Tan Kah Kee (1874 to 1961), Eu Tong Sen (1877 to 1941) and Lee Kong Chian (1893 to 1967). While bettering their lives, they did not forget the Chinese idiom of 饮水思源 (when one drinks water, one shall never forget its source - one should always remember the source of one's blessings). Hence, they contributed fervently to the well-being of their countrymen in China and Singapore, in areas such as healthcare, education and social welfare.

The exhibition also showcased the artistic development in Singapore, specifically in the area of Chinese Modern Ink Painting, which flourished with the contribution of a broad spectrum of both migrant and Singapore-born Chinese artists - Chen Wen Hsi (1906 to 1991), Cheong Soo Pieng (1917 to



A treasured photographic memory of one's visit to the Singapore Pavilion – a photo opportunity with the performers outside the Pavilion.



A participative installation, the Metro-Nome, invites the visitor to hop onto the interactive trampoline and in unison with other participants, bouncing in a cohesive rhythm, the Metro-Nome unveils familiar images of Singapore's sights and scenes.

1983), Lim Tze Peng(1923), Chua Ek Kay (1947 to 2008), Tan Kian Por(1949) and Hong Sek Chern (1967). Combining the influences from their personal experiences, the artistic training they received in China and overseas and the stimulus of their lives in this new land, these artists injected new life to modern ink painting, creating a unique style of visual art.

In deference to the Nanyang Connection theme and reflecting Singapore as a magnet for different cultures, the final showcase of the NHB exhibition was on the Peranakan Chinese. The Peranakan Chinese are descendants of inter-marriages between the early Chinese migrants and local women. From such intermarriages, a hybrid culture of Chinese traditions and indigenous customs developed, giving birth to the distinctive Peranakan culture. To give visitors a sense of Singapore's rich Peranakan culture, selected artefacts from the Peranakan Museum could be viewed on a video clip.



The *Dendrobium Singapore Shanghai Symphony*, the centrepiece of the Floral Finale at the rooftop garden of the Pavilion. This orchid was specially cultivated to commemorate Singapore's participation in the Expo and to celebrate Singapore's friendship with China.

Through this exhibition, NHB presented the strong historical and cultural links between Singapore and China. This link is especially important as 2010 marks the 20th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Singapore and China. Singapore-China relations have come of age; these 20 years have seen the two countries engaged in multi-faceted ties that span politics, economics, education, culture, science and technology. Significantly, on the ground, the exhibition struck a chord with an appreciative Chinese audience. The enduring values of the early Chinese migrants - hard work, honesty, integrity, perseverance, love for your community - continue to resonate with the audience. The kinship between Singaporean Chinese and the extended family in our ancestral hometowns in China continue to bind us. Most strikingly, when I spoke to an elderly Chinese man who bears the passage



An evocative exhibition presented by NHB – which stirs the feelings of kinship and friendship between China and Singapore.

of time etched as lines on his skin, he described the relations between Singapore and China as 唇亡齿寒 (when the lips perish, the teeth become cold - the common fate that binds a relationship between two parties). Coming from someone who has witnessed and been part of the history of modern China, these words continue to ring in my ears.

While I celebrate my identity as an ethnic Chinese and my ancestral links with China, I am proud to be part of the new society my ancestors have built in their land of hope, which they found in Singapore. Together with fellow migrants from different lands who shared dreams of a better life and a sense of zeal towards a better future, they have contributed to the diverse cultural landscape in Singapore and eventually called Singapore home. Given the recent passing of some of our first generation political leaders, this reflection on 唇亡齿寒 is a poignant reminder of how as fellow Singaporeans, our lives are really bound by a common thread - we need each other to be successful and to build better lives for our future generations. The values our ancestors held dear will continue to anchor us as we sail through the unpredictable seas of societal change.



Stamps, stamps everywhere! Enthusiastic visitors to the Singapore Pavilion, eager to get a stamp of the Singapore Pavilion on the Expo Passport as a memento of their visit.



View of a Malay Village, Singapore, 1904 (John Randall Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore).

