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Philipp Heinrich Müller (Augsburg 1654–1719 Augsburg), *Medal of Prince Johann Adam Andreas I von Liechtenstein* (r.1684–1712), 1694, Gold, Acquired by Prince Johann Adam Andreas I from the artist, diameter 7.28 cm. © Liechtenstein, The Princely Collections, Vaduz-Vienna

back cover

Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio or Santi) (Urbino 1483–1520 Rome), *Portrait of a Man*, c.1502–1504, Oil on panel, H48xW37cm. Acquired by Prince Johann I in 1823. © Liechtenstein, The Princely Collections, Vaduz-Vienna

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20 YEARS of HERITAGE with YOU 1993–2013

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EDITOR'S MUSEINGS

The past, it is said, is a foreign country where things are different and done differently. But it is also a place that many of us visit from time to time to recollect and reminisce. History, it could be said, provides an emotional anchor that helps us recapture a sense of self that risks being forgotten amid our pursuit of individual progress.

It is true that some places we hold dear may have been transformed, even beyond recognition, but what remains unchanged are the memories we cherish. And increasingly, many people who have seen how the nation grew and changed over the years are not content to keep their memories to themselves. Through events and efforts such as the Singapore HeritageFest and our community heritage trails, Singaporeans are coming forth to share their experiences and enrich our collective knowledge of various neighbourhoods and other lesser-known nooks around the island. In turn, these individuals are finding appreciative audiences in fellow Singaporeans, both young and old, who are discovering that the past, different as it may be, is a country well-worth exploring and filled with stories that surprise and stay in the mind.

One example, as recounted in this issue of *BeMuse*, comes from the family of William Lawrence Soma Basapa, who shared with the Indian Heritage Centre the life of their forefather, a landowner who loved animals and established the first Singapore Zoo in a now-forgotten corner of Punggol. Meanwhile, long-time residents of Tiong Bahru are giving visitors a fresh and insider's look at their beloved housing estate. These residents form part of a cohort of volunteer guides, along with students and other heritage enthusiasts, who point out hidden facets of Tiong Bahru such as a unique underground air-raid shelter, once-overlooked graves and favourite traditional eateries.

The past may be a foreign country, or *from* a foreign country. By this, I refer to the showcases of artefacts and artworks from all over the world that regularly visit our shores, the latest being a must-see selection of masterpieces from the Principality of Liechtenstein. On a slightly different note, curators from the Singapore Art Museum offer, in this issue, a heartfelt take on artistic homecoming and cultural awakening in an isolated village in Myanmar, where the community is taking part in creating art that is a commentary on life and change in their nation.

I hope you enjoy reading these and other features, and as we hit press in the fasting month of Ramadan, I wish to take the opportunity to wish all our Muslim readers and friends a blessed Ramadan and Selamat Hari Raya Puasa come Syawal in August.

THANGAMMA KARTHIGESU
Editor-In-Chief



[L-R] Mrs Mildred Tan, Chairperson, Businesses for Families Council; Mr Chan Chun Sing, Acting Minister for Social and Family Development, Guest-of-Honour for the Awards Ceremony; Ms Lucille Yap, Senior Curator, Singapore Philatelic Museum. Pictures courtesy of Businesses for Families Council

SINGAPORE PHILATELIC MUSEUM CONFERRED ACHIEVER AWARD BY THE BUSINESSES FOR FAMILIES COUNCIL

Since 2009, the Singapore Philatelic Museum (SPM) has been accredited with the Businesses for Families Mark by the Businesses for Families Council (BFC). SPM is the only NHB museum to receive the Businesses for Families Mark, which honours organisations or businesses that go the extra mile to cater to families. SPM was awarded the mark for meeting specific strategy, service and infrastructure standards related to the museum's exhibitions, programmes, marketing, service and facilities.

Strong supported by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), the BFC encourages companies to target families as customers. SPM has tapped

into the former Businesses for Families Grant (now FamilyMatters@Business Grant), which is set aside by the MSF to help businesses adopt and put in place business practices that welcome and support families. SPM used the grant to develop fun and educational activities for families and children such as family corners, an activity and games.

At the 'We Welcome Families' Awards ceremony held on 25 April 2013, SPM was conferred the Achiever Award by the BFC. This was in recognition of the museum's family-friendly programmes and facilities. Altogether, the BFC handed out 23 Excellence Awards and 30 Achiever Awards at the event.



Fun educational activities using the Businesses for Families Grant

LIGHT VS. DARK EXHIBITION: STAMPS AND COLLECTIBLES

The Force was strong at the *Light vs. Dark* Exhibition! Held at the Singapore Philatelic Museum, this special exhibition, which ran from 1 March to 30 June 2013, attracted many non-stamp collectors, who were treated to a visual feast of more than 2,000 Star Wars collectibles. These included postage stamps and first day covers from the USA and Singapore Post MyStamps from the Singapore Philatelic Museum's collection, as well as figurines, model ships, vessels and costumes on loan from Star Wars memorabilia collectors in Singapore.

A number of interesting programmes were organised during the period of the exhibition. Troopers from 501st Legion, a group of Star Wars fans who dress up as characters from the films, made special appearances during Star Wars Day on 4 May; International Museum Day on 18 and 19 May, and Children's Season open house on 2 and 16 June. They were dressed up as popular characters such as the Emperor, Biker Scout, TIE Fighter pilot, Jango Fett, Sandtrooper, Stormtrooper and Commander Stone of the Clone Wars. Many visitors also dressed up as Star Wars characters to join in the fun, while others were just overwhelmed by the excitement of seeing the figurines come alive!

Two 3D figurine workshops were also held in June. The participants, children as well as adults, used 3D modelling software to create their own Star Wars figurines and viewed the state-of-the-art 3D printing in action! Each participant brought home their very own R2-D2 figurine. The workshops were conducted by Jose Maya, a professional 3D modelling artist.

At the "World of Light vs. Dark" school holiday programme, young participants were awed by the Star Wars figurines on display at the exhibition. They also made Star Wars-inspired handicrafts such as Darth Vader/Jedi Father's Day cards and Darth Vader hand puppets.

"We feel like we have travelled back in time to our childhood! This is fantastic. We just can't stop laughing because we're so happy!"

- Two sisters in their 30s, on 19 May

"Truly amazing crowd! I enjoyed trooping for your museum! I'm happy to see so many happy faces and there's so much family bonding."

- Star Wars Trooper, on 19 May



Tucked away behind the borders of Singapore's shopping district is Tiong Bahru, a quaint and charming housing estate dotted with eclectic independent shops as well as eateries old and new. Popularly known for its food offerings and distinctive architecture, Tiong Bahru has become one of Singapore's most sought-after residences as many people have rediscovered in recent years the unique attractions of a laid-back, low-rise neighbourhood.

The Tiong Bahru Heritage Trail

A ROUTE TO DISCOVERY

Text by **TAY MAY LING & JOSEPHINE SIN**
Images by **ALEX HENG & MARCUS NG**



On 14 April 2013, the National Heritage Board (NHB) launched its 11th heritage trail to uncover the rich history and fascinating stories behind Tiong Bahru, which the public can now explore through a walking trail spanning the conserved housing area and its nearby surroundings. Tracing Tiong Bahru from its beginnings as an adjoining cemetery to a gravesite known as *Teong Lama* — literally ‘Old Cemetery’ — the trail sheds light on the social history and remarkable evolution of the estate, its unique Art Deco flats and shophouses, other landmarks past and present, as well as the people, trades, eateries and events that have helped shaped the community in Tiong Bahru.

FROM BURIAL GROUND TO BUSTLING DESTINATION

There is definitely more to Tiong Bahru than meets the eye. As the third public housing project developed by the Singapore Improvement Trust or SIT, Kampong Tiong Bahru, as it was known then, was transformed from a Chinese burial ground to a thriving residential estate. Today, there are no traces of the swamps, hills and graves that once dotted the area around Tiong Bahru Road from the mid-19th century until the 1930s, but many other aspects of the past can still be seen in and around the estate and are highlighted by informative storyboards and markers placed by these historic sites.

One hidden nugget that even regular visitors and residents may not have known about is an air-raid shelter located right under the flats of Block 78 Moh Guan Terrace. This vacant space, which was for a time used as a rubbish disposal site, was in fact the largest public air-raid shelter in Singapore and the only one to be built as part of a public housing project. The shelter, dug in 1939, could accommodate up to 1,600 people but was seldom used as Tiong Bahru was not a major target for Japanese bombs during the Second World War.

Another oft overlooked historical site lies at the outskirts of Tiong Bahru along Outram Road, across the road from a petrol kiosk and Tan Boon Liat Building. Here, on a wooded hill long abandoned and ignored by passers-by, rest the remains of philanthropist Tan Tock Seng (1798-1850), his daughter-in-law Chua Seah Neo (d. 1882) and granddaughter-in-law Wuing Neo (d. 1882). The same hillock was also the location of a thriving Chinese-medium school called Gongshang, which operated at the site from 1930 till 1988.





Other former landmarks have vanished or changed beyond recognition. Visitors will learn from the trail about the history of a site at the junction of Seng Poh and Tiong Bahru Roads, where a small temple stood between 1918 and 2006. This Chinese temple was a major feature of the neighbourhood due to a large red *bulu* or gourd-shaped incense burner placed outside the shrine. Right across the road from the temple was a very popular bird corner that used to draw people from all over the island to listen to the songs of feathered pets as well as enjoy meals at a coffeeshop beside the bird corner.

The site of the former Seng Poh Road Market is also a very different sight from the past; the cramped old market has given way to a spacious food centre and wet market, where many stallholders from the older market continue to prepare and serve popular hawker fare such as fried *krway teow*, Hokkien prawn noodles, *wanton mee*, *chwee kueh*, porridge and traditional snacks. Visitors can read about the individual stallholders, their history and culinary specialties in a brochure that presents the Tiong Bahru Heritage Trail in detail, which can be accessed at this website: <http://www.nhb.gov.sg/NHBPortal/Trails/TiongBahru/Overview>.

These are just a few of the many highlights of the trail, which is designed to tell the story of Tiong Bahru and chart the milestones of its development in a way that reflects the spirit and character of the community, including the personal memories of present and past residents. To this day, the physical and social landscape of Tiong Bahru is still evolving, as new residents, businesses and visitors arrive and interact with each other as well as older establishments. The conservation status granted to the housing estate, however, paves the way for a harmonious blend of the classic and contemporary, as new eateries and retailers move into the pre-war shophouses, injecting new life into the estate while retaining its old-world, understated nature.

TO THIS DAY, THE PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL LANDSCAPE TIONG BAHRU IS STILL EVOLVING, AS NEW RESIDENTS, BUSINESSES AND VISITORS ARRIVE AND INTERACT WITH EACH OTHER AS WELL AS OLDER ESTABLISHMENTS.

GUIDED BY VOLUNTEERS AND STUDENTS

The Tiong Bahru Heritage Trail also marked a number of 'firsts' for the NHB, which is working to engage Singaporeans in documenting and sharing about the history of the places where people live, work and play. The trail was the first to feature guided tours conducted by volunteer guides on a regular basis for the public. Some of these guides are themselves residents of Tiong Bahru who were keen to share their own stories about the neighbourhood, as they have lived in the estate for many years. These volunteer guides underwent training sessions organised by the NHB and also conducted their own research on the estate. The tours have proven popular with the public; within three weeks of the trail's launch in April, all sessions until August 2013 were fully booked.

The trail is also the first to be adopted by a school. Henderson Secondary, which is located not too far away from the estate, has adopted the Tiong Bahru Heritage Trail for the next two years and plans to use it as an education platform. Students will also serve as the NHB's ambassadors in promoting the trail to other schools. The NHB is also organising training sessions for students who are keen to act as guides for their peers. The heritage trail offers students a creative avenue to involve themselves with local history and further their understanding of Singapore's past, while honing their research and leadership skills.



LAUNCHING THE TIONG BAHRU HERITAGE TRAIL

On the morning of 14 April 2013, the basketball court beside the Tiong Bahru Community Centre was turned into a site of festivities for the young and old, as a curious crowd explored colourful stalls, watched cultural performances put up by residents and enjoyed the privilege of being the first people to embark on the heritage trail. Volunteer guides, students and long-time residents led the guests through the estate, stopping at 10 markers and storyboards that showcase historical elements of Tiong Bahru and pointing out places and moments of significance. The launch of the trail was a day-long event of fun and celebration as residents and visitors alike gathered to celebrate the history and life of a community with much to offer in stories and sights.

The Tiong Bahru Heritage Trail is a collaborative effort between the NHB, the Tiong Bahru Youth Executive Committee (TB YEC), and the Tiong Bahru Community Centre Management Committee. Launched in conjunction with a Tiong Bahru Heritage Fiesta organised by TB YEC, the event was graced by Guest-of-Honour Ms Indranee

Rajah, in her capacity as Advisor to Tanjong Pagar GRC Grassroots Organisations. Approximately 1,000 people attended the event, including close to 200 invited guests and representatives of businesses and organisations located in the area, who were invited to walk on a modified trail route of the estate. As part of the tour, the guests had the opportunity to interact with Henderson Secondary students who were stationed at each heritage marker to introduce the guests to the site. These students had been trained by the NHB and conducted their own research to prepare for the launch. Their efforts certainly paid off as guests and students alike had an enriching time learning about the places they saw.

