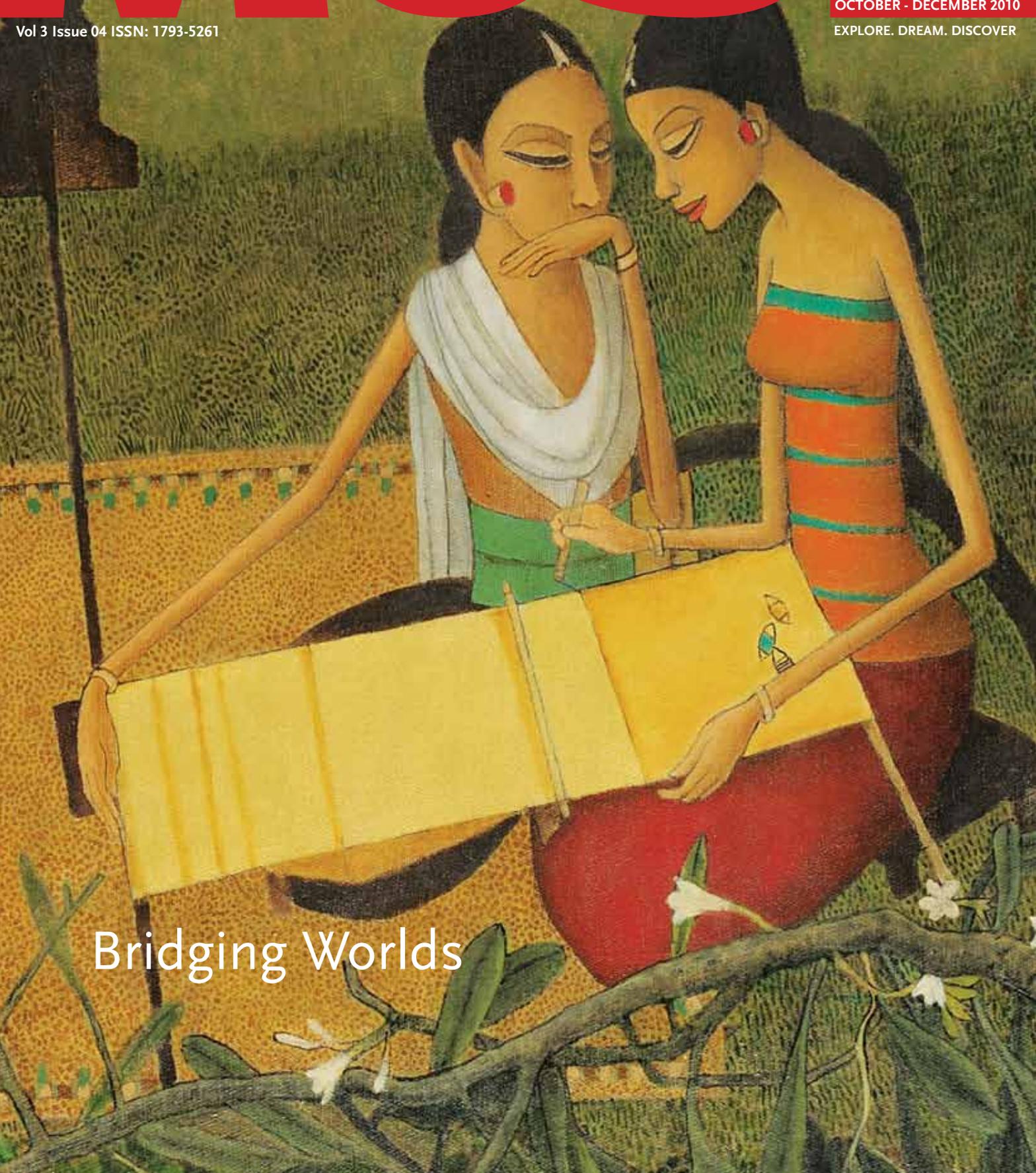


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