THE VILLAGE VIEW

Recalling the Local Farm House

musedesign

BY KELVIN ANG KAH ENG
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IMAGES:
KELVIN ANG KAH ENG

Growing up in the early 1970s and in Queenstown, my first impressions of the built environment were very much shaped by the modernist and high-rise public housing that was built by the HDB around me. Home was a 3-room corner flat that looked just like many others, and located on the 12th storey of Block 175, Stirling Road. From the common corridor, my friends and I could see the growth of our city as more and more highrises were built along Orchard Road and the Golden Shoe area.

This was just a decade removed, though it could well have been a lifetime, from the environment that my father was familiar with when he was growing up in the 1940s, which was an elevated wooden house in one of the many lorongs off Geylang. They were also a world away from the single storey timber houses in the Upper Thomson 'Hailam Sua' area where my mother had friends who lived in rambutan plantations, and where we would go during the holidays to visit and eat rambutans straight off the trees.

Even closer to my physical home, the image of a local farm house was that of the Malay-style kampong houses, raised on stilts and set amongst coconut groves, that were shown in P. Ramlee movies that I watched with my Malay neighbours – usually with a winsome young lady at the window, singing about her loved one while a gentle breeze rustled her selendang (a kind of shawl).

In those simpler days, visiting our neighbours or watching a film was as good as going away on a holiday.



Close up showing the typical construction of a Chinese farm house. Picture is author's own.



Typical Chinese farm house in the mid 1960s, sitting close to the ground. Pigs, wandering 'garbage conversion units', were an indispensable part of the Chinese rural environment.' Post card from author's collection.

TWO TRADITIONS OF KAMPONG HOUSE

So, back to reality, what were the rural houses that Singapore used to have by their thousands – and which we called the 'kampong house'?

Generically, there were two main traditions of rural domestic houses: namely the Malay-style and the Chinese-style houses.

For the Malay-style house, there are numerous variations in the structural layout of the house and also the roof forms. These variations are tied to the different architectural cultures of the different parts of the Malay peninsula and archipelago. A good reference book on this topic is *The Malay House: Rediscovering Malaysia's Indigenous Shelter System* (1991) by Lim Jee Yuan. However, they all share a few key features that make these homes very much suited to living in the tropics. These features are:

- A steep roof (traditionally of attap thatch – a readily available material, with good heat-insulating properties) that could rapidly throw off rain,
- A verandah in the front, that forms an 'inside-outside' living room which is readily cooled by the slightest breeze, while the kitchen

is at the rear,

- A timber structural system, with timber walls that often had more windows than walls,
- A raised floor – to keep the inhabitants safe from wandering animals, floods, and also provide better ventilation all round.

THE CHINESE FARM HOUSE

What is less fully documented or analysed is the Chinese farm house in this region, which exhibits both commonalities and differences with the indigenous Malay house.

Being relatively recent immigrants into the region, Chinese farmers brought their architectural world view into the region. As practical folks, they too would have made practical adaptations, learning from the locals, to what they would build. However, in certain aspects, they were to be very conservative.

The Chinese farm house in this region, and in Singapore, instead of being built from earth, brick and stone as in China, adopted the widespread use of timber for structure and walls. Roofing was also of attap and similar to Malay houses. The house would be under a single roof. Ventilation was provided by a gap of 2 to 3 feet between the top of the wall and the underside of the roof.

The house would be rectangular in plan, and based on my memory of houses that I went to as a child, there would be a central living hall where the family ate, and entertained, while bedrooms would be on either side of this hall. Similar though to the Malay house, would be the placement of the kitchen at the rear.

On elevation, in contrast to the pleasing asymmetry of the Malay house, it retained the traditional approach of a symmetrical façade – with a central main door and flanked by solid plank windows on either side.

Perhaps the two greatest differences between the two traditions, would be that firstly, Chinese houses were rarely, if ever, raised above the ground. They would sit on the earth, with the upper timber walls resting on a low foundational wall, and unless one was quite wealthy, the floors were of bare compacted earth. Secondly, the verandah that is indispensable to the Malay way of life, is not seen in the Chinese farm house.

PRIVATE HAVENS FROM THE CITY

In relation to the surrounding environment, it can be observed that the Chinese retained the concept of clearly and physically demarcating private land from common land. Their farm houses would have a fence, and



Modernised Chinese farm house near Ubin village, with zinc roof. Picture is author's own.

sometimes, a gate way, following the practice back in China. For Malay villages, there was demarcation too for individual houses, but often in a less formal way. A common way was the use of spiky plants such as bougainvillea as a 'fence'. Which by the way, as I learnt in movie and folk tales, had an important role in keeping out unwanted visitors of the spiritual kind – such as the very frightening 'hantu penanggalan'.