Many of the participants and guests also grabbed the chance to sign up for a guided walk of the trail. Two trail routes were available: one covered all ten heritage markers, while the other brought participants into the pre-war air-raid shelter at Blk 78 Moh Guan Terrace. With help from the HDB and Tanjong Pagar Town Council, the air-raid shelter was opened to the public for this special occasion. Adding a highly personal note to the tours were the volunteer guides, who shared their own research, experiences and stories with the participants.



Also at the launch to share her personal story was Ms Mary Pereira, who was born in the air-raid shelter at Moh Guan Terrace during an air raid in 1942. Ms Pereira's mother was taking cover in the shelter during the war when she suddenly went into labour. Thankfully, the shelter was equipped with medical facilities and had a doctor on site to attend to her. Ms Pereira was thus safely delivered and has shared her story with many others over the years, including the guests on the trail.

Many visitors were clearly enriched by the tours. Expressing his thoughts after going for the guided walk, Anthony Loke said he "definitely learned more about the history and community activity in Tiong Bahru in addition to the architectural information." Another participant, Karen Phan, remarked that the guided tours help to make "Tiong Bahru [a] living and growing museum."

The day-long launch event culminated in an outdoor movie screening that relived the old times back in the 1950s when the Tiong Bahru Community Centre would organise open-air film screenings for the community. Earlier, various community groups had set up booths selling snacks, handicrafts and fashion by the community centre. Occupying a

prominent space was a stall by Urban Sketchers Singapore, a group of avid and energetic artists who focus on drawing various outdoor locations in Singapore. The Urban Sketchers had collaborated with the NHB to conduct a sketch-walk along the trail, with individual artists seated at various spots where they could capture the mood and atmosphere of the estate in beautiful artworks that were exhibited during the trail's launch. Paul Wang, a representative of the group, stated, "We the Urban Sketchers had a really good time sketching Tiong Bahru. The event was well-organised and we appreciate NHB's hard work."

Another touch of artistry at the event came from fashion designer Elyn Wong of Stolen, a Singapore-based womenswear label. For the launch, Ms Wong had created a designer tote bag featuring Tiong Bahru's distinctive Art Deco flats. The bags were sold during the Tiong Bahru Heritage Fiesta, with all proceeds going to the Tanjong Pagar-Tiong Bahru Citizens' Consultative Committee Community Development and Welfare Fund to assist needy residents. The money collected from subsequent monthly guided trails, which require a nominal fee of two dollars per participant, will also go into this fund.





MANY VISITORS WERE CLEARLY ENRICHED BY THE TOURS. EXPRESSING HIS THOUGHTS AFTER GOING FOR THE GUIDED WALK, ANTHONY LOKE SAID HE “DEFINITELY LEARNED MORE ABOUT THE HISTORY AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITY IN TIONG BAHRU IN ADDITION TO THE ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION.”

ROUTES TO DISCOVERING THE HEARTLANDS

As with earlier NHB community trails, the Tiong Bahru Heritage Trail was launched with the aim of engaging Singaporeans to learn and share about the heritage of the heartlands, as well as to document the unique histories and social memories of places and communities in different parts of Singapore. These trails chart old trades, businesses, schools and institutions as well as the diverse communities that have shaped the character of each place. As part of this effort, the NHB also encourages the community to actively contribute to the making of these trails. The result is that these trails include many human interest stories shared by old residents or business-owners, which provide first-hand accounts of important landmarks as well as events and changes that have taken place over the decades.

Another mission of the trails is to encourage the public to explore Singapore's heritage on their own, and at their own time and pace. Apart from the permanent markers and storyboards installed at major historical locations along the trails, the NHB has produced detailed brochures to accompany each heritage trail, which provide in-depth information about the neighbourhoods and sites of historical interest. Tiong Bahru is just one of many heritage trails launched by the NHB in recent years; other community trails cover places such as Kam-

pong Glam, Balestier Road, Jalan Besar, Bukit Timah, Queenstown, Ang Mo Kio and Yishun/Sembawang. There are also heritage trails focusing on the downtown Civic District as well as sites of significance during the Second World War in Singapore. Together, these trails offer a fresh and exciting understanding of the Singapore Story.

The heritage trails serve not merely as channels to improve our knowledge about places in Singapore. They also provide a useful platform for heritage enthusiasts, researchers and schools to pursue further research into the history of particular places, peoples and trades. It is hoped that these trails will motivate the public to see Singapore's history in a fresh light and discover more about the past in their own backyards, and in doing so, make history into a pursuit and passion that is continuous, alive and enriching.

You can read about the various heritage trails developed by the NHB at this website: <http://www.nhb.gov.sg/NHBPortal/Trails/Overview>

It's a bright and early morning at Bukit Timah Nature Reserve and I am going about my usual fieldwork when I hear a ruckus going on at a nearby tree. Walking over, I see a flurry of activity: long-tailed macaques are hopping from branch to branch, plantain squirrels are scurrying about, and a variety of birds are flocking to a great big tree that is covered with thousands of small, red, juicy fruit. It's a feeding frenzy, and the host?

A Fabulous Fig Tree.

Figs such as this Yellow Stem-Fig (*Ficus fistulosa*) produce great amounts of fruit, providing much-needed sustenance to many forest animals. Photo by Marcus Ng



By **DR. NANTHINEE JEVANANDAM**

Figs (or *Ficus* as this group of trees are known in Latin to botanists) are often touted as “key-stone species”, which means that these trees play a disproportionately large role in the lives of many creatures in an ecosystem. One key reason for this significance is that fig trees provide food for a great number of other animals in the forest. One research study has found that over 1,270 species of mammals and birds, as well as a number of reptiles and fish, feed on figs to varying degrees (Shanahan et al. 2001). In addition, many other tropical rainforest trees are seasonal, producing fruit only in certain months or even certain years, whereas figs bear fruit all-year round, thus providing a reliable and nutritious source of food for forest-dwelling birds and other beasts. In Singapore, animals that are known to eat figs include long-tailed macaques, squirrels, fruit bats, civets, hornbills, pigeons, barbets and bulbuls.

A FRUIT WITH A LONG HISTORY

Wild figs have existed for millions of years but their use in agriculture by our ancestors appears to have originated as far back as 11,400 years ago in the Near East. This was established in 2006 by archaeologists from Israel and the United States who found the remnants of dried figs at an archaeological site in the Jordan Valley (Kislev et al. 2006). Their discovery, which was published in the journal *Science*, suggests that figs were being used in agriculture even before olives and grapes, making them the oldest cultivated fruits to date.

Most of figs that are cultivated by mankind are varieties of a single species, *Ficus carica*, also known as the Common Fig. The name *carica* comes from Caria, a region in Asia Minor that is now part of Turkey. Turkey is the world’s largest producer of figs, accounting for approximately 27% of the total production of figs, followed by Egypt, then the USA. In Asia, figs are cultivated in Japan and China, but these are mostly retained for the domestic market. The cultivation of figs and the recognition of their nutritious quality have helped spread the fig far and wide. Today, figs are found wherever the weather permits and are cultivated in regions outside their native range like France and California.

TREES THAT DEPEND ON TINY WASPS

Despite their widespread cultivation and popularity as culinary treats, few people are aware that aside from *Ficus carica*, there are more than 700 species of figs worldwide. Approximately 500 species can be found in Australasia, making this region the most diverse for figs. Some of the most well-known local trees are figs; readers are surely familiar with Banyans or Strangler Figs (*Ficus benjamina* or *Ficus microcarpa*), which begin life as tiny seeds deposited on the branch of another, already mature, tree by a passing bird. The fig sapling then sprouts and sends down roots towards the ground. These aerial roots, which confer a rather spooky atmosphere to these figs, later thicken and ‘strangle’ the host tree, which dies off. The Banyan that remains forms a thick canopy with a dense latticework of roots, which provide ample habitat for other plants and animals. In the ruins of the Angkor Wat complex in Cambodia, large strangler figs have taken over some temple compounds, their roots enveloping the ancient stone walls and gopurams with a layer of living wood.

Another little-known fact about figs is that these magnificent, life-giving trees are completely dependent on tiny wasps measuring just a few millimetres in length, which are the only insects able to successfully pollinate their flowers. These fig wasps are very different from the hornets and other social wasps that visit flowers in parks and gardens and nest in elaborate hives; fig wasps do not feed as adults, lack stings and are totally harmless to humans; in fact, without fig wasps, we would have no figs at all.

Figs and fig wasps share what is known to ecologists as a reciprocal obligate mutualism. This means that both partners cannot reproduce without the other. The relationship is made more complex by the fact that approximately two-thirds of all fig species have a one-



This Malayan Banyan or Jejawi tree (*Ficus microcarpa*) is a prominent landmark at Kallang Riverside Park. These trees are often left undisturbed by locals and often have shrines set up under their canopy. Photo by Marcus Ng.



to-one relationship whereby each species of fig tree can only be pollinated by a single species of fig wasp. Thus, the extinction of the pollinator would mean the extinction of its associated fig tree as well.

The Chinese refer to figs as 'Wu hua guo' or 'flowerless fruit', a name which aptly describes the distinctive reproductive features of figs. Instead of showy flowers that bloom in the open from the tips of branches, figs produce an enclosed receptacle that is full of hundreds of tiny individual florets. This receptacle, called the syconium, is often thought to be the fruit, but it is not a fruit until pollination has taken place.

At the bottom of this receptacle, keen observers will see a tiny entrance called the ostiole. This hole serves to allow the female fig wasp to enter the syconium. She then proceeds to simultaneously pollinate the fig and lay her eggs. Her offspring, when they finally emerge as adults, will then mate with each other within the syconium. The male wasps die after mating, but the mated female will exit the syconium via the ostiole, carrying pollen on her body as she flies off to find other figs of the same species. When she reaches and enters a new syconium, the pollen on her body fertilises the fig and the life-cycles of both tree and wasp are repeated. In the meantime, the pollinated florets in the syconium will ripen and turn the receptacle into a delectable fruit enjoyed by humans and frugivorous animals. In short, the fig tree provides a nest for the offspring of the fig wasp, and in return the fig wasp pollinates the flowers of the fig. It is a mutualism that has lasted over 60 millions years and ensured the survival of both groups of organisms.

Cut into half, this Golden Hairy Fig (*Ficus aurata*) shows a fig wasp making its way around the florets in the syconium. As the fig wasp wanders inside the fig, she picks up pollen which will pollinate other figs she visits. Photo by the author.





These tiny wasps with long ovipositors (*Philotrypesis* sp.) are not pollinators but parasitic wasps whose young outcompete the larvae of pollinating fig wasps. Photo by the author.



(Left): Three fig wasps (*Valisia malayana*) entering a receptive syconium of the White-leaved Fig (*Ficus grossularioides*) through the ostiole. (Right): The pear-shaped syconia of the Yellow Stem-Fig grow directly from the trunk of the fig tree. Ripe fruit turn a bright yellow. Photos by the author.

In Singapore, figs are the second largest genus of woody plants with 48 recorded native species, of which 32 (66%) are considered critically endangered or nationally extinct (Chong et al. 2009). This is largely the result of deforestation, which has replaced nearly all of the island's original vegetation with urban spaces that support only a handful of hardy fig species such as Banyans. Another, more pervasive, threat to the survival of all species of figs is the possibility that their tiny pollinators will go extinct. A study carried out by my colleagues and myself using four species of fig wasps found in Singapore suggests that climate warming may not bode well for the short-lived tiny pollinators, as the projected increases in temperature expected for the tropics may shorten the lifespan of fig wasps by 33-60%. (Jevanandam et al. 2013). For an insect that already has a brief adult lifespan of just 1-2 days, this means a drastic reduction in the time it has to mate, locate a suitable fig, lay eggs and pollinate the florets. Over time, the reduction or absence of pollination services would lead to fewer ripe figs, and in turn both urban and wild animals may be adversely affected as they would lose a valuable source of food.

FIGS IN CULTURE AND CULTIVATION

Unlike animals in the wild, people are luckier since most of the appetising figs that end up in our stores and on our plates are parthenocarpic, which means that the fig ripens on its own without pollination. Most of the figs commercially cultivated in California are of this type, while those in the Middle East are a combination of wasp-pollinated and parthenocarpic cultivars.

Due to their sweetness, nutritious value and abundant crops, figs play an important role as a food resource in many cultures around the world. Dried figs are an excellent source of minerals, vitamins and antioxidants. In fact, dried fruits are concentrated sources of energy, with each 100 grams of dried figs providing approximately 249 calories. Fresh figs, on the other hand, contain antioxidants such as vitamins A, E, and K. Both dried and fresh figs have a high calcium content and rank second after oranges in terms of calcium content in fruits.