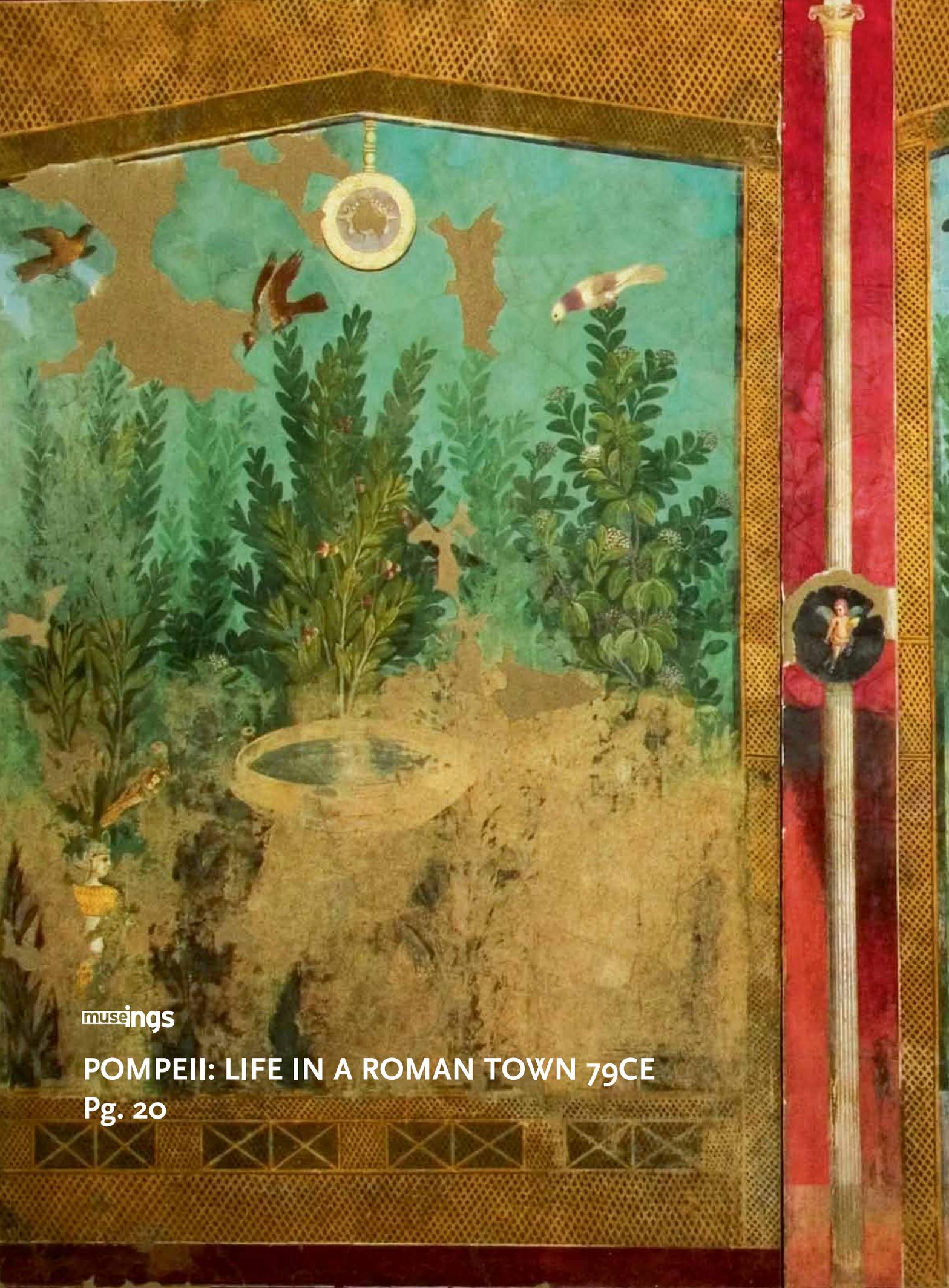
Vol 3 Issue 04 ISSN: 1793-5261