These houses, numbering in their thousands across Singapore, were therefore, the homes of those who were in a way fortunate enough to avoid the extreme urban overcrowding that characterised the old city up to the early 1980s. But at the same time, living in a 'rural idyll' meant being deprived of basic facilities and amenities of a modern life.

Today's Singapore is even more developed, but on Pulau Ubin we still have the opportunity to see some remaining examples of Singaporean Malay and Chinese farmhouses in a traditional rural setting. There, one can find a good representation of these traditional and functional forms of building, albeit, with some recent modifications, such as the replacement of attap roofs with corrugated zinc roofs.

Visiting the island gives me a cherished reminder of my childhood visits to Hailam Sua with its farmhouses in the rambutan plantations, as well as brings to life scenes from those early Malay films.

What is your mental image of a farm house? Is it what we have? Or perhaps, it is more likely to be that of cosy 'fairytale' English and European style farm cottages or Tudor-styled thatched buildings where naughty children, elves and fairies were caught up in magical adventures as described by Enid Blyton or the Grimm Brothers?

Well, I have news for you. Surprisingly, the island also holds one of these 'fairytale' farm houses from our old story books. What is this house? That's a tale I will have to save for another time...

The author trained as an architect in University College, London. He still takes the occasional day trip to Ubin, and hopes to be able to stay overnight in one of the farm houses there.



MUSINGS ON SINGAPORE'S NATURAL HISTORY
WITH PROFESSOR PETER NG
DIRECTOR, RAFFLES MUSEUM OF BIODIVERSITY RESEARCH,
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

Director of the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research (RMBR), National University of Singapore, Professor Peter Ng also heads the Systematics and Ecology Laboratory at the Department of Biological Sciences, Faculty of Science, NUS. An international authority in the biodiversity of crabs and fishes, he has also conducted research into the ecology of peat swamps, conservation biology in Southeast Asia and museology. He is also charged with the moving of the present Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research from its present location in the science faculty to a new \$30 million building that will serve as a fully fledged Natural History Museum offering free admission to the public.

Q: HOW DID YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL, INTEREST IN SINGAPORE'S NATURAL HERITAGE BEGIN?

Professor Ng: Since I was in primary school – I loved animals as a hobby – kept all sorts of fish, loved bird watching and pottering around the seashore. It stayed.

Q: WHY DOES SINGAPORE NEED A NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM? HOW DIFFERENT WOULD IT BE FROM THE NATURAL HISTORY GALLERIES OF THE FORMER RAFFLES MUSEUM AT STAMFORD ROAD?

Professor Ng: Because we are no longer a third world country that cannot afford the educational value and heritage value of such a museum. People need to connect with the past – and that includes natural heritage. There has been much said about culture, arts and architecture. I am of the opinion that this must include nature. The world has changed. As has our heritage. We need to tell people – show people – show citizens what we had, lost and are now trying hard to keep.

How will the natural history museum be different? Only in content, because the world has changed, and presentation, as there is now greater style and improved technology. The message remains the same – natural heritage and the natural environment must be conserved. It will showcase the Singapore model in many ways. Not because we are the best – we are still some way off – but how we have lived our history, achieved first world status, and paid a price for it in many ways – heritage included. We are now trying, as always, to do a balancing act between economic and social well being and environmental challenges. We are good at balancing and trying to mitigate.

Q: WHAT MAKES THE COLLECTION OF THE RMBR SIGNIFICANT TO BIOLOGISTS AS WELL AS THE PUBLIC AND POLICY MAKERS?

Professor Ng: It is Singapore (and Malaysia)'s history in a nutshell. It represents 150 years of our history of living on this island. What was here – what we used to do, what Singapore was like. We need this history to bond a people that has come from a multitude of nations and cultures. Short of sounding

like a politician, I am of the belief that people who do not know their history, including natural history, cannot really appreciate what it is to be a Singaporean. That includes what we have lost, the mistakes we have made as a nation, and what we are now doing to change things. In this new world, we – Singaporeans – need to walk the talk!