Even today, figs continue to play an important role in food and nutrition. This is most evident during the month of Ramadan when Muslims from around the world including Singapore break their daily fast with a combination of figs, honey, dates, olives and bread.

In traditional Chinese medicine, dried figs are used as an ingredient in tonics to help strengthen the lungs and relieve coughs. In Western cuisine, dried figs are popular as healthy, energy-rich snacks like the fig newton, which is a widely consumed pastry roll filled with fig paste. Figs are also made into jams, preserves, biscuits and confections such as Turkish baklava. The dried leaves of one native fig, *Ficus auriculata*, can be used to make a medicinal tea.

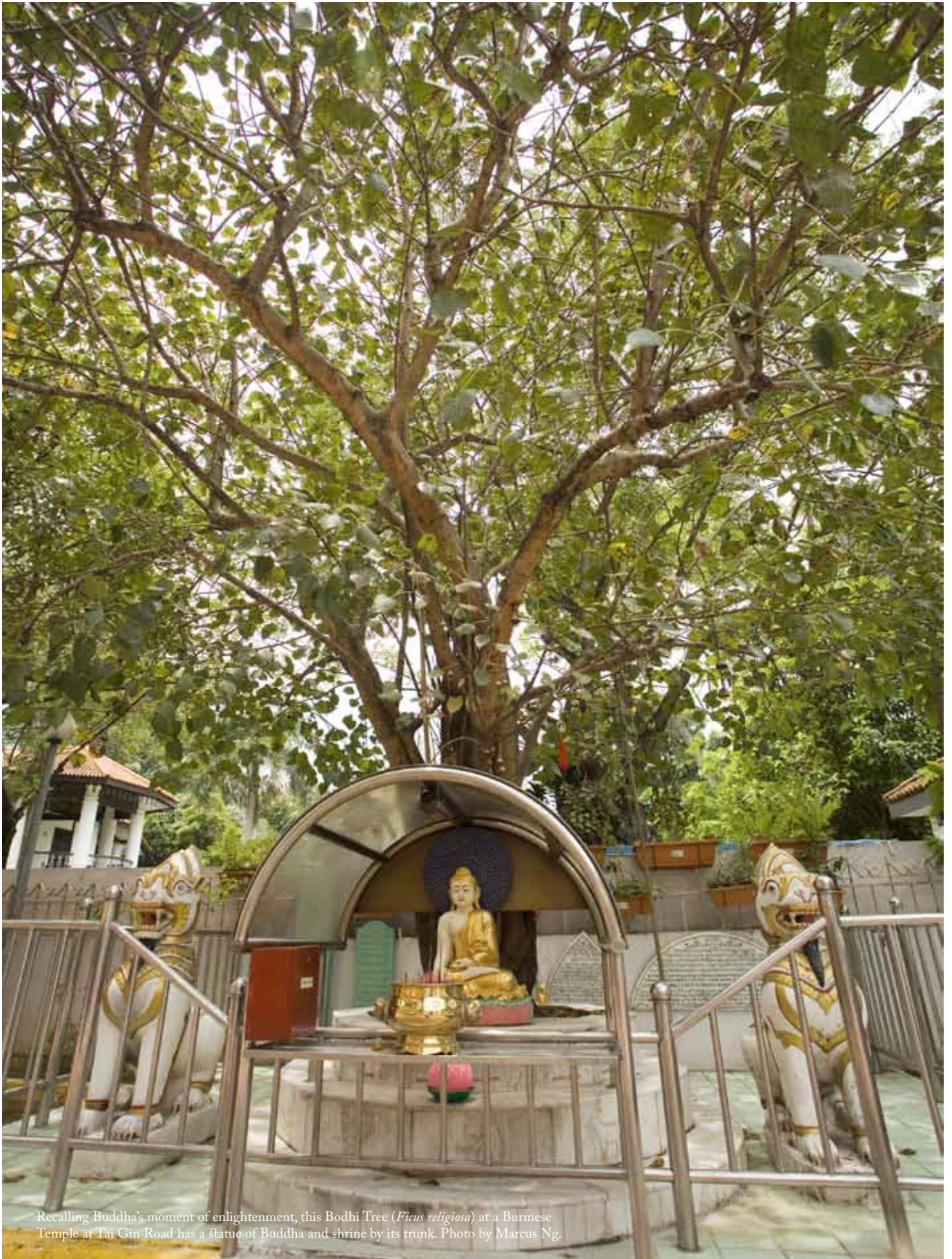
The fig's significance does not just end with it being an easy-to-consume, nutritious food. These trees also have a strong religious significance in the East. It is said that Buddha found enlightenment while meditating under a Bodhi Tree, which is believed to be *Ficus religiosa*, a fig native to India but which has been introduced to Singapore. And so throughout countries where Buddhism prevails, like India, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Singapore, figs are revered and often planted

as a religious symbol and worshiped in the absence of proper temples. When I was travelling in Thailand, a number of restaurants I dined at had a pressed leaf of *Ficus religiosa* on the first page of their menus, an indication of the deep-seated religious significance the fig tree holds in Thai culture.

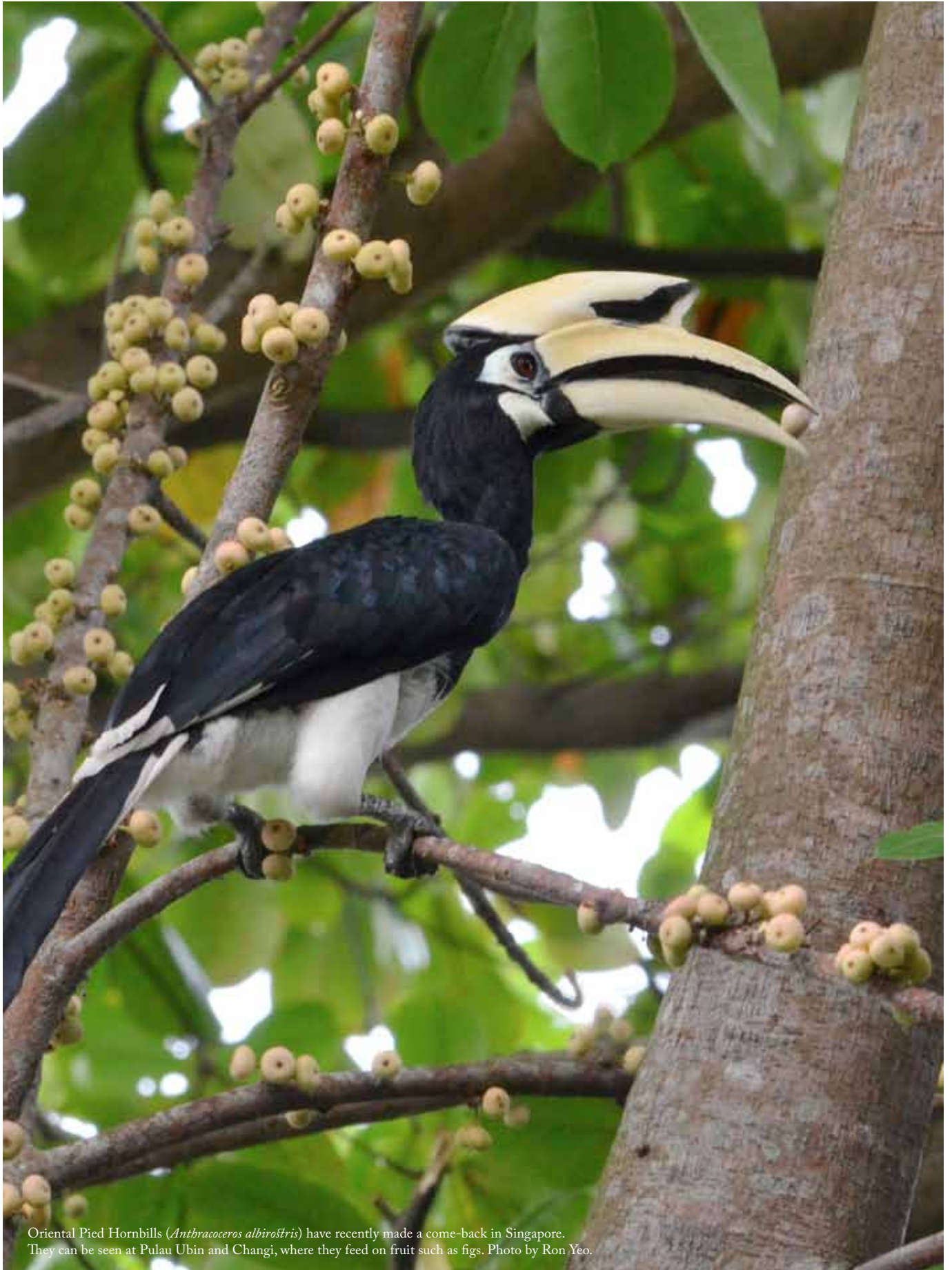
But the bold, ubiquitous fig doesn't hold back and has ventured beyond Islam and Buddhism into Christianity. It has been argued by some scholars that the forbidden fruit, which Adam and Eve consumed in the Garden of Eden, was the fig and not the apple. And that the leaves of the fig were used to cover Adam and Eve when they realised that they were naked. The most famous depiction of the fig as the forbidden fruit was painted by the Italian artist Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) in his masterpiece fresco on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City.

Fig trees such the Bodhi Tree play a prominent role in many world religions and cultures. In Singapore, they are often planted in the grounds of Buddhist and Hindu temples. Photo by Marcus Ng.





Recalling Buddha's moment of enlightenment, this Bodhi Tree (*Ficus religiosa*) at a Burmese Temple at Tai Gin Road has a statue of Buddha and shrine by its trunk. Photo by Marcus Ng.



Oriental Pied Hornbills (*Anthracoceros albirostris*) have recently made a come-back in Singapore. They can be seen at Pulau Ubin and Changi, where they feed on fruit such as figs. Photo by Ron Yeo.



Pink-necked green pigeons are among the many native birds that feed on figs. Photo by Ron Yeo.

FIGS IN VARIOUS FORMS

Not all figs grow to become massive trees like the Banyan or Bodhi. Figs exhibit different growth forms that include climbers, shrubs, average-sized trees and large trees which reach well above the canopy. Many of these forms are found in Singapore. One large native fig tree is the Common Red Stem Fig (*Ficus variegata*), which can grow up to 40 metres high and is found mainly in parks and nature reserves. There is one specimen in the Botanic Gardens growing near the visitor centre, which can be recognised by the bright red figs growing in clusters from the trunk. Another native fig species, *Ficus punctata*, is a woody climber that can be found extensively along Holland Road on the side of Botanic Gardens. This species is easy to spot when it is figging as the figs look like oranges. A very common roadside shrub is the White-leaved Fig (*Ficus grossularioides*) which often attracts bulbuls, green pigeons, black-naped orioles and Asian koels amongst other birds. These species and more dot our urban landscape and provide sustenance for our urban fauna. As a result, the possible loss or reduced abundance of figs from the landscape should be of major conservation concern. Their value in our concrete jungle is perhaps most appreciated by local bird watchers and photographers who often flock to figging trees in anticipation of the huge variety of birds that visit these trees to feed.

Some of the figs found in Singapore are 120 to 160 years old. Fortunately, the National Parks Board's Heritage Tree Scheme, which began in 2001, identifies and conserves mature trees that are rare and have historical significance. There are currently 199 trees on

the list, of which 34 are figs consisting of eight species. In particular, a 120-year old heritage fig tree at Sentosa Island was made a star when it received much media attention after being featured in a 2001 film, *The Tree*, starring popular local actress Zoe Tay.

And so it is, food, faith and controversy define the fig's story, making it a 'keystone' in more ways than one. Like the roots of its own great Banyans, the magnificent *Ficus* in all its forms and habits has firmly intertwined itself into the lives of both people and wildlife. Given that more than half our 48 native species are endangered or extinct, no effort should be spared in conserving them. The next time you walk past a fig, take a moment to stop, observe the many birds, monkeys and squirrels that feast on its fruit, and appreciate how this natural bounty is the result of a complex yet fragile relationship with a tiny wasp that not many people have heard of and few have seen.

The Fabulous Figs of Singapore, which inspired this article's title, is an excellent pocket book written by local fig enthusiasts. It provides a list of fig species found in Singapore with pictures, helpful descriptions and locations of notable trees. Available at good bookstores, this is an informative little book I used when I first started out on my journey into the world of figs.

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Dr. Nanthinee Jevanandam did her PhD research in figs at the National University of Singapore. She currently works as an Ecologist for AECOM, an environmental consultancy.

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Few traces of the past remain at Bencoolen Street, which was once lined with pre-war shophouses as well as notable landmarks such as the Bencoolen Mosque and Asia Radio Building. But a striking reminder of the architectural heritage of this busy thoroughfare can be seen at 77 Bencoolen Street, where two former shophouse units and an old bungalow, the last of their kind along the street, have been conserved and restored into a modern 43,000-square foot showroom for luxury furniture and interior design. Called Space Asia Hub, the complex is probably the largest stand-alone retail space for furniture in Singapore.