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2010

EXPLORE. DREAM. DISCOVER



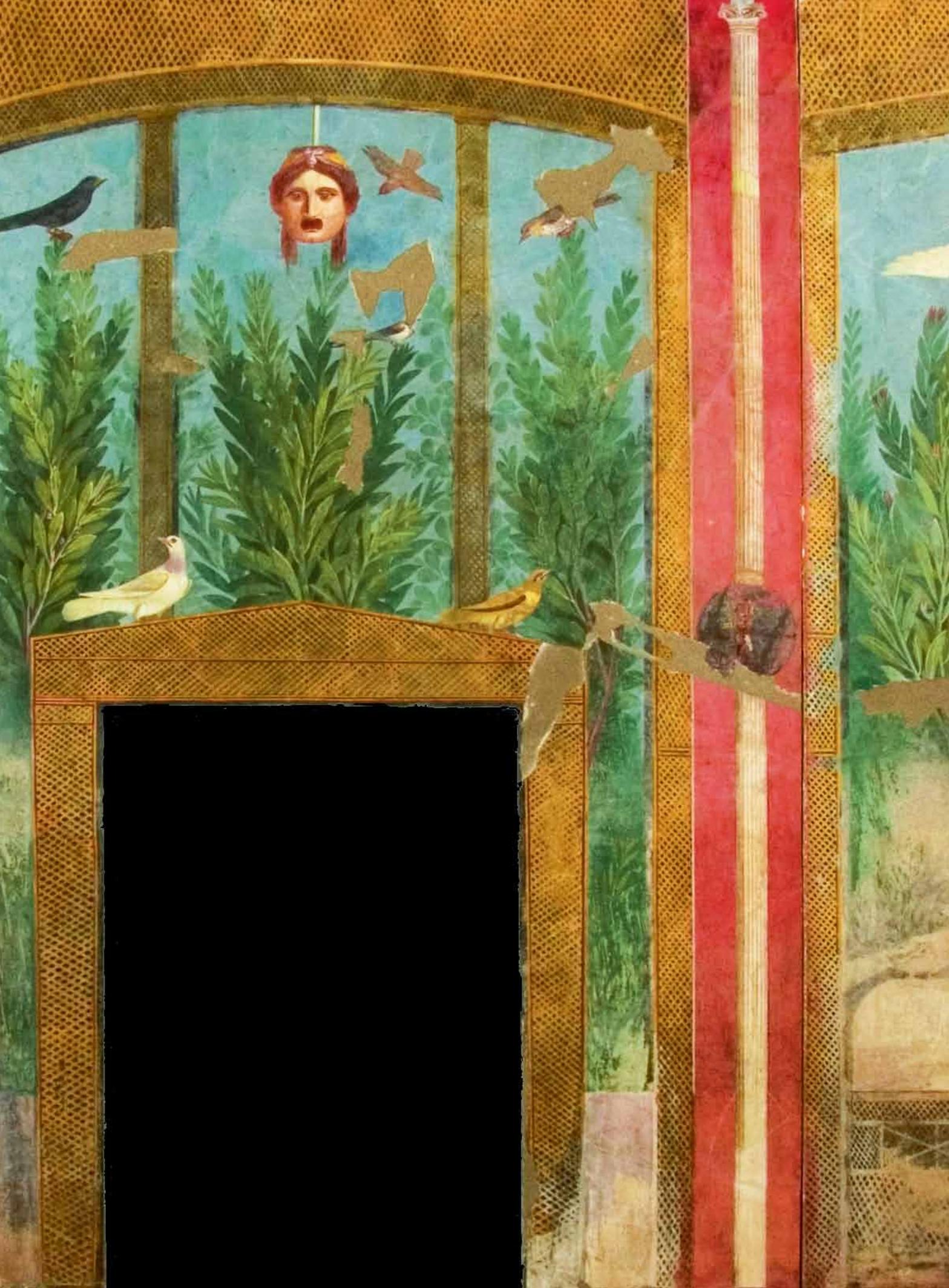
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editor's musing...

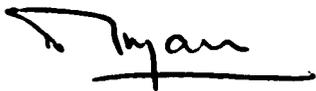
It is the last quarter of another year and time to look forward to the year-end festive season. Whilst we set our sights forward and plan for the year ahead, it is also that time of the year when we look back and take stock of our achievements both in our professional and personal life.

Have you ever wondered what would happen if we experienced what the famous civilisation of Pompeii did centuries ago? People were completely stopped in their tracks and buried alive in the aftermath of the volcanic eruption. The city was discovered much later with remnants of their past glory buried in the ash and lava. Luckily, these finds helped to piece together what life was like then for the people and how rich and advanced their lives were.

What would you like to leave as a legacy to our young for the future? What would a Singaporean discover in the many time capsules that are buried around the country or in schools and other places that could tell them how we lived in Singapore today? What will our museums showcase about Singapore in the future? And what might our history books recount about Singapore?

This issue of *Bemuse* explores just that idea with articles on Pompeii, on one of Singapore's pioneer artists, Cheong Soo Pieng, and on what we now call Contemporary Art which could be regarded as ancient art in about 100 years from now. What do we want to be remembered for, and what do we want future generations to think about when they read about Singapore? Once we think about these questions, we will realise that our history and heritage are dynamic, evolving and mean different things to different people at various points in time. This is the challenge for any heritage worker or professional and is discussed in our MuseTalk interview with the Chairman of the National Archives Board, Mr Kwa Chong Guan. There is also in this issue a new section, MuseShop, that highlights heritage merchandise inspired by the past and created in a contemporary fashion.