Q: COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT SOME OF THE SPECIMENS FROM THE RMBR COLLECTION THAT YOU ARE PARTICULARLY FOND OF? ARE THERE RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE COLLECTION THAT YOU BELIEVE WILL PROVE VITAL TO FUTURE RESEARCHERS?

Professor Ng: I am biased towards my crabs – so that is hard. All the material that comes into the collection, especially from researchers and public from Singapore, is important – we are after all the national repository for animal specimens. These specimens of all types will tell future generations what was here and what researchers did. We also have growing holdings of Southeast Asian specimens – that is important for researchers who need to see the region as a whole. Singapore endeavours to be a portal for the region. We are well positioned – both geographically and economically. It's the same for biodiversity research.

Q: COULD YOU UPDATE US ON THE PROGRESS OF THE PLANS FOR THE NEW NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM?

Professor Ng: Fund raising is now reaching its end-phase – we need to wrap it up, get the outstanding funding needed and get the new museum building up and running soon.

Q: WHAT WOULD IT TAKE FOR A NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM TO BE EFFECTIVE FROM A PUBLIC OUTREACH AND EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE?

Professor Ng: A new larger gallery would be a good start. We have good educational programmes that can be substantially enlarged and expanded in the future. We have a host of new ideas and plans for expanding the museum's role in tertiary and school environmental education in the years ahead – but it is too early to tell you about them now. Suffice to say – watch this space.



Q: WHY SHOULD SINGAPOREANS CARE ABOUT OUR NATURAL HERITAGE, BOTH WHAT USED TO EXIST AS WELL AS WHAT REMAINS?

Professor Ng: Well, it is a matter of soul. They need not care or worry about the past and what has been lost. But if the people of today – young and old – really could not be bothered and only worry about the 5Cs and wealth, then as a people, we are extremely uncivilised. There is much more to being human than just material wealth. Great cities and civilisations need their people to have not only economic and military smarts but also a philosophical one – and to bond with nature. I think Singaporeans will rise to this challenge; I have met enough young people to believe that this is the way ahead. Know the past, understand the present – only then can you chart your future. Winston Churchill once said that those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it.

Q: YOU TEACH A MODULE ON THE NATURAL HERITAGE OF SINGAPORE. DO YOU THINK THE MODULE HAS A REAL IMPACT ON THE STUDENTS?

Professor Ng: I am sure it has. The module has evolved and is now very popular with NUS students. It is interesting because we are taking the natural history and conservation message to a wider audience and they are getting excellent exposure. The first thing, as always, is for people to know what is out there. Once they know, then their common sense will take over.

Q: THE FUTURE OF NATURE IN SINGAPORE IS OFTEN CAST IN GLOOM AND DOOM TERMS. ARE THERE ANY SIGNS LATELY THAT SINGAPORE'S NATURAL HISTORY COULD HAVE A FUTURE?

Professor Ng: I am a pessimist by nature – so I am well placed to answer this. After seeing how the conservation scene here has evolved for the last 25 years, I can in all honesty say things are getting so much better. We have gone beyond pure pragmatism into a new belief that we can change things. The landscape has become better – the policies have improved and our leaders are listening and believing.

Many young people – including some of my students – lament on how bad things are or how slow policies are. Yes – things can go faster and things can be better. But we have in 25-30 years moved in leaps and bounds! Things were much worse and more depressing 25 years ago. The future for our natural history is actually pretty good looking forward into the next 2-3 decades. Can I see further? No – and I have no intention. Anything longer than a generation is hard to imagine. If things go well in the generation ahead, I would be happy – and it would bode well for the next.

musecalendar

July – September 2010

NHB EDUCATION AND OUTREACH DIVISION

Singapore HeritageFest 2010 11 – 22 August 2010

Join us for an exciting journey of discovery with this year's instalment of Singapore HeritageFest! Zip over to *Festival In the City@Suntec* to check out the eye-opening World Cultures Through Traditional Costumes exhibition. Or fix your eyes on a stream of local cultural stage performances that promise to be a visual feast. Too busy to get down to the city? Then make a trip to one of the *Festival Hubs@The Heartlands*, where we bring the festival closer to home with exhibitions featuring different themes, colourful performances and activities.