SHOWROOM & SHOWCASE

77 Bencoolen Street

This \$50 million project, which involved the integration and adaptive reuse of two double-storey shophouses (former units 71 and 73) and a double-storey residence (former unit 81), was a Category B winner in the 2012 URA Architectural Heritage Awards (AHA), which honours architectural designs that integrate old and new elements with success and sensitivity. Owned by Harvey Norman Yoogalu and Bencoolen Properties, the property was given a lease of life by WOHA Architects, who turned it into a retail gallery in which the shophouses and bungalow are linked by a modern 'glass house' that creates spatial dialogue between the two historic structures. The resulting complex is a visually stunning and commercially attractive facility that respects the character and human scale of the older buildings it encompasses.

Text by **MARCUS NG**
Photos by **PATRICK BINGHAM-HALL**

DIALOGUE BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT

The redevelopment of the site, which took place between April 2010 and August 2011, entailed the sensitive restoration of the original building facades, the opening up of interior spaces to suit contemporary functions and the introduction of a transparent glass infill unit. According to WOHA, the team focused on creating a dialogue between the old and new elements rather than a rigid separation of parts. In this approach, the goal was spatial clarity and a reading of archetypal forms, instead of a wholesale retaining of inferior features.



IMAGE COURTESY OF WOHA ARCHITECTS PTE LTD

DAMAGE UNDONE

In their research and documentation of the original buildings, the project team learnt that the original nature and internal forms of these buildings had undergone many, often insensitive, changes over the decades. The fenestrations (arrangement of windows and doors) and decorative elements of unit 71, for instance, had been stripped off and had to be meticulously reinstated. Using photographic records, the team also repaired or reinstated ornate moulding details that graced the external walls of the bungalow unit as well as the house's timber windows, louvers and fanlights. The soaring roof of the bungalow, now named the Villa, was also restored with great care; an old attic was removed and the existing jackroof was exposed to highlight the timber trusses that are aligned with the original masonry, adding breathtaking volume to the interior of a stately heritage home.



IMAGE COURTESY OF WOHA ARCHITECTS PTE LTD

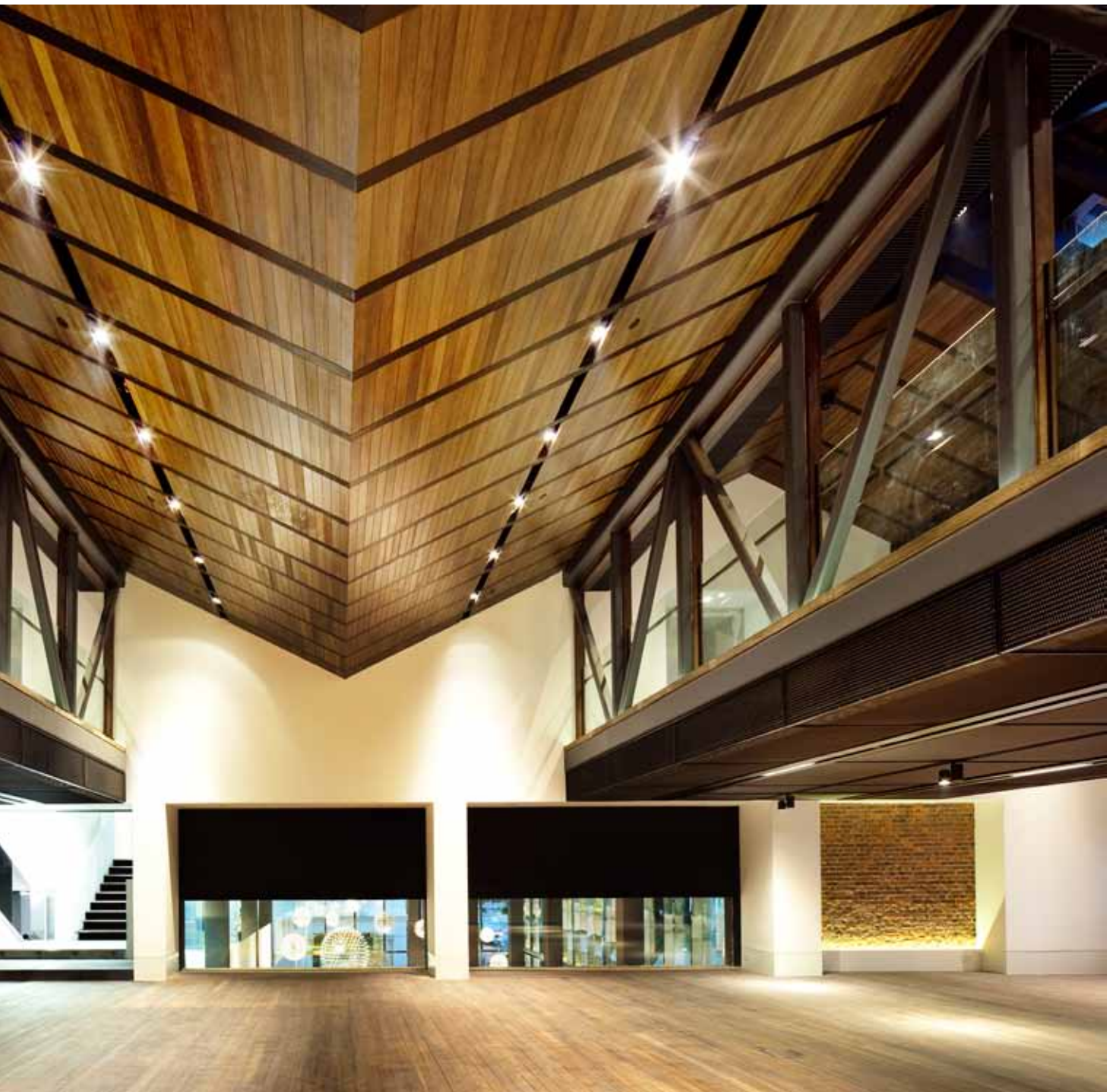




INTERNAL CLARITY

In their reworking of the interiors, the architects adapted the old buildings for modern use as a display gallery by freeing up valuable space. First, the internal walls of the shophouse units were removed and openings created in the party wall to unit 77. Sweeping column-free spaces were then delineated between the shophouse units and the new 'glass house'. The result is an open-plan configuration which fulfils the space-intensive needs of a furniture showroom while preserving the aura and patina of the conserved buildings. In unit 71, the interplay of old structures and contemporary architectural techniques can be seen in the spectacular placement of two symmetrically aligned lofts, which hang from an exposed pitched roof and draw attention to the striking angles and contrasts formed by the now barrier-free roovescape. This interplay of novel features and original patterns fosters an internal environment that captivates and excites the senses.







CONNECTING SPACES

To create visual continuity between the formerly separated old buildings, the architects inserted a glass infill at the site of unit 77, where the structural frame of an earlier building was used as anchorage. This 4-storey Glass Block is distinguished by its crystalline see-through quality which adds functional space for the gallery without overwhelming its neighbours, and is set a little further back from the street compared to the shophouses. An underlay of tiles with rich colours and textures spanning the Glass Block and Villa serves as a spatial link between the development's external and internal spaces. Resembling a woven tapestry of terracotta and pebblewash strips in various hues that recall traditional sarong patterns, the tiles extend to the street space around the Villa, creating an inviting plaza where the restored buildings can be appreciated by the public.

In its finished state, the development sets a precedent for high quality restoration that injects fresh relevance to an old cluster of buildings within the Bugis arts and entertainment district. In turn, the historical form and backdrop provided by the conserved structures offers a appealing setting for a variety of furniture and lifestyle facilities within the authentic settings of once decrepit private homes.









Did You Know?

The bungalow which is now part of Space Asia Hub (formerly 81 Bencoolen Street) was probably the home of a wealthy merchant. Later, it was turned into a hotel called Kian Hua which operated from the 1950s to the 1990s, when the building was converted into a pub and karaoke lounge called Cleopatra. Meanwhile, the shophouses on the left are said to have once housed a bakery, motorbike shop and private school. The space now occupied by the Glass Block was formerly the site of a stand-alone bungalow, which once housed commercial offices, private schools and dance studios.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BENCOOLEN STREET

Bencoolen (also known as Bengkulu) is a small city on the west coast of Sumatra, which was a British outpost from 1685 until 1824, when an Anglo-Dutch treaty was signed that transferred Bencoolen to the Dutch and recognised British control of Singapore. Sir Stamford Raffles was Lieutenant-General of Bencoolen from 1818 to 1822. After Raffles established a new British trading port in Singapore in 1819, many Malays from Bencoolen followed him and settled in an area called Kampong Bencoolen. A road that ran near this village was later named Bencoolen Street.

A former landmark of Bencoolen Street was the Bencoolen Mosque or *Masjid Benggali*, which was originally built in the mid-1820s by Malay settlers from Bencoolen and rebuilt in 1845 at the expense of Syed Omar Aljunied (1792-1852), a Yemeni merchant and philanthropist. The site of the old mosque and four adjacent shophouses was redeveloped in 2001-2004 and is now a mixed development complex of commercial and residential facilities, along with a new mosque that can accommodate 1,100 worshippers.

Located on the same side of the road as the mosque was the Asia Radio Building, a 14-storey commercial building which opened in 1975 and housed a popular electronics store. After a fire damaged the building in 1990, it was sold and redeveloped as a budget hotel.

Before the Second World War, the Chinese referred to Bencoolen Street as *chai tng au* or 'behind the vegetarian hall', as a Chinese vegetarian guild was located along the street. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Bencoolen Street acquired a reputation as a backpacker's district, as many budget hotels such as Kian Hua, Nam Hai, San Wah and Peony Mansion were located along it.

Marcus Ng is Editor, BeMUSE

JULY- SEPTEMBER 2013

// NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD

Our Museum @ Taman Jurong

• Till 31 December 2013

Our Museum @ Taman Jurong is Singapore's first community museum. Located at the Taman Jurong Community Club, it showcases artefacts and artworks from Singapore's National Collection, as well as creations from the community. Curated by the Singapore Art Museum, the theme of the museum's exhibition is 'Picturing Home', where visitors can view archival photographs of what Taman Jurong used to look like in the past and learn about the unique history behind this neighbourhood. Our Museum @ Taman Jurong is a collaboration between the National Heritage Board (NHB), Taman Jurong Citizen's Consultative Committee, Taman Jurong Community Arts and Culture Club and People's Association.

// ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

Devotion & Desire:

Cross-Cultural Art in Asia, New Acquisitions of the Asian Civilisations Museum

• Till 8 Dec 2013

When cultures come together, distinctive works of art are created. This exhibition at the Asian Civilisations Museum's Special Exhibitions Gallery reveals new directions for the ACM, which has recently focused on building understanding of the diverse cultures of Asia. The objects reveal surprising connections between Asian cultures, and between Asia and the wider world. Cross-cultural works of art are powerful indicators that peoples of diverse cultures and faiths have lived together harmoniously for centuries throughout Asia. Themes of the exhibition include the importance of trade, transmission of religions, courtly art, and colonial networks. This is the first time that the public has the opportunity to see many of these new treasures.

Lacquer Across Asia

• Till 24 Nov 2013

Explore the art of lacquer from China and mainland Southeast Asia. A prized commodity traded and presented to dignitaries, lacquer is a precious material that signifies wealth and social standing. Different decorative techniques and styles were cre-

ated in response to local needs and tastes. Chinese lacquer fashioned for literati and the imperial court, as well as Burmese and Thai examples made for Buddhist merit-making rituals, illustrate the wide variety of this craft.

Exploring the Cosmos:

The Stupa as a Buddhist Symbol

• Till 18 August 2013

The stupa is the principal and most characteristic monument of Buddhism. This exhibition features 29 works from the ACM's collection, covering a period from the 3rd to the 19th century, as well as a hanging mobile stupa by the internationally renowned Thai artist Jakkai Siributr. Stupas can take on different forms; they can be domed, cylindrical, or pyramidal. The domed shape originates in simple burial mounds. Its original purpose was to enclose relics associated with the Buddha or Buddhism. The meaning of the stupa is tied to the vertical and horizontal axes, which cross at the central space where the relics are kept. The rounded shape signifies the earth, and the axes are associated with Buddhist concepts of birth, life, and rebirth. Over time, the stupa became a complex symbol of the Buddhist cosmos. The pagodas of China and Japan are also an extension of these ideas.

// THE PERANAKAN MUSEUM

Luminous Depths: A Contemporary Project on the Museum

• Till 22 Sep 2013

A contemporary art installation in the atrium of the Peranakan Museum explores the nature of collecting, and asks how a museum develops. Issues of archaeology, memory, connoisseurship, and rebirth are taken up by the artist Lee Mingwei, whose project invites visitors to participate in creating new work. Audience participation will also contribute permanently to the museum's collection. *Luminous Depths* is inspired by Mingwei's first visit to the Peranakan Museum. Upon entering, he recalled his grandparents' home, where light cascading from the skylight, with sounds and aromas coming from different floors, "became a sort of multisensory symphony in my mind". The design of the *Luminous Depths* installation is a collaboration with Desai/Chia Architecture.

// NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE

Princely Treasures from the House of Liechtenstein

• Till 29 Sep 2013

Collected over 500 years, over 90 masterpieces from the exquisite art collection of the Prince of Liechtenstein are travelling to Singapore for the first time. This exhibition is exemplary of a highly cultivated choice in art,

with artworks ranging from paintings, prints, tapestries, sculptures to rare decorative art objects. Significant works by important Flemish artists like Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony van Dyck, as well as those by other renowned European masters such as Raphael and Lucas Cranach the Elder, will be showcased to celebrate the High Renaissance, Baroque, Neoclassical and Biedermeier styles that span the late 15th century to the mid 19th century, all of which characterise the European way of articulating the authority, power and wealth of the ruling houses. In addition, a selection of 16 oil paintings from the National Collection will be displayed to draw links to the art of portraiture in Singapore's historical context, exploring how it was an important representational mode between the late 19th and mid 20th century.

Seen & Heard in Singapore Island: Ecologies Today and in the Time of William Farquhar

• From 29 October 2012

Guest-curated by visual artist Lucy Davis, an Assistant Professor at the Nanyang Technological University's School of Art, Design and Media, this new selection from the William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings invites visitors to explore the sights and sounds of the natural world Farquhar would have encountered when he first arrived in Singapore in 1819. Accompanying the vibrant watercolour drawings are newly introduced audio stations with birdcall recordings, a taxidermy specimen of the common palm civet (a mammal native to Singapore) and Davis' own woodcut animation featuring elements from the collection. Other segments feature the variety of palms native to Singapore, animals and plants of local mangroves, and the secrets of local forest fauna and flora.

// SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

Terms & Conditions

• Till 8 September 2013

The phrase "terms & conditions" often refers to the fixed set of guidelines at the basis of any official contract or agreement. While these extensive specifications are sometimes overlooked in everyday practice, their implementation can powerfully dictate the representation and interaction between people, entities and countries, as well as set parameters that appear rigid over time. Yet, taken apart, the words "terms" and "conditions" convey fluid and precarious concepts that can, in actuality, be continually negotiated and modified.

Many artists with roots in the Arab world work simultaneously across different geographic, physical and cultural contexts, making it difficult to define and constrain them to

specific identities and representations. Their work is thus a result of a variety of techniques, which enables them to navigate and speak within multiple contexts. Terms & Conditions presents an open-ended debate into how history and social realities are represented, with an emphasis on the Arab world. These artists examine the divide between those who control the discourse and those who are silenced or forgotten.

The exhibition is co-organised by SAM and Barjeel Art Foundation, and guest curated by Mandy Merzaban, Curator and Collections Manager of the Barjeel Art Foundation. Terms & Conditions draws upon seminal works from Barjeel Art Foundation, Abraaj Group Art Prize Collection, Musée national de l'histoire et des cultures de l'immigration, Paris, as well as private and artists' personal collections.

Credit Suisse: Innovation In Art Series President's Young Talents

• Till 15 September 2013

Inaugurated by SAM in 2001, the President's Young Talents is Singapore's premier commissioning exhibition, featuring the island's most promising emerging artists under the age of 35. Selected by an independent curatorial committee of local art professionals, these artists are mentored through the entire process of art creation - from concept development to exhibition realisation. This year's exhibition features new commissions from Boo Junfeng, Liao Jiekai, Zaki Razak, Grace Tan, Ryf Zaini and Robert Zhao. A new component of the 2013 edition will involve the selection of up to four artists from the exhibition to further develop their work for the Singapore Biennale 2013.

// SAM AT 8Q

Art Garden 2013 at the Singapore Art Museum

• Till 1 September 2013

Wander through fairy tales, get lost in dreams and stretch your imagination, as *Art Garden* comes back for the fourth year running! This ever-popular exhibition for the young, and the young at heart, features exciting new commissions, mesmerising artworks, short films as well as animations by local and international artists. Explore the exhilarating world of contemporary art through these installations, and take part in the delightful activities specially designed by SAM and the artists. Get ready to be surprised!

Art Garden 2013 is supported by students from Republic Polytechnic and National University of Singapore, Department of Architecture. The exhibition is held in conjunction with Children's Season 2013, and jointly organised by the National Heritage Board and the Museum Roundtable.

// SINGAPORE PHILATELIC MUSEUM**National Stamp Collecting Competition**

• 31 August – 15 September 2013

The National Stamp Collecting Competition is an annual philatelic event that recognises the effort and creativity of young stamp collectors from primary and secondary schools, and tertiary institutions in Singapore. Using a wide range of philatelic items such as stamps, miniature sheets, postcards, maxicards, first day covers, aerogrammes and stamp booklets, participants explore an array of exciting themes. The competition hones student's skills such as research, organisation, language and writing. For more information, please visit www.spm.org.sg.

Snakes and Ladders

• Till September 2013

Did you know that snakes cannot move backwards and they have very poor hearing? With limited eyesight and hearing, snakes have developed a very good sensing tongue. Snakes are reptiles that evolved from lizards. To adapt to living underground, their legs became unnecessary and were lost over time. The movable eyelids became transparent covers and snakes lost their external eardrum. Like all reptiles, snakes have scaly skins to prevent them from drying up. There are about 3,000 species of snakes. They are cold-blooded and depend on external heat to keep alive. So, many snakes are found in warmer tropical areas. Find out other interesting facts and myths of this scaly but not slimy creature in the Children's Gallery of the Singapore Philatelic Museum. The exhibition is held in conjunction with the zodiac year of the snake.

Spice Is Nice

• Till May 2014

Touch, feel and smell spices that are commonly used in Singapore such as pepper, cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg. Did you know that some of these spices were once worth their weight in gold? This interactive exhibition traces the voyages of discovery, the history of the spice trade and its impact on Singapore, traditional cures and flavours of regional cuisine. Learn about explorers such as Christopher Columbus, Vasco da Gama and Ferdinand Magellan who made significant contributions to the discovery of the origins of spices, and in the process, discovered new lands and people. Experience life at sea as encountered by early immigrants from Southern China – in a recreated dark and cramped cargo hold of a ship, complete with sound effects and creepy pests.

// SUN YAT SEN NANYANG MEMORIAL HALL**Kindred Spirits: Dr. Sun Yat Sen, Singapore and Japan**

• Till 17 November 2013

The Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall is presenting an exhibition on Dr. Sun Yat Sen and his supporters in Japan and Singapore. The exhibition will highlight the roles the two countries played in Dr. Sun's revolutionary activities, and showcase close to 90 rare artifacts which will be on display in Singapore for the first time. The exhibition is presented by the Memorial Hall in partnership with the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall (Kobe), Miyazaki Brothers Museum (Arao), Nagasaki Museum of History & Culture, Ms Kosaka Ayano and Dr. Nakano Masahiko, with the support of the Embassy of Japan in Singapore and the Japanese Association, Singapore.

In conjunction with the exhibition, there will be two public lectures. Ms Kosaka Ayano, a descendant of Umeya Shokichi, a supporter of Dr. Sun, will speak on 'Umeya Shokichi and his Friendship with Dr. Sun Yat Sen' on 17 May 2013 from 1.30-3 pm. On 18 May 2013, from 2.30-4 pm, Mr Ai Xin Yi, a descendant of the Qing royal family and deputy librarian of the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall (Kobe), will speak on the topic, 'Life of a Descendant of Qing Royal Family in Japan'.

// MALAY HERITAGE CENTRE**Yang Menulis/They Who Write**

• Till 24 March 2014

With the advent of modern printing technology, Singapore emerged as an important centre of the Malay publishing industry during the 19th and 20th centuries. The Malay Heritage Centre's first changing exhibition, *Yang Menulis / They Who Write*, examines the invisible role of the *penyalin* or scribe and the process of copying by hand as the Malay publishing industry underwent a shift to mass production through the use of printing presses. A joint project by the Malay Heritage Centre (MHC) and the National Library Board (NLB), this interpretive exhibition features commissioned illustrations of excerpts from 19th century literature, a selection of manuscripts and lithographs from the NLB's Rare Materials Collection, and a virtual library.

An Afternoon of**Traditional Malay Music**

• First and last Thursdays of the month from May 2013 until August 2013
4 & 25 Jul, 1 Aug, 12.30pm to 1.15pm, 3.30pm to 4.15pm

Kampong Gelam Tales (A Dramatised Characters Tour)

• 10 Aug, 2 Nov, 25 Dec, 10am & 4pm
Watch the Malay Heritage Centre's permanent galleries come alive with

stories and music! Learn more about various traditional Malay music forms through live performances in our Muzik Gallery on selected Thursdays or join us during our Open House days for our historical characters tours! All programmes are free but admission charges to the permanent galleries may apply for our live music performances. Registration for performances and tours are required. To register, please email your contact details to NHB_MHC_Programmes@nhb.gov.sg.

Neighbourhood Sketches

• Fridays and Saturdays, 26 & 27 July, 30 & 31 August, 8.30pm to 9.30pm
Bussorah Mall, Kampong Gelam

Neighbourhood Sketches is the Malay Heritage Centre's signature programme and it returns this year with more vibrant performances along the bustling esplanade of Bussorah Mall. This popular series of street performances will continue to showcase different aspects of traditional and contemporary Malay artistic expressions such as *kerongchong* [Malay folk music originating from Java], *angklung* [a musical instrument consisting of two or four bamboo tubes], *kulingtang* [a wooden xylophone from Sulawesi], *wayang orang* [Javanese theatrical performance] and more. All free performances will be held at Bussorah Esplanade on every last Friday and Saturday of the month from 26 July to 31 August 2013.

Malay CultureFest 2013

• 31 August to 22 September 2013
[Closed on Mondays]

The Malay Heritage Centre commemorates the first anniversary of its re-opening with its Malay CultureFest! The festival will feature a wonderful mix of traditional and contemporary programmes by local and regional performers. Visitors can enjoy Malay films in an outdoor setting, or take their pick from a variety of workshops, lectures, concerts and cultural performances. In conjunction with the festival, MHC will also offer free entry for all visitors to its revamped permanent galleries which feature a new storyline focusing on Kampong Gelam's history as a bustling port town and its significance to the Malay community. For the full list of programmes during the Malay CultureFest 2013, please refer to www.malayheritage.sg for regular updates.

Ilham Alam: Nature and Healing in the Malay World (Ilham Alam: Tradisi Perubatan Dunia Melayu)

• 11 September 2013 to 5 January 2014

Ilham Alam: Nature and Healing in the Malay World is a special exhibition at the Malay Heritage Centre that examines the ways in which various historical Malay communities have harnessed the bounty of indigenous flora and fauna to create both preven-

tive and curative medicines. It also explores the corpus of traditional Malay medicine as a specialised form of local knowledge specially in relation to early Malay conceptualisations of the human body as well as human relationships to the natural environment. Organised in partnership with the Singapore Botanical Gardens, the exhibition will also feature a medicinal plant maze, rare 19th century Malay medicinal manuscripts as well as selected tools of trade of traditional Malay healers.

Public Lecture Series: Adat to the Nusantara communities in Singapore

• Saturdays, 21 September 2013, 3pm to 5pm

Adat [or customary practices and traditions] is commonly held up as a defining characteristic of the Malay identity. Defining *Adat* is a forum offering insights by representatives of major ethnic Malay communities [such as the Sumatran Minangkabau, the Baweanese from Pulau Bawean, and the Bugis from South Sulawesi] on how each of their communities define and practice *adat*. This forum will also include demonstrations of distinctive *adat* practices by the ethnic communities. The lecture will be held at the Auditorium of the Malay Heritage Centre. Admission is free.

Patrons and Princes:

PRINCELY
TREASURES
**FROM THE
HOUSE OF
LIECHTENSTEIN**

Text by **VIDYA MURTHY**

Images © **LIECHTENSTEIN, THE PRINCELY COLLECTIONS, VADUZ-VIENNA**



Art lovers in Singapore will be treated in June 2013 to a display of stunning works from one of the oldest privately held European collections. They will witness first-hand the sheer breadth and scope of the collection, gaining in the process an insight into the fine taste and aesthetic judgement of the patrons – the princes of the House of Liechtenstein. It is hoped that this exhibition will attract art lovers, students and a wide section of the public including patrons and collectors. As the arts in our times are largely a source of speculative wealth, the Liechtenstein collection is a very rewarding source of inspiration for good taste and vision in acquiring art. The difference between an indifferent patron and a careful one is not just a matter of education, instinct, taste or even sound judgement – but imagination. Whether the patron is an individual or a collective, public or private, an ideal supporter is willing to step beyond the confines of his or her own historical context and conventions. Such a patron can envision a far-reaching artistic programme that lasts for a few centuries. There have been examples of such bold patrons in both South Asia and East Asia, too. Despite the personal glorification that is an inherent motivating factor of such enterprises, one can only marvel at the results in, for example, the vast temple complexes of India or the intricate decorative sheets of the Mughal *Hamza Nama*.