Till January 2011, here's wishing all our readers a wonderful 10 remaining weeks or so of 2010 and a wonderful 2011 to look forward to.



Ms Thangamma Karthigesu

be **MUSE**

Volume 3, Issue 4



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COVER

Cheong Soo Pieng
Weaver
1981
Oil on canvas
107 X 131 cm
Collection of the National Heritage Board

BACK COVER

Fresco depicting Silenus and a maenad
House of Dancers, Pompeii
© Soprintendenza Speciale per I beni Archeologici di
Napoli e Pompei

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Silver Dagger, a Presidential Gift from Jordan.

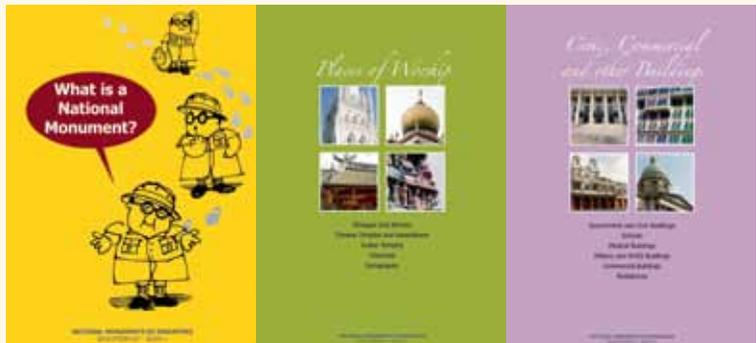
PMB launches education kit for teachers

Over 90 people gathered at The Pod, National Library Building on 11 June 2010 for the official launch of *National Monuments of Singapore* by Ms Ho Peng, Director-General of Education (DGE) from the Ministry of Education.

Produced by the Preservation of Monuments Board (PMB), *National Monuments* is a comprehensive resource guide for teachers and educators on Singapore's 61 National Monuments. The education kit aroused keen interest in curriculum specialists and teachers, many of whom were interested to explore place-based learning at our National Monuments.

To show teachers how to create an exciting learning environment using the kit, a workshop titled Operation Monument! was held on 27 August. Teachers from primary and secondary schools were challenged to develop an exciting learning environment by bringing learning into sites of experience, in particular National Monuments, that serve as playgrounds for imagination and experience. PMB hopes this experience complements the current drive in schools to 'Teach less, Learn more'.

Left to right: Ms Low Kwee Fah, Deputy Director (DD)/Marketing, National Library Board (NLB), Ms Judy Ng, DD/National Reference & Special Libraries, NLB, Mrs Elaine Ng, Deputy CEO, NHB, Ms Ho Peng, DGE, MOE, Ms Jean Wee, Director of PMB, Mr Tham Tuck Cheong, Chairman of PMB.



VIPS at the Singapore Philatelic Museum



Pehin Dato Hj Hazair Abdullah, Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports of Brunei (3rd from right), Ms Tresnawati Pihadi, General Manager, Singapore Philatelic Museum (2nd from right) with the delegation from Brunei.

Pehin Dato Hj Hazair Abdullah, Brunei's new Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports was in Singapore for the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) held from 14 to 26 August 2010. Minister Hazair led a delegation of officials from the Ministry, including the Permanent Secretary and Acting Director of Youth and Sports Development. The delegation visited the Singapore Philatelic Museum on 16 August 2010 to view the museum exhibitions including the special 'Youth Olympic Games' display that was put up in conjunction with the YOG. The exhibition showcased the three stamp issues of YOG from 2008 to 2010, and a colourful range of YOG memorabilia such as the limited edition minted YOG stamp set, Singapore 2010 map pin set, and plush toys of YOG mascots Lyo and Merly.

Local and international interest in SAM contemporary art shows



Acting Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts Mr Lui Tuck Yew visiting *Art Garden: Children Season* at the Singapore Art Museum with students from the Children Network on 12 July 2010.

Singapore Art Museum's (SAM) acclaimed exhibitions, *Ming Wong: Life of Imitation* and *Art Garden: Children's Season* at the Singapore Art Museum, have received much attention and interest from local and international visitors.

New Zealand's Secretary for Foreign Affairs and Trade Mr Simon Murdoch, accompanied by Mrs Pip Murdoch, toured the two exhibitions on 23 June, while a group of journalists from prominent French newspapers focused their attention on *Ming Wong: Life of Imitation*.