For those of you who like a bit of adventure, hop on the *Expedition 'H'* bus as we take you to places you never knew existed. Finally, don't forget to head down to the Arts & Heritage District for the grand crescendo: *Heritage Sparkles In The City* where you can get into the bustle with concerts, food fairs, heritage workshops for children and arts & craft bazaars. Visit the festival website at www.heritagefest.sg for more details and regular updates.

ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

The Testament of Tebaran: Borneo's Moment of Truth Till 18 July 2010

Held in conjunction with *Month of Photography Asia 2010*, this exhibition by acclaimed National Geographic Photographer Mattias Klum is a powerful and revealing testimony of the devastation of Borneo's tropical rainforests, which are among the oldest and most biologically diverse in the world. Free admission.

Ramayana: Reinterpretation in Asia 17 Jul 2010 – 18 Jul 2010 9 am to 5pm, Ngee Ann Auditorium, ACM Empress Place

This international conference on the *Ramayana* examines the retelling and manifestation of the epic in diverse ancient and modern textual traditions, visual and performing arts as well as popular cultures of Asia. Also featured is the *Ramayana* in performance theatre such as Chinese opera and modern Indonesian dance. Please refer to www.acm.org.sg for the full list of speakers and the conference programme. This conference is organised with the generous support of Mr Hwang Soo Jin and the Embassy of the United States, Singapore.

Sumatra: Isle of Gold 30 July – 7 November 2010

Known in ancient times as the 'Island of Gold', Sumatra was an early point of arrival for trade,

new religions and ideas in Southeast Asia. These cross-cultural exchanges have created the unique and diverse Sumatra of today. Discover Sumatra's forgotten histories and unexpected richness through some 300 artefacts from the collections of the National Museum of Indonesia, the Museum Volkenkunde (National Museum of Ethnology), Leiden, the Asian Civilisations Museum and private collections. Look out for the gold crown of the Sultan of Siak, shipwreck treasures and 2,500 year-old Bronze Age artefacts. *Sumatra: Isle of Gold* is the first international touring show about Sumatran culture and is the highlight of the National Heritage Board's Fokus Indonesia Festival.

SuperMighty! Heroes of Asia

24 July 2010 – 13 February 2011

An exhibition created specially for children, *SuperMighty!* explores the legends behind some popular characters from Asian myths, many of whom are still well-known and even found in contemporary culture. Meet iconic figures such as Hanuman, the Monkey God of India; Rustam, the dashing champion of Iran who defeated dragons and demons; and Mulan, the warrior-maiden of Chinese legends. Featuring colourful displays, engaging artefacts and a fun zone for kids to get into some hands-on learning, *SuperMighty!* promises a fun museum-going experience for the young and young at heart.

PERANAKAN MUSEUM

Ramayana Revisited: A Tale of Love & Adventure Till 22 August 2010

The Ramayana is one of the timeless epic poems of India. It recounts the life of Rama, Prince of the Ayodhya kingdom, and his quest to rescue his wife Sita from Ravana, King of Lanka, with the help of an army of monkeys. This exhibition will feature paintings, textiles and shadow puppets associated with the *Ramayana* from across South and Southeast Asia.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE

SINGAPORE 1960 Till 22 August 2010

In celebration of 50 years of self-government, *Singapore 1960* transforms the National Museum's galleries into a colourful 'live' show set interjected with noteworthy and quirky news articles. By appropriating cultural spaces familiar to Singaporeans then such as Haw Par Villa and the neon-lit 'Worlds' amusement parks, over 300 artefacts will be presented in the manner of art installations. Artefacts such as a 100 year-old Strohenger grand piano, sexy sarong kebaya, sequined Chinese opera costumes, hundreds of popular vinyl records and publications and two pairs of sweat-stained boxing gloves were

some of the icons that dotted Singapore's socio-cultural landscape in 1960.

Surviving the Streets: Peddlers and Artisans in Early-Mid 20th Century Singapore 28 June – 22 August 2010

The streets of Singapore in the early to mid-20th century testify to the complex social and economic world of the people who dwelled here. Lurking in the corners, on the edges and in the darkened corridors were nameless entrepreneurs who included rickshaw pullers, hawkers, coolies, refuse collectors and petty traders. The exhibition is supplemented by a display of tools and an audio-visual footage of some traditional crafts – all set in the context of the various aspects of the social life.