Top: Johann Bernard Fischer von Erlach (Graz 1656–1723 Vienna), *The Belvedere in the Gardens of the Liechtenstein*, Summer Palace in Rossau Quarter, 1721, Copperplate etching, H52.2xW63cm, old family collection.



COLLECTIONS OF REFINEMENT

Prince Johann Adam Andreas I (1657-1712) was one such astonishing patron. At age 27, he became the head of the family and during the next 28 years (r.1662-1712), the Prince expanded the family's wealth and acquisitions. He purchased lands including the present principality of Liechtenstein, properties, embarked on building projects, commissioned artists and acquired works – all of which have given the Princely Collections their richly deserved status and recognition. He was influenced by his father Prince Karl Eusebius (1611-1684), a dedicated collector who did much to give a definite orientation to the collections. He was also the author of two didactic works, which in English read as "Treatise on Architecture" and "Princely Education: Instructions for Life, Lifestyle and Collecting." Prince Johann Adam Andreas was educated in philosophy and also went on a Grand Tour in which he specially studied Italian art. He would use this knowledge and understanding to grow his collections.

The historic context in which Prince Johann Adam Andreas lived and acquired played an important role in shaping his tastes and decisions. After the Turks were expelled from Vienna in 1683, the leading aristocrats including the House of Liechtenstein became the major art patrons and were responsible for turning Vienna by 1700 into a Baroque city, which began to attract numerous artists. During this time many Italian artists sought support from the elites in German-speaking lands, as there was also a decline in papal patronage especially in Rome. Thus, as a leading patron and collector, Prince Johann Adam Andreas played a major role in fostering Baroque art in Europe, particularly Vienna.

The Prince left his mark in the two Baroque palaces that he built in Vienna. One was a City Palace and the other was the Summer or Garden Palace in Rossau, then outside the city. He bought land in 1687 and planned for a large palace with extensive gardens. The Austrian architect Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach (1656-1723) provided the overall concept, which included a country-style residence, a belvedere and a Baroque garden linking the two. Eventually two Italian architects, first Domenico Egidio Rossi (1678-1742) and next, Domenico Martinelli (1650-1718), were hired to complete the building.



The Prince took great interest in the decoration of the rooms and for this he carefully chose painters, sculptors and decorators. Towards this end, he maintained a wide network of artists and dealers and corresponded with major cultural centres such as Bologna, Florence, Rome and Venice. For decorating the five rooms in the Garden Palace overlooking the garden, he sought the services of the Bolognese artist Marcantonio Franceschini (1648-1729). It should be noted that the Garden Palace was the sum total of the Prince's grand vision – a dwelling in which the tastefully decorated interiors were matched by the exteriors with gardens and statuary. The most fascinating documents are the correspondences between the Prince and the artist. It was a patronage that lasted from 1691-1709, in which the Prince commissioned works and sought advice on purchasing of works. The thoroughly documented exchange includes 159 letters (written in Italian) that illustrate the choices of the patron, the artist's preference,

details of payment and mode of transporting the works.

Over a history of over 500 years, each Prince has left a distinct imprint of his taste and temperament. Today the Princely Collections represent a showcase of diverse individual choices. As early as 1400, Gerog von Liechtenstein (c.1360-1419) was reputed for his art commissions. The first major patron was the first hereditary prince, Prince Karl I (1569-1627) who was fond of collecting decorative objects. While Prince Karl Eusebius (1611-1684) created the artistic nucleus of the collections, it was, as we have seen, further enriched by his visionary son, Prince Johann Adam Andreas I (1657-1712). Subsequent princes have nurtured the collections with care by continuing to purchase art works and protecting their inheritance through dangerous times such as war. Today the Princely Collections, although privately held, are a testimony to the rich collective cultural heritage of European thought and patronage.

Top: Workshop of Cosimo di Giovanni Castrucci, Ottavio Miseroni and Workshop of Giuliano di Piero Pandolfini, *Pietra Dura Ornate Chest*, c1620–1623, Hard stones, garnets, ebony, gilt bronze, H56xW88xD49cm. Commissioned by Prince Karl I in 1620s.

Facing page: Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio or Santi) (Urbino 1483–1520 Rome), *Portrait of a Man*, c1502–1504, Oil on panel, H48xW37cm. Acquired by Prince Johann I in 1823.







A SHOWCASE OF BAROQUE ART

The exhibition at the National Museum of Singapore, consisting of 91 works, is organised in several sections. Opening with a section on the House of Liechtenstein, it introduces the visitors to the royal family, its princes, their various palaces and a range of decorative objects they commissioned and collected. The rest of the display follows a western art-historical trajectory beginning with the Renaissance era. The art of the Baroque, which forms the bulk of the display, is organised along examples from the southern and northern Baroque. Dedicated sections on Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625) and Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) – the latter being the highlight of the exhibition – enrich the display.

Baroque art, a pan-European style spanning 1600 to 1750, is largely an art for the senses. Having emerged in the age of religious conflict between Catholics and Protestants, Baroque art is not uniform but marked by regional and cultural variations – examples of which can be seen in the exhibition. The most important 17th century Baroque artist, Peter Paul Rubens, is represented with eight works including two drawings or *modelli*. Rubens's extraordinary gifts can be seen especially in the highly expressive *Lamentation* (1614/1615), a painting that moves us to tears. The distinct themes of still-life, portrait and genre painting, which received much attention in the hands of the northern Baroque artists are all illustrated through the works of Jan Davidsz. de Heem (1606-1684), Frans Hals (1582-1666) and Adriaen van Ostade (1610-1685).

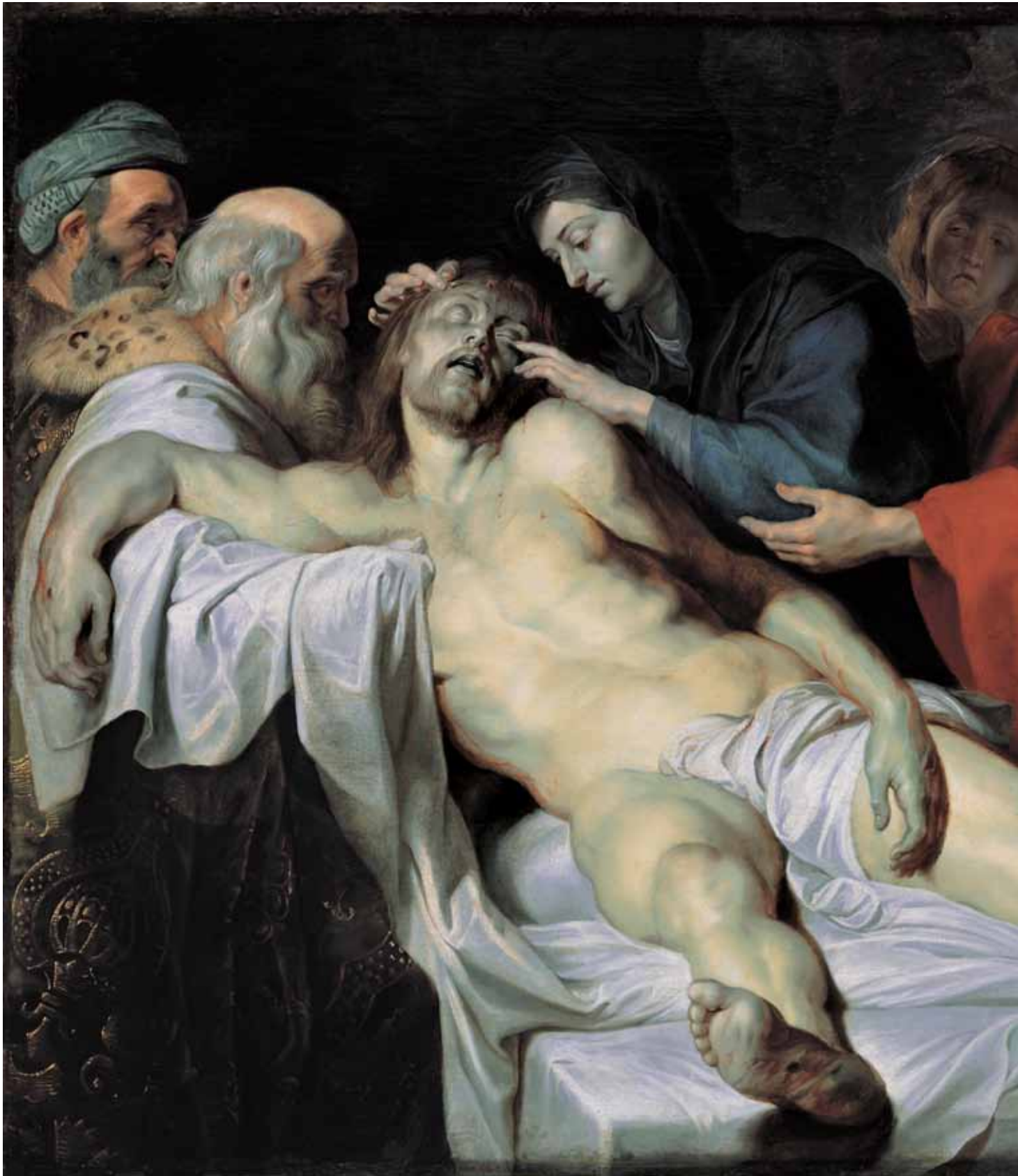
The social practice of the Grand Tour, which lasted from late 16th century through the mid-19th century, gave rise to numerous art patrons and collectors and nurtured in them a fine connoisseurship. More importantly it fostered the talents of view painters such as Canaletto (1697-1768) and Giovanni Paolo Pannini (1691-1765). (Also known as *vedutisti* after the Italian term for view or *veduta*, view painters created large, highly detailed paintings of cities and other scenic vistas). Finally the short-lived distinct art of the Biedermeier (1815-c1848) – a realist movement that emerged in the German-speaking regions, is introduced through the work of Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller (1793-1865).

Left: Marcantonio Franceschini (Bologna 1648–1729 Bologna), *Birth of Apollo and Diana*, 1692–1698, Oil on canvas, H175xW210cm. Commissioned as a sopraporte (a painting set over a door) and acquired by Prince Johann Adam Andreas I from the artist in 1698.

Following page: Jan Brueghel the Elder (Brussels 1568–1625 Antwerp), *Landscape with Young Tobias*, 1598, Oil on copper, H36xW55cm. Acquired by Prince Alois I in 1787.









A COLONIAL COUNTERPOINT

The Art of Portraiture: Historical Paintings from the National Collection is a complementary exhibition featuring 16 artefacts illustrating diverse representational modes. An integral part of the National Museum of Singapore's historic legacy, many of the works belong to the colonial era. More importantly, several of the paintings reveal their links to the grand British portrait painting tradition, which set the model for representing statesmen, elite personalities and people belonging to a higher social class – an influence that was carried into its colonies and well into the 20th century. Having had an assured patronage from both the royalty and the landed gentry, the fine art of British portraiture was formed largely by continental painters such as Hans Holbein the Younger (1497-1543), Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641) and Peter Lely (1618-1680). The compositional modes they set were further expanded and even modified by the premier artist Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), the first President of the Royal Academy of Arts (1768) – the leading arbiter of taste in the 18th century. The American expatriate John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), who settled in London, brought a dashing elegance to his realist depictions. He showed what portraits are really all about – an art of flattery. The oil portraits belonging to the National Museum of Singapore together reveal different artistic persuasions – grandness of vision, idealisation, and a realism. Of particular interest is the range of artists who produced these paintings. They include established artists trained in the Royal Academy, itinerants in colonial Malaya, amateurs and the feted Singapore artist, Lim Yew Kuan (b.1929).

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Vidya Murthy is Curator, National Museum of Singapore

Left: Peter Paul Rubens (Siegen 1577-1640 Antwerp),
The Lamentation, c1612, Oil on canvas, H150xW204cm.
 Acquired by Prince Johann Adam Andreas I in 1710.



(Left):

Jan Davidsz de Heem (Utrecht 1606–1684 Antwerp), *Fruit Still Life with Covered Goblet*, 17th century, Oil on panel, H53xW41cm. Acquired by Prince Hans-Adam II in 2006.

(Bottom left):

Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller (Vienna 1793–1865 Hinterbrühl near Vienna), *Flowers in a Porcelain Vase with Candlestick and Silver Vessels*, 1843, Oil on panel, H47xW38cm. Acquired by Prince Hans-Adam II in 2009.



(Facing page):

Giovanni Paolo Pannini (Piacenza 1691–1765 Rome), *Capriccio with the Most Important, Architectural Monuments and Sculptures of Ancient Rome*, 1735, Oil on canvas, H126xW180cm. Acquired by Prince Hans-Adam II in 2003.





THE PRINCIPALITY OF LIECHTENSTEIN

One of the smallest European states, Liechtenstein is situated between Austria and Switzerland. It is governed by the House of Liechtenstein which is an Austrian dynasty of rulers. They derived their name from Castle Liechtenstein south of Vienna and applied it to their present territory after the estate became an imperial principality in 1719.