Ms Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, Director of the Frye Art Museum in Seattle, Washington State, USA, visited the museum on 29 June and took part in a full day of working sessions with SAM staff to prepare the *Ming Wong: Life of Imitation* exhibition for its presentation at the Frye Art Museum next year. The Director of Faurschou Galleri in Shanghai, Mr Khai Heinze, visited SAM on 8 July as part of a trip to study Singapore as an incubating ground for the growth of Southeast Asian contemporary art.

On 12 July, Acting Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts, Mr Lui Tuck Yew spent a full hour at SAM at 8Q to visit *Art Garden: Children's Season* at the Singapore

Art Museum, the first exhibition dedicated to introducing contemporary art to young audiences. During his visit, Mr Lui had the opportunity to observe art sessions provided by IQ Kids for students between 4 and 14 years old from the Caterpillar's Cove Child Development and Study Centre, Children Network and Raffles Girls School.



New Zealand's Secretary for Foreign Affairs Mr Simon Murdoch (right) and Mrs Pip Murdoch visiting *Ming Wong: Life of Imitation* at the Singapore Art Museum on 23 June 2010.



Heritage Mall debuts at Business of Heritage Conference 2010

The National Heritage Board organised the third edition of its Business of Heritage Conference at the National Museum of Singapore on 16 September 2010. The annual conference aims to enhance the professional skills and capabilities of the museum industry and providing networking opportunities for local heritage players. The one-day conference attracted a turnout of 240 participants and featured renowned museum professionals and thought leaders from the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan as well as Singapore.

The conference also featured the first ever Heritage Mall showcasing the best of heritage products supported by NHB's Heritage Industry Incentive Programmes (HI²P) products. These products included the Heritage Wedding Gallery, a new private museum dedicated to showcasing Chinese wedding rituals and items from ancient times; a documentary of old Singapore by acclaimed local filmmaker Royston Tan; and a series of interactive mobile heritage trails covering the Singapore River and the Civic District.

Mr Michael Koh, Chief Executive Officer of the NHB said: "I am happy to note that in the past three years, the Business of Heritage Conference has not only been able to attract a regular pool of participants, but also many new applicants from various industries. This, I believe, stems from a growing awareness of the potential of the heritage sector and the many opportunities it brings. The healthy growth in the number of private museums and heritage ventures also bodes well for Singapore's museum and heritage scene, and I hope today's conference will contribute to the sustainability of our heritage sector."

Feedback received from conference participants has also been positive and encouraging. "This year's conference was well done, in terms of range of topics and nationalities of

speakers. It was also supported by an exhibition of actual HI²P products to help potential applicants (learn more about the programme)," said Ling Xiang, Manager, Singapore Tourism Board.



museviews

National Monuments of Singapore Education Kit

Published by the Preservation of Monuments Board

National Monuments of Singapore is a comprehensive guide for teachers and educators on Singapore's 61 National Monuments. Produced by the Preservation of Monuments Board (PMB), *National Monuments* is a resource guide for anyone interested to learn about and teach Singapore's rich history and culture.

The kit encourages teachers to incorporate experiential learning in their lessons and is especially useful for educators who want to take learning out of the classroom. Besides write-ups on all the monuments, it also includes a trail map, proposed activities and worksheets, spread out into three books. This education kit is designed to assist the planning of walking trails for students with suggestions to facilitate student engagement while bearing in mind the curriculum needs of National Education, Social Studies and Singapore history.

The *National Monuments of Singapore* education kit is available for free download on PMB's website at: http://www.pmb.sg/?page_id=96



The 2nd Decade – Nation Building In Progress, 1975-1985

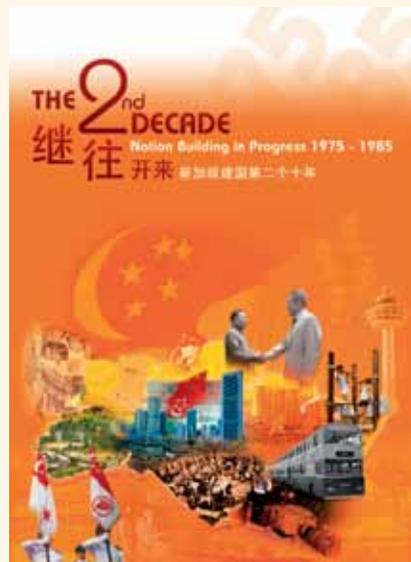
(继往开来 – 新加坡建国的第二个十年, 1975-1985)

Published by the National Archives of Singapore

In 1975, Singapore arrived at an enviable position after enjoying peace and rapid economic growth during its first decade of independence. Much had been done to put in place policies, systems and infrastructure to propel this new country from a time of uncertainty to a period of self-assured sovereignty. Yet fresh challenges abound for then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and his cabinet, as Singapore braced itself for another decade of nation building.