Night Festival

16 & 17 July 2010

Dream of the past, be in the present and fantasise about the future at Night Festival 2010! Explore, stay and have fun at the reinvented magical playground in the pulsating avenue of Singapore's arts and heritage district. Taking its inspiration from the New World Amusement Park in the 1960s, a dazzling spectacle of street theatre extravaganza, magical lights and carnivalesque play will retell the story of this era. Teaming contemporary art and video installations with outdoor performances, Night Festival 2010 will also reveal a surprising insight to our New World, 2010!

Cai Guo-Qiang: Head On 2 July – 31 Aug 2010

Head On is created by Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang for his solo exhibition of the same name at the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin. Ninety-nine life-sized wolves leap en masse towards an unseen wall, with those in front falling from striking the wall. Seen from afar, the leaving wolves form an arc of force and power, reflecting the collective mentality of humanity that is destined to repeat its errors to an almost unbelievable degree.

SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

Ming Wong: Life Of Imitation Till 22 August 2010

Ming Wong revisits the Golden Age of Singapore cinema in the 1950s and 60s, an era of nation-building and rapid modernisation. He re-reads 'national cinema' constructed through language, role-playing and identity by re-interpreting films familiar to audiences then, using video interventions that pose questions related to roots, hybridity, and the politics of becoming. The exhibition also unveils cinema posters by Singapore's last surviving billboard painter; rare screen memorabilia of a private collector; and documentaries by film-maker Sherman Ong.

Istana Art Event 2010

8 Aug 2010

The Istana

The Istana Art Event is an annual arts and heritage festival brought to you by the Singapore Art Museum, and in conjunction with the Istana National Day Open House. It is a community outreach programme that encourages families with children to celebrate art and heritage in the lush grounds of the Istana. For fun and games, make a date with us this August! Free admission to the Istana.

SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM at 8Q

Art Garden: Children's Season at the Singapore Art Museum

Till 18 July 2010

In its inaugural Children's Season, SAM introduces young people to contemporary art in an interactive, supportive and fun family environment. The entire SAM at 8Q building is transformed into magical art gardens showcasing artist projects and artworks inspired by nature. These displays are accompanied by captions and activity sheets to enhance the children's learning experience. Young visitors can also participate in a series of artists' workshops and enjoy short film screenings.

Tags & Treats: Works by Vincent Leow

6 August – 17 October 2010

Vincent Leow has carved out an important niche in Singapore's contemporary art development through the course of his long, prolific and alternative art practice. He has worked in a wide range of genres from performance, installation and sculpture, to digital and mixed-media works. This exhibition marks a mid-career survey of Leow's prolific oeuvre, focusing both on his very earliest influences to his latest works created specially for this show. While his practice has centred largely around the provocative and aggressive, *Tags & Treats* reveals a meditative side to Leow, exploring issues of identity, mortality and legacy that were present in his earliest paintings, and which he is revisiting again today.

SINGAPORE PHILATELIC MUSEUM

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Danger

Till 1 August 2010

Celebrate the Year of the Tiger with this fun and educational exhibition for children, and admire beautiful tiger stamps, including zodiac stamps from all over the world. Unravel interesting facts about this magnificent creature whose number has dropped greatly in the last century. Gain an insight into the plight of wild tigers in our world today, and find out what you can do to save wild tigers from extinction.

At the Post Office - with Max & Phily

Till December 2010

For children aged 5 to 10 years, this exhibition introduces children to the post office as a service provider for the community. Children can learn the location of different countries on the world map, find out about the history of the post and see different types of mail boxes from around the world.

Football Fever!

Till 29 August 2010

Every four years, the world's attention is riveted on the World Cup – the world's most watched and discussed football event. This June, 32 countries battle for the prestigious crown in South Africa. *Football Fever!* unravels the development of the world's most popular sport, amazing World Cup moments, and the history of football in Singapore. Discover how the game survived centuries of banning during medieval times and is eventually played by millions today. Admire beautiful football stamps from around the globe and rare football memorabilia of iconic players such as Pelé.