The modern history of this dynasty begins with Prince Karl I who became the first hereditary prince in 1608. By the second decade of the 17th century the House of Liechtenstein were closely tied to the Habsburgs. Prince Karl I's grand-

son, Prince Johann Adam Andreas I purchased the territories of Schellenberg and Vaduz in 1699 and 1712, which were affirmed with the rank of Imperial Principality of Liechtenstein. After Prince Johann Adam Andreas I died without a male heir, the title went to Anton Florian, who was a descendant of Gundaker, Prince of Liechtenstein and this line continues till today. With Prince Franz Joseph II (1906–1989) moving to Vaduz in 1938, it became a permanent residence of the ruling princes. Liechtenstein became a constitutional monarchy in 1921 and the town of Vaduz has been the perma-

nent residence of the ruling Princes since 1838.

In 1989, Prince Hans-Adam, who succeeded Prince Franz Joseph II, worked towards making his country a part of the United Nations in 1990. Now it is the 160th and smallest member of the UN. The Principality is the 4th smallest state in Europe and covers a 62-square mile area between Switzerland and Austria. It is highly industrialised, has an export-oriented economy and offers a hospitable atmosphere for business.

A domino effect is premised upon an often small initiative that, though seemingly insignificant on the onset, results in a catalytic chain reaction that reverberates through the periphery. The theory of the domino effect is an empowering one, in that it enables momentous change to occur, even in the absence of conventional structures of support. In the case of contemporary Myanmar artist, Aung Ko (b. 1980) and the *Thuye'dan Village Art Project* which he pioneered, the result is a potent upheaval of established status quos and an impacted community that shares in artistic intervention and discourse.

In discussing Myanmar's often 'troubled' macro socio-economic condition and the sudden sensational swiftness of regime change, one often overlooks individual acts of transposition that, though micro in nature, have a lasting impact on the quality of change. Earlier this year, Singapore Art Museum (SAM) curators Khairuddin Hori and myself embarked on a road trip approximately 10 hours north of the nation's old capital Yangon to a 200-year old village bordering the Rakhine state and witnessed firsthand the lasting impact of an artist-initiated project.

Thuye'dan loosely translated into English means 'Hero', and is the birth village of Aung Ko. Isolated from the rest of the world, the village is a resource-rich area, flanked by the Irrawaddy River and is also a military surveillance site due to the presence of a military arms factory nearby. The village was gifted the name

'Hero' as many victorious and formidable warriors came from Thuye'dan and served throughout the historic lineage of Burmese Kings. It is perhaps most apt that the nation's first, sustained and prolonged village art community project takes root here. First launched in 2007, the project is in its fifth-year running and is an entirely self-funded initiative by Aung Ko as he is impassioned that "community art cannot be made with the support of a foundation but only by the support of the artists who grow in that community."

This year's edition was a significant hallmark in the history of Thuye'dan village, as foreigners were officially invited to the village for the first time since the 1940s. Some of the participants include contemporary Myanmar artists Po Po, Aung Ko, Nge Lay, Hla Phone, Suu Myint Thein, as well filmmaker Thet Zaw Win and Yangon-based art writer and researcher Natalie Johnson. The artistic premise of the village project is kept intentionally simple and accessible, in that artists are entirely free to explore and contribute in a village which functions as a liminal space of creativity and exchange. Myanmar painter Hla Phone held outdoor drawing classes in a neighbouring village while Mandalay-based performance artist Suu Myint Thein did a collaborative performance piece involving village children. In a multiply coded performance, Suu performed along a main street, holding a funnel to his face while participants held up a two-metre length cloth which trailed behind him. Five eggs were then placed, mov-

IF THE WORLD CHANGED:

THE DOMINO EFFECT

(THUYE'DAN VILLAGE ART
PROJECT 2007 – 2013)

Text by **NAOMI WANG**

Images courtesy of **SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM**



(Top): Aung Ko's home, Thuye'dan Village, Myanmar. (Above, left): Myanmar Artist Hla Phone conducts art classes as part of the 2013 *Thuye'dan Village Art Project*. (Above, right): Suu Myint Thein, *Diictator's "OK"*, 2013, Site-specific performance at Thuye'dan Village, Myanmar.

ing precariously up and down the length of the cloth, in accordance to the artist and participants' synchronisation. The artist proceeded to stamp an "OK" sign on almost everything he encountered – a cow was stamped with "OK", so was the milkman that came along, as well as static objects such as fences and trees. This interactive piece ended with Suu donning the red cloth, hinting at the robes monks wear. *Diictator's "OK"*, the title of Suu's site-specific performance piece, is an astute commentary on the act of sanctioning and approving, of authorities that have the power to do so, and an inquisition into the consequence of such concentrations of power. Like the fragility of the moving eggs, power that is left un-moderated and un-coordinated faces a real possibility of fracture and breakage. In the final donning of the monk's robe, Suu adds another dimen-

sion to the reading of religious and spiritual credence and the notion of sustenance so closely linked to alms and monkhood, and conversely, figures of authority and systems of power.

Artworks created through the platform of the *Thuye'dan Village Art Project* are characterised by their conceptual relevance and relatedness to the community. This is Aung Ko's vision of art and of the role of an artist – that art and life should be intertwined seamlessly. In this artist-driven endeavour, there is no imposition of an artist's ego, but instead a genuine exchange and interaction deeply anchored in a sense of rootedness to the land and its people. Artworks created through this project adopt a visual language and form that is relatable to the community as they either "actively involve people in artistic processes or in the production

of works of art”.

Artists often employ the use of familiar materials and visual markers in the village, which allows for a deliberate ‘openness’ in the interpretation and reading of works. Aung Ko’s *H.U.M.M.M...*(2007), executed during the first *Thuye’dan Village Art Project*, highlights this perspective particularly well. Piqued by the visual eccentricity of the five-metre long strips of ladders that villagers use to climb Toddy palm trees in order to collect Toddy juice (“sky beer” as affectionately known to the locals), Aung Ko appropriated a familiar visual marker and re-created multiple versions of these “ladders”, installing them at various sites such as sand dunes and lakes. Villagers are involved in the entire process of art making from the initial crafting and making of the ladders, to the multiple site-visits required to install the works and finally in the witnessing of the dramatic climax of the work’s crowning execution – when Aung Ko set them all ablaze in the final instalment of his work. A commentary on the violent 2007 anti-government protests in Myanmar, this work encapsulated both the instability of political strife and the personal frustrations and agony of the artist during that period. The act of setting something ablaze is an act of violent destruction but understood within the Buddhist context of spirituality and immateriality, *H.U.M.M.M...* is read as a means of renewal and





Po Po, *Song of Disaster #2*, 2013, Site-specific installation at Thuy'dan Village, Myanmar



Aung Ko, *H.U.M.M.M...*, 2007, Site-specific installation at Thuye'dan Village, Myanmar





Nge Lay, *The Relevancy of Restricted Things* (detail), 2010, Prints on archival paper, set of 9 prints, Singapore Art Museum collection

regeneration. Likened to the joss sticks offered up to the Gods at the temples, these ladders similarly embody the hopes, dreams and aspirations of the artist – a longing and aspiration for peace and stability once the ladders are burnt and relinquished to the Gods.

Nge Lay's *The Relevancy of Restricted Things* (2010), conceptualised and realised during the third *Thuye'dan Village Art Project*, was set and photographed in the restricted areas surrounding the village and involved the participation of several families from that village. In *The Relevancy of Restricted Things*, Nge Lay plays with the notion of the idealised and celebrated functions of family portraits and explores ideas relating to societal yardsticks and expectations of completion and wholeness. These family portraits, however, all bear subtle hints of distortion and dystopia, as evident by Nge Lay's representation of the father figure of a family with a mask. Hinting at the imaginary and fictitious presence of the father figure, Nge Lay reminisces the loss of her father at a young age in this highly personal work. The inside and outside portrayals of the tents, however, makes a larger commentary on the secretive and private nature of homes, that though the 'inside' does not know the 'outside', and vice versa, both worlds nonetheless bear similar threads of commonality. While the absence of Nge Lay's father in Myanmar's highly patriarchal society changed her family's dynamics, the similar lack of a father figure of authority in Myanmar politics (since the assassination of General Aung San in 1963), has resulted in a prolonged political vacuum in the nation.

Much has been done by Aung Ko in continued lobbying efforts to ensure the buy-in of the local community and township authorities. The need to explain the role, function and nature of the work of contemporary artists, and the intents, relevance and nature of their presence and participation in the village project are but the tip of the iceberg of what Aung Ko does to champion the project. In its fifth year running, the project now has the full support of the Thuye'dan village, as well neighbouring villages. Villagers support the project in numerous ways, either in terms of logistical support, such as transportation, or through the contribution of materials and skill sets in the creation of artworks. In a defining moment of self-ownership, the village community has specially invited and commissioned senior artist Po Po to re-design the village library. An active space of congregation and informal learning, the library has its own executive committee consisting of village leaders, school headmasters and residents. Collectively the library's executive committee determine the library's mandate, operating procedures and long-term sustainability plans. The initiative to include Po Po in the li-

brary's re-development plan is seen as an extension of their sense of ownership and more importantly, an acknowledgement and recognition of the value of Aung Ko's village art project.

The Wathann Film Festival from Yangon was brought to Thuye'dan by film maker Thet Zaw Win. 'Pop-up' style outdoor cinema featuring award-winning entries from the 2012 Wathann Film Festival was screened on the first night of the *Thuye'dan Village Art Project* to the delight of local villagers, and as word got around of the 'pop-up' cinema at Thuye'dan, neighbouring villages began to request for similar screening to be held in their villages, making it a tremendously fruitful event for the Wathann Film Festival crew who were busy dismantling and putting up outdoor cinema structures every night.

A scratch beneath the surface of idyllic countryside living reveals a startling reality of transformation and change due to the encroachment of recent economic reforms. For instance, Chinese corporations have begun to purchase large plots of farmlands leading up to the Irrawaddy River, leaving the future of land ownership in a state of flux. The rapid rate of logging has also resulted in a drastic loss of natural resources for the village, thereby causing dire environmental consequences. Within a radius of approximately 12 kilometres, we visited five pre-tertiary schools, each differing drastically from the other. The close proximity of villages to the nation's military arms factory is an unfortunate predicament as military surveillance further fragments the reality of everyday living and survival. Myanmar's recent institutionalising of education and with it the promise of free pre-tertiary education is but one of the many instances of this sense of fragmentation. Villages located closest to the military arms factory seem to be kept intentionally poor and most deprived in terms of infrastructural support and in such locales, state funding and equal rights to free pre-tertiary education simply do not apply.

'POP-UP' STYLE OUTDOOR CINEMA FEATURING AWARD-WINNING ENTRIES FROM THE 2012 WATHANN FILM FESTIVAL WAS SCREENED ON THE FIRST NIGHT OF THE THUYE'DAN VILLAGE ART PROJECT TO THE DELIGHT OF LOCAL VILLAGERS, AND AS WORD GOT AROUND OF THE 'POP-UP' CINEMA AT THUYE'DAN, NEIGHBOURING VILLAGES BEGAN TO REQUEST FOR SIMILAR SCREENING TO BE HELD IN THEIR VILLAGES...



(Left): Thuye'dan Village, Myanmar Library Committee. (Right): Myanmar artist Po Po on site-visit to re-design the library.

The roots of this artist-initiated project are borne out of an urgency, concern and awareness of the unsettling circumstance of the present, of change that is unprecedented, unregulated and uncertain, and of a future that is on the brink of eclipse. While the 'outside' world might be pre-occupied with propagated notions of civil freedom and liberation, Aung Ko is effecting a domino effect back at his birth village, one person at a time. Through art that dialogues and highlights the reality of inheritance and sustenance vis-à-vis the reality of one's projected future, Aung Ko hopes to empower the community through informal education, awareness and discourse of the changes that are occurring in daily life. The result of this domino chain of events, though not immediately apparent, is one that is embedded in a philosophical exchange, of an artist giving back to his birth village in the best way he can by activating the Myanmar art community and creating work that is accessible, approachable and relevant to the community. This project is about the expansion of visions and perspectives, and the knowledge that one world view does not supersede the other.

Naomi Wang is Assistant Curator, Singapore Art Museum





THROUGH ART THAT DIALOGUES AND HIGHLIGHTS THE REALITY OF INHERITANCE AND SUSTENANCE VIS-A-VIS THE REALITY OF ONE'S PROJECTED FUTURE, AUNG KO HOPES TO EMPOWER THE COMMUNITY THROUGH INFORMAL EDUCATION, AWARENESS AND DISCOURSE OF THE CHANGES THAT ARE OCCURRING IN DAILY LIFE.



FINDING BASAPA

In search of a pioneer and his story

Text by **NALINA GOPAL**

Images courtesy of **INDIAN HERITAGE CENTRE**

The first official census of 1824 recorded 756 Indians, 7% of the population of Singapore then. In just over a century, by 1931, the Indian population had grown to 50,000 people and continued to grow with time. The dynamic profile of Indian migrants included North as well as South Indians. The early migrants came as British troops or Sepoys, prisoners (political and otherwise) who contributed to Singapore's infrastructure, traders, plantation workers, professionals and civil servants, policemen, and even as performing artists and craftsmen. These early migrants founded empires and institutions; inspired their community and others; and fought for their rights and beliefs. The increasing number of Indians also gave birth to several associations and organisations that served their agendas of religion, business and trade, arts and culture and even social reform. These organisations continue to be instruments of social bonding and cultural interaction till today.