As with its precursor, *10 Years That Shaped A Nation, 1965-1975*; *The 2nd Decade – Nation Building In Progress, 1975-1985* is organised into thematic sections (defence/internal security, foreign relations, economy, health & the environment, housing, sports & culture and education) chronicling the challenges and triumphs of the years between 1975 and 1985, which presented both obstacles and opportunities for a young and evolving nation.

Price to be announced.



The Role of Archives in Documenting a Shared Memory of The Cold War: Asia-Pacific Perspective

Published by the National Archives of Singapore

In May 2009, the National Archives of Singapore (NAS) and S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) jointly organised a seminar on "The Role of Archives in Documenting a Shared Memory of The Cold War: Asia-Pacific Perspective".

The seminar coincided with the Board Meeting of the Southeast Asian Regional Branch of the International Council of Archives (SARBICA) for which NAS is the current chair. Bringing together national archivists and historians from various institutions all over the Asia-Pacific, it was a breakthrough in exploring the role of regional archives in documenting their shared memory of the Cold War from an Asia-Pacific perspective.

The fresh insights arising from the seminar of the respective archives' holdings and latest developments in historical scholarship on the Cold War in the Asia-Pacific are captured in the publication. Information on how to organise and develop an international multi-archival collaborative effort to expand the range of unique records on the Cold War available for public research is also explored.

Priced at \$26.75 (incl 7% GST), this publication is an indispensable resource for researchers and students on the history of the Cold War.

SPECIAL PROMOTION!

The Role of Archives in Documenting a Shared Memory of The Cold War: Asia-Pacific Perspective can be purchased together with the NAS publication, *Power of Collective Memories and Evidence*, at a special price of \$45.20 inclusive of GST. This is a 15% discount off the normal price of \$53.50.

Both orders can be done via Eileen 6332 7973 or eileen_ng@nhb.gov.sg



ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

Blue and white porcelain *huqqa* base
1573-1619 CE (base), 19th century (silver mount),
China and Turkey
28.6cm (H)
Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum

This stylised blue and white porcelain elephant *kendi* (pouring vessel) has been transformed into a *huqqa* (water pipe). Set with elegant gilt-silver repoussé mounts, the trunk attached to the porcelain body has an open finial for the pipe. The howdah on the elephant's back is depicted as an elongated tower with a hinged lid and floral finial which serves as

the burner and the local compartment for the water pipe. In Iran, the popularity of delicate Chinese porcelain ensured that they were constantly in demand as trade wares. Pieces made in China for export were either specifically made to cater to the needs of their Muslim clients, or they were adapted for local use once they arrived in West Asia.



SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

Cheo Chai Hiang
Dear Cai Xiong
(*A Letter From Ho Ho Ying, 1972*)
2005
Pencil on unprimed canvas
379 x 257 cm per piece
Collection of the Singapore Art Museum

A 2005 work with a history that dates back more than 32 years, *Dear Cai Xiong* (*A Letter From Ho Ho Ying, 1972*) is an important piece of art which references events and currents of thought in Singapore's artistic circles of the 1970s.

In 1972, Cheo, then 26, submitted a proposal to the annual Modern Art Society exhibition. The proposed work, entitled *Singapore River*, came in the form of written instructions to the exhibition organisers to draw a square measuring five feet, partly on the floor, and partly on an adjacent wall. The conceptual piece was rejected by the society, and its founder Ho Ho Ying responded to Cheo

in a letter that discoursed on the criteria of art in relation to its audiences. Art, Ho opined, besides being new, also had to resonate with its viewers and possess unique qualities.

In *Dear Cai Xiong* (*A Letter From Ho Ho Ying, 1972*), the letter, originally written by Ho Ho Ying in Mandarin, is reproduced by Cheo. The very question of the purpose of art and the pervading inclinations of Singapore art in the 1970s can be gleaned in this exchange. Cheo's critique of the prevailing forms of representation in Singapore art is evident through his proposed conceptual presentation of the Singapore River,

illustrating his own position on how modern art should progress.