The Originals of G.R. Lambert

2 August 2010 – 2 January 2011

The Originals of Lambert features a rare collection of original GR Lambert photographs and historical picture postcards from the late 19th to mid 20th century. This collection was donated by Mr Koh Seow Chuan, an avid and renowned collector in Singapore. Visitors can get a glimpse of the landscape and people of early Singapore through the eyes of GR Lambert, a famous German photographer who arrived in Singapore in 1867. He opened his photographic studio in 1875, and produced the first picture postcard of Singapore in 1897.

Youth Olympic Games

9 – 31 August 2010

This mini exhibition showcases the three issues of Youth Olympic Games (YOG) stamps – 2008, 2009 and 2010, and a colourful range of YOG memorabilia which include a minted YOG stamp set, plush toys of YOG mascots Lyo and Merly as well as Singapore 2010 sports and pictograms pin set.

Singapore Grand Prix 2010

6 – 30 September 2010

In conjunction with Singapore's hosting of the Formula 1 race for three consecutive years, a mini exhibition will be held during the race period. The exhibition will focus on the popularity of the Ferrari car marque which is widely featured on postage stamps, and collectibles such as flags, apparels, and model cars.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE

10 Years that Shaped a Nation: 1965-1975

25 June – 6 August 2010

On 9 August 1965, barely two years after a political merger with Malaysia, Singapore was suddenly thrust into independence. As a small country with no natural resources and facing unemployment, vulnerable security and far from satisfactory health conditions, Singapore had to stand up to the challenges to build a viable nation. This exhibition looks back at an important period of Singapore's history – our first decade of independence. Learn about the major contributions of our founding generation of leaders and appreciate how they laid the foundation for Singapore as an independent city state.

The Second Decade - Nation Building In Progress: 1975 - 1985

From 13 August 2009

This second instalment of NAS's nation-building travelling exhibition series showcases the struggles, decisions and predicaments faced by Singapore in her second decade of independence. This exhibition is held at Ngee Ann Polytechnic from 23 June – 6 August, Iluma from 1-13 October, at HDB Hub from 9-22 October and the National Library from 17 December - 4 January 2010.

Living History:

Tracing Our Customs and Traditions

12 – 23 July 2010

Racial and religious harmony are the bedrock principles for Singapore's multi-racial society. Appreciation and respect for one another's cultures, customs and traditions contribute to the well-being and stability of our country. Together with compassion and a sense of responsibility for one another, this is the "glue" that will hold our nation together. Held at St. Nicholas Girls' School (Primary), this exhibition is a celebration of our cultural diversity and aims to promote a better understanding of the varied cultures that give Singapore its unique flavour.

PRESERVATION OF MONUMENTS BOARD

Of Monuments and Memories

From May 2010

Feast your eyes on an artistic photography exhibition by the photographers who brought you the book *Resonance Songs of our Forefathers*. Featuring Singapore's 27 National Monuments, the exhibition is a chance to learn about the built heritage of Singapore as well as the stories behind their facades. Watch out for the exhibition at City Square Mall, VivoCity, Singapore General Hospital and Tampines Central Community Complex. Visit www.pmb.sg for more details on the exhibition and venues.

MALAY HERITAGE CENTRE

Malays in Early Photography

Till 1 August 2010

Documentation, in a form of pictorials, of the culture, tradition and daily lives of the Malays was considered incumbent to understanding the region at the end of the 19th century. This exhibition focuses on Malays through the lens of Western photography as it began to capture the local landscape and social fabric of a budding nation. The photographs shed light on the specific style of Western photography that romanticised much of the landscape and its people. Admission is free.

Visit www.nhb.gov.sg or www.heritagecalendar.sg for updates on NHB calendar of events. Please note that guided tours conducted by the Friends of the Museum (Singapore) and Museum Volunteers are available at NHB's National Museums. For details on the timings at the various museums, please refer to NHB's website.



Yang Di-Pertuan Negara Yusof Ishak congratulating silver medallist Tan Howe Liang at the Istana after his return from the Rome Olympics in 1960. Photo courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

By now, most people would be familiar with the two mascots of the Singapore Youth Olympic Games (YOG) as the media blitz for the inaugural YOG hits fever pitch in the run-up to the event that will be held from 14-26 August 2010. A dashing cub with a fiery mane, Lyo (pronounced 'Leo') channels the leonine heart and soul of a city-state that has adopted the Lion as a national symbol. A nod to the mythical side of the Singapore story, Merly is a young Merlion inspired by local folklore and the 8.6m high icon that welcomes tourists at Marina Bay.

Sceptics who recall earlier mascots such as the Courtesy Lion might scoff, but Lyo and Merly have an undeniable charm that has endeared them to fans of the Games and memorabilia hunters at the YOG superstore fronting Ngee Ann City at Orchard Road. The organisers of the London Olympic Games in 2012 probably hope that in time, their mascots will likewise win over audiences who have been baffled by the choice of a pair of animated ingots bearing cyclopean eyes and a London taxi light on their heads. Though alienlike to some (they were fashioned from steel droplets used to build the Olympic Stadium, goes the official fable), Wenlock and Mandeville owe much to Britain's historical ties to the Games. Wenlock, for one, is named after a town in Shropshire where Baron Pierre de Coubertin was inspired to found the modern Olympic movement. The Paralympic mascot, Mandeville, is named after a village in Buckinghamshire that was the birthplace of the Paralympic Games.

Singapore, too, enjoys an Olympic history that predates her birth as an independent nation. In fact, athletes born here have at various times represented China, Great Britain, Malaya and after 9 August 1965, the Republic of Singapore. The very first Singapore-born Olympian, Chua Boon Lay (1902-1976), journeyed to Berlin for the 1936 Games as a reserve in the Malayan Chinese football team. Chua did not get to play, unfortunately, as China was knocked out in the first round. Back in Singapore, the six-foot-tall fullback was nicknamed 'The Rock' for his defensive capabilities – not bad at all for a chicken seller who plied his trade at the Telok Ayer market and even named his second son 'Berlin' to commemorate the Games.

High jumper Lloyd Valberg (1922-1984) was the first to officially represent the island, being Singapore's sole competitor at the 1948 Games in London. As there was no Singapore flag then, Valberg had to use the British Union Jack during the traditional flag-raising ceremony at the Athletes' Village. He later took part in the triple

THE NAMES OF THE GAME: Mascots and the Men (and Women) of the Olympics from Singapore

The much-anticipated inaugural Youth Olympic Games are finally in town and BeMUSE pays tribute to the sportsmen and women who have made Singapore proud over the years.

jump at the 1952 Helsinki Games and after retiring, coached many younger sportsmen in fields as diverse as softball and boxing.

The Helsinki Games also saw the debut of Singapore's first female Olympian: Tang Pui Wah (b. 1933). Born and bred in Chinatown to a soya sauce factory owner, Tang was a versatile sportswoman who excelled as a high jumper, hurdler and sprinter. Alas, Tang's outing at the Games was an anticlimax as cold weather, an unfamiliar track and poor coaching dampened her potential and she was eliminated in the heats. Faring better was Mary Klass (b. 1935), who took a close 4th place in the 200m sprint at the Melbourne Games in 1956. Born to an Eurasian family, Klass usurped Tang's position as the 'fastest woman in Malaya' with a silver medal for the 100m sprint in the 1954 Asian Games in Manila. Klass recorded the same time as the gold medallist, Japan's Atsuko Nambu, but with no split-second camera technology during that time, the call was made in the latter's favour.

Singapore's shining Olympic moment arrived in 1960 when 27-year old Tan Howe Liang (b. 1933) lifted 380 kg to garner a silver medal in the lightweight (under 67.5 kg) category. It was a fitting victory for a newly minted (though not yet fully independent) nation and the achievement of a lifetime for the Swatow, China-born Tan, who was inspired to take up weightlifting 'just for the fun of it' after witnessing a contest at the Gay World Amusement Park.

With no coach and only a set of barbells, Tan used his income as a store clerk with the Cathay Organisation to purchase competition attire and participation fees that saw him bagging gold medals at the 1958 Commonwealth Games (where he established a world record in the lightweight division) and the 1958 Asian Games in Tokyo. His first Olympic outing in 1956 drew a blank, but a hunger for the ultimate prize led him back to the subsequent Games in Rome where he took home the silver and also set an Olympic record of 155 kg in the clean and jerk event. It would be another 48 years before the nation savoured once more a place on the podium with a silver at the 2008 Beijing Olympics thanks to Li Jiawei, Feng Tianwei and Wang Yuego of the women's table tennis team.

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