The Indian Heritage Centre has been delving into this early history of the Singapore Indian community – in the absence of published records, oral history has been pivotal to curatorial research. The Somapah/Basapa family is a perfect example of this initiative.

These names were mentioned to me by every other member of the Indian community; he (Somapah) was a pioneer in the property business, they would say. The names kept returning to taunt me, yielding few returns to endless searches at various public archives. Until December 2011, when I found, quite by accident, a family history website created that year by the family of Thomas Augustine (T.A.) Basapa (1917-2010), following his demise. T.A. Basapa was the grandson of Hunmah Somapah (d. 1919) and the son of William Lawrence Soma (W.L.S.) Basapa (1893-1943). With names, context and places made explicit in the content of the website, the public archive search (which included the collections of the National Museum of Singapore, the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research and newspapers in Singapore) became more rewarding. I also managed to locate T.A. Basapa's son Lawrence Basapa, who kindly agreed to be interviewed on the family's history. Lawrence Basapa has since donated digital copies of photographs from the family album for display at the Indian Heritage Centre.

A part of my research findings are compiled below into a short narrative on W.L.S. Basapa (Hunmah Somapah's son) and his passion for collecting animals,



which led to his establishing of Singapore's first private zoo as well as his contributions to the erstwhile Raffles Museum. Curatorial research on the Somapah/Basapa family will form part of the content for the Indian Heritage Centre's permanent gallery on Indian Pioneers in Singapore. Please visit us when we open in February 2015 at the junction of Campbell Lane and Clive Street to know more about this remarkable individual and other Indian pioneers in Singapore.

The Heritage Institutions Division under the National Heritage Board has also produced a travelling exhibition on Singapore's Early Zoo which features photographs and the history of the first Singapore zoo at Punggol. The exhibition was launched at the Singapore Zoo in April 2013 and will be travelling to three National and Public Libraries in Singapore.

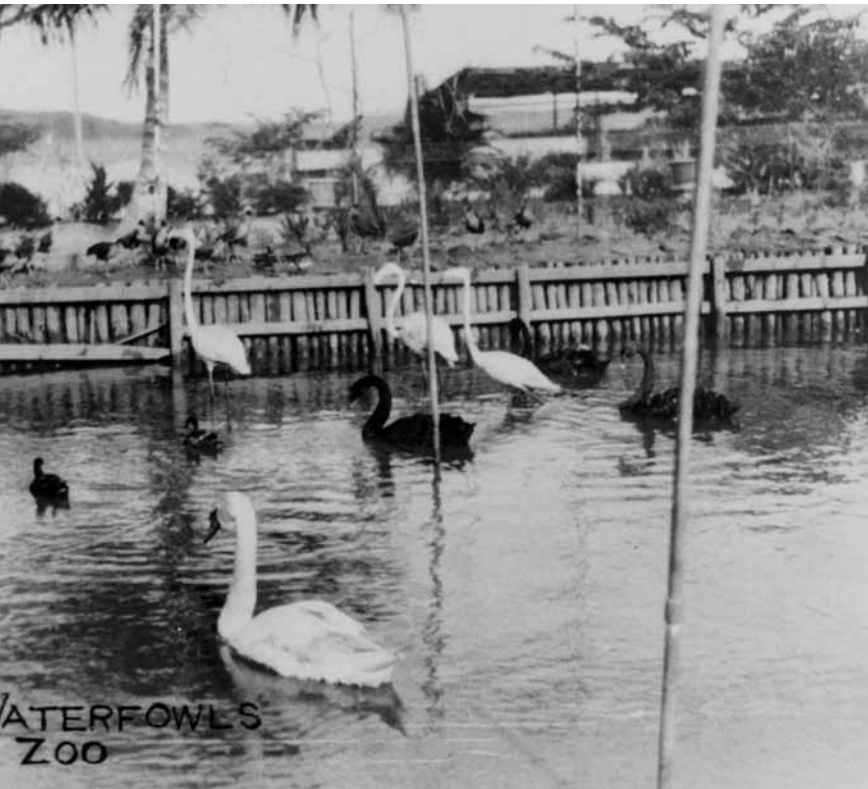
W.L.S. BASAPA: PIONEER AND COLLECTOR

Hunmah Somapah was a land owner and municipal official. The Somapah estate owned properties in the Serangoon Road and Changi areas. Upon Somapah's

death, W.L.S. Basapa became a trustee of the Somapah estate and inherited his father's residence at 317 Serangoon Road. It was at his Serangoon estate that he began, between the period 1920 and 1922, to collect several species of animals and birds.

To accommodate his growing collection of animals and birds, Basapa acquired 11 hectares of seafront land at Punggol. In 1928, he relocated his collection to Punggol and started the Singapore Zoological Gardens and Bird Park at Punggol (also known as the Punggol Zoo).

It took ten years for Basapa to transform the muddy and overgrown piece of land in Punggol into a full-fledged zoo. At the rate of S\$35 per day, Basapa maintained the zoo privately from 1928 until the start of World War II. Basapa was a man of foresight who forged international connections to create the best displays at the zoo. For instance, Basapa imported a stunning black leopard (announced as a Black Panther in a 1937 *Straits Times* article) for the Punggol Zoo from Sydney's Taronga Park Zoo in 1937. This was part of an animal exchange plan devised between the two zoos. He also brought in exotic animals from South Africa, America and Australia, and eventually built up a col-



lection of 200 animals and 2,000 birds for the Punggol Zoo.

The zoo was a major attraction in pre-war Singapore and charged a nominal entrance fee of 40 cents. It even gave discounts of up to 75% off the entrance fee for students. In fact, the Punggol Zoo was known the world over, and even locally, as the Singapore Zoo – the first to be called so.

At the start of World War II, the British moved their forces to the North of Singapore in anticipation of the Japanese onslaught and occupied the site of the Punggol Zoo. Basapa was given 24 hours to vacate his animals and birds, and given the short time span, was unable to save all of his animals. The British freed the birds and harmless animals and shot the more dangerous ones.

During the Japanese occupation, the Punggol Zoo became the location for the Japanese mess, and Basapa eventually died in 1943, a broken-hearted man. The Punggol Zoo was not restarted by the Basapa family after the war.

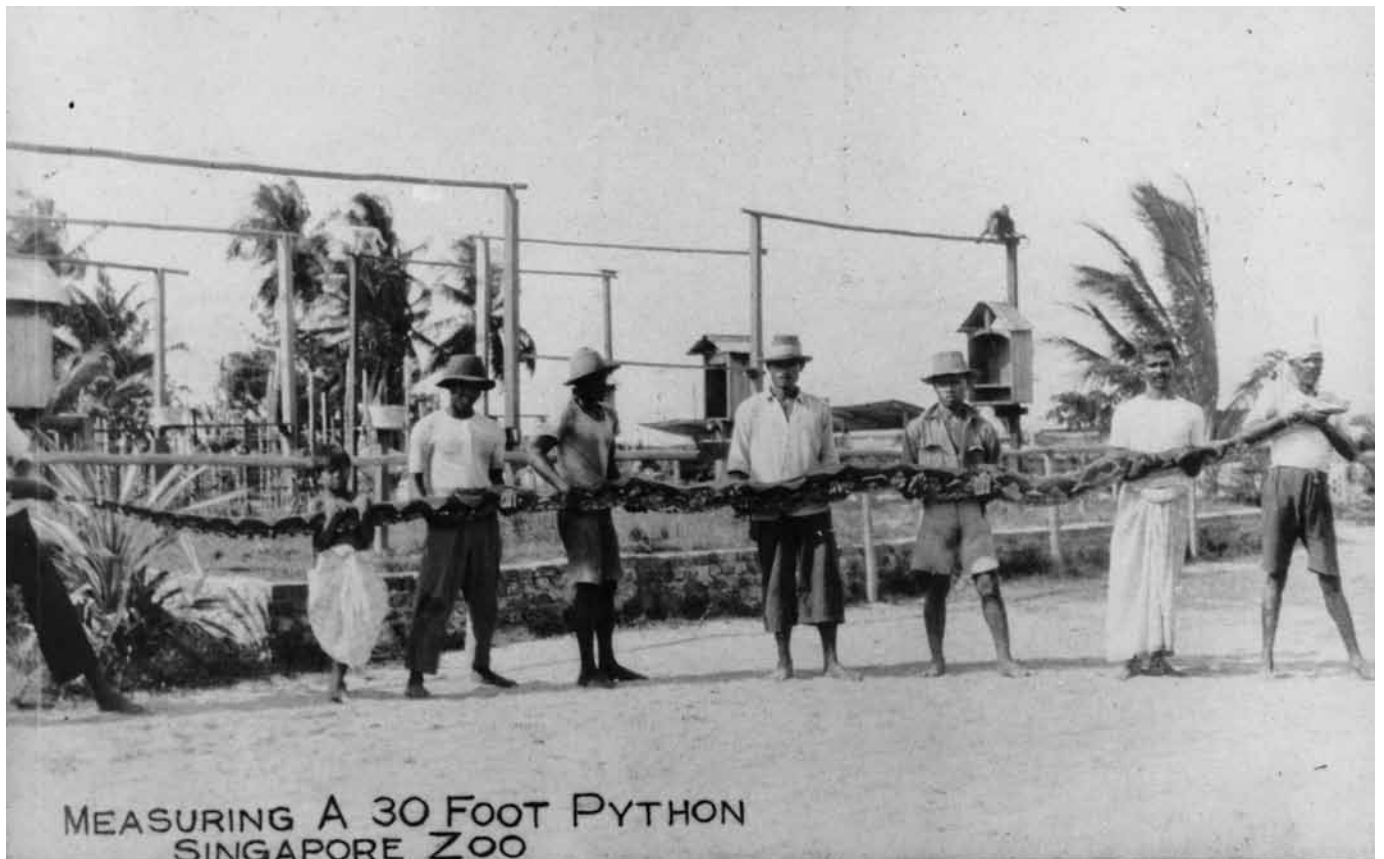
In his lifetime, Basapa made periodic, almost annual, donations to the Raffles Museum between the

years 1924 and 1938. These donations included animal skins and mounted specimens of animals that had died at Basapa's home zoo at Serangoon Road and later at the Punggol Zoo. The Raffles Museum's annual reports (in the collection of the National Museum of Singapore) mention Basapa's generous donations to the Museum's collection of zoological specimens. More than 80 specimens donated by Basapa were later inherited by the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research (now Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, National University of Singapore) from the former Raffles Museum and are still part of the museum's collection.

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Nalina Gopal is Assistant Curator, Indian Heritage Centre

FINDING BASAPA

In search of a pioneer and his story



MILESTONES OF THE PUNGGOL ZOO

According to contemporary newspaper articles, the famous physicist Albert Einstein visited Singapore in November 1922 to raise funds for a proposed Hebrew University in Jerusalem. His notes on this visit mentioned his passing through “Singapore’s Zoological Gardens”. This is possibly a reference to Basapa’s private home zoo located at 317 Serangoon Road.

Basapa’s Punggol Zoo was commended by Sir Roland Braddell in his 1934 book *Lights of Singapore*. Braddell also men-

tioned Basapa’s “magnificent collection of birds”, his orang-utans and a pet tiger named Apay that could be led around by a chain even though he was four years old. In March 1930, the Punggol Zoo imported seals into the British colony of Singapore. This marked the first time members of the public could view these marine creatures in a public zoo.

A 1933 American film titled “Dyak” starring English actor M.H. Kenyon-Slade was shot at the Punggol Zoo. Kenyon-Slade was filmed fighting a dead

python in a battle which was regarded as one of the high points of the film. In February 1935, the newspapers reported that the Punggol Zoo had received several Arabian camels, black swans and Shetland ponies from the Perth Zoo. The following year, the Punggol Zoo produced advertisements to promote a café that served afternoon tea at the Zoo. The café was in fact an open-air “refreshment room” that served tea, biscuits and lemonade at a low price.

NATIONAL DAY TOTE BAG

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1965 **AUGUST** 八月

9



蛇

一九六五
七月十三

立秋 八日
处暑 二十三日



星期一
MONDAY

新加坡

On the 9th of August 1965, Singapore was thrust into independence becoming a sovereign republic overnight. The future of the island nation was uncertain and not many expected it to survive.

Today, this date marks Singapore's National Day. The country celebrates and reflects upon its progress since 1965.

The four official languages of Singapore are: English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil. 'Majulah Singapura' means 'Onward, Singapore' and is the title of the national anthem which is sung in the national language - Bahasa Malaysia.

Since 1965
Republic of Singapore
新加坡共和国
Republik Singapura
சிங்கப்பூர் குடியரசு

独立

M A J U L A H

S I N G A P U R A