An artist who practised conceptual art during the 1970s in Singapore, Cheo's practice encompasses the various mediums of drawing, installation, painting, printmaking and sculpture. Cheo, who has also taught and lectured, first obtained his art education in England at the Brighton Polytechnic and the Royal College of Art in London in the 1970s. He has exhibited widely both locally and internationally, and most recently in the 2008 Singapore Biennale and the 2010 Asia Pacific Triennial in Queensland, Australia.



SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

Natee Utarit
The Western Light No. 1
2006
Oil on canvas
200 x 180 cm
Collection of the Singapore Art Museum

The Western Light No. 1 recalls the famous bronze equestrian statue of King Rama V, which is situated at Bangkok's Royal Plaza. Rama V, Thailand's revered king, and the country's most successful reformer, is known as the first Thai monarch to travel to the West, who subsequently implemented reforms in education and religious freedom. During his reign, Thailand maintained her independence from European colonial rule.

By choosing to portray a statue of Rama V, an object of reverence rather than the image of the king himself, Natee reveals the influence and magnetism of symbols of veneration. This painting, which shows the king looking in a westward direction, alludes to the disjuncture between the Western-style modernism on the surface of Thai society and the reality of Thailand beneath this veneer.



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE

Three Legs Brand traditional household medicine
1950s – Late 1990s
Donated by Wen Ken Drug Company (Pte) Limited
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore

The National Museum of Singapore has received a donation of a group of Three Legs Brand traditional household medicine manufactured by the Wen Ken Drug Company (Pte) Limited. The company's trademark logo consists of three trousers-clad legs connected at the hips. Founded in 1937 by four Chinese men in colonial Singapore, the 'cooling water' was one of its well-known products. Prepared from a 'special Chinese raw medicine', it is said to prevent fever and toothache caused by 'heatiness' in the body.

In the post-war period, more outpatient clinics were built. However, the Three Legs Brand products did not wane in popularity. Their print advertisements could be prominently seen via billboards, banners and even on vehicles. Today, as Wen Ken Drug Company (Pte) Limited repackages some of their traditional products to appeal to the younger generation, these artefacts provide insights into the history of the consumption and marketing of proprietary medicine in Singapore.



In the early days, immigrants who arrived in Singapore had trouble acclimatising to the searing tropical weather. Basic health care was not readily available to the general public up till the 1940s. Over the counter traditional medication was thus an economical solution. Other products manufactured under the Three Legs Brand include headache powder and cough syrup.

WHAT BRINGS US TOGETHER?

*Building Bridges Between Singapore's
Diverse Cultures and Communities
through Singapore HeritageFest 2010*

museings

BY CHRONOS KWOK
MANAGER
EDUCATION AND OUTREACH DIVISION
NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD

IMAGES: NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD

It's a question that deserves a good answer. In fact, for the Education and Outreach Division of the National Heritage Board (NHB), it was a question that warranted a thorough and terrific exploration of the similarities, shared values and common ground between Singapore's diverse cultures and communities.

The result was *Singapore HeritageFest 2010*, the 7th instalment of what is now an annual highlight in the nation's heritage calendar. Held between 11 and 22 August 2010, this year's *Singapore HeritageFest* (SHF) challenged both Singaporeans and foreign visitors to take a deeper look at what brings together a nation of many different cultures. What's more, as Singapore grows to become more multicultural and diverse, there is much more to discover, enjoy and celebrate. Regardless of our origins, it is our combined experience as Singaporeans, New Citizens and Permanent Residents that shapes the multicultural heritage of this island we all came home. *SHF 2010* thus sought to encourage all participants to build stronger bonds with each other by raising the level of awareness and appreciation of Singapore's multicultural heritage through fun, educational and interactive events.

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Ministry of Community Development,
Youth and Sports.



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Launch of SHF 2010 by Acting Minister for Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA) Mr Lui Tuck Yew, together with Professor Tommy Koh, Chairman of National Heritage Board (NHB), and Mr Michael Koh, CEO of NHB on 11 August 2010 at the Festival Hub@Suntec.

This year's festival was launched on a high note by Mr Lui Tuck Yew, Acting Minister for Information, Communications and The Arts on 11 August at the Festival Hub@Suntec which also housed SHF's anchor exhibition on traditional costumes from around the world. Entitled *Diverse Threads, One Humanity*, the exhibition featured more than 70 colourful costumes from over 30 countries. This is also the first time SHF has engaged the diplomatic community in such a major way and the NHB is grateful for their overwhelming support in showcasing their unique cultures through the costumes. Continuing with the success of satellite hubs in the heartlands from the previous year, SHF 2010 also made its presence felt in five shopping malls islandwide. Each satellite hub had its own exhibition gallery, stage programming and activities revolving around a particular aspect of Singapore's culture such as food, traditional games as well as myths and legends passed on from one generation to the next. As part of ongoing efforts to engage the community, for the very first time, five cultural ambassadors, one each from the Chinese, Malay, Indian, Eurasian and Peranakan communities, were appointed to help develop the programmes for the stage performances at the festival and satellite hubs. Being renowned personalities in their own fields and communities, the cultural ambassadors lined up a series of performances that thrilled and entertained audiences from all ages.

As a partner festival for the inaugural Youth Olympics Games, SHF set out to engage students and youths in a big way. With support from the Ministry of Education, SHF launched a doll-making activity called *Project U @ I*. Each school was assigned a country and given a pair of dolls. The students conducted research on their assigned country to find out about the lives of their peers abroad and gather information on their ethnic costumes. They then put what they learnt into

action by sewing and dressing up the pair of dolls in their particular country's ethnic clothes. *Project U @ I* was a great success with 193 schools participating and the submitted dolls were curated into an exhibition at one of the satellite hubs, Compasspoint.



Mr Sam Tan, Parliamentary Secretary, MICA, listening attentively to students who participated in the SHF 2010 school competitions.



A rarely seen Indian Traditional Dance – the Tiger Dance performed at Bukit Panjang Plaza.



Audience member at the Anchor Hub, Suntec City participating in a sarong tying demonstration.



Chinese opera and acrobatic performance.

To close the festival with a bang, SHF organised a 3-day outdoor carnival as a finale event at Singapore Management University Campus Green. Known as “Heritage Sparkles in the City” the festival finale was a celebratory microcosm of all things that bring us together as Singaporeans, New Citizens and PRs. Visitors were treated to four mega concerts in English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil, each with a stunning line-up of young and veteran, local and regional artistes. The finale also featured a food fair, art and craft stalls, cooking demonstrations, workshops for children and a community exhibition that provided a ‘crash course’ on cultures from 10 communities that call Singapore home.

As a publicity stunt to promote the festival’s finale, SHF launched a series of flash mobs across the island. Dancers delighted the public with impromptu performances made of up ethnic dance moves specially choreographed to a mishmash of traditional songs. The flash mob engaged volunteers and dancers from diverse age groups, ethnic backgrounds and nationalities. It was truly a representation of what this year’s SHF is all about.

Thanks to the support of its partners and the extensive and engaging programmes, SHF recorded for the first time 80% engagement levels for its events. The festival also resonated well with the mass media, gathering press coverage worth almost \$2.3 million.

But if you have missed the festival this year, worry not. More exciting activities are already being planned currently for SHF 2011, so keep an eye out for more updates on the festival website at www.heritagefest.sg. We look forward to seeing you next year!



Ms Indraneel Rajah, Deputy Speaker of Parliament and MP of Tanjong Pagar, special guest at the SHF 2010 Festival Finale Tamil Concert at the Singapore Management University (SMU) Green.



The Rameshwara Dancers performing a series of rarely-seen Indian traditional dances at the SMU Green.



A Mexican dance performer.



Flash mob.



Cooking demonstration by the famous local chef, Violet Onn, at the Festival Finale.



The Community Exhibition at the National Museum of Singapore (NMS) front lawn.



Food stalls at the SMU Green.



Children and parents at the immensely popular Drum Circle performance at the entrance of Singapore Art Museum (SAM).



Visitors posing with the Festival Finale roving performers.



SHF also made its presence felt at the *Singapore 2010 Youth Olympic Games* with roving cultural performances and booths featuring traditional crafts, games and costumes at the Youth Olympic Village. Many athletes got into the groove of things with a “+65” Ethnic Rhythm Party where performers blended traditional dances with modern beats.



Image © Soprintendenza Speciale per i beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei

POMPEII: LIFE IN A ROMAN TOWN 79CE

museings

BY SZAN TAN
CURATOR (EXHIBITIONS)
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE

IMAGES: SOPRINTENDENZA SPECIALE PER I BENI ARCHEOLOGICI DI NAPOLI E POMPEI

“... they are human beings seen in their agony. This is not art, it is not imitation; these are their bones, the remains of their flesh and their clothes mixed with plaster, it is the sadness of death that characterises body and form. I see their wretchedness. I hear their cries as they call to their mothers, and I see them fall and writhe. How many human beings perished in similar or even worse ways! Up to now temples, houses and other objects have been found that have aroused the curiosity of educated people, artists and archaeologists; but now you, my dear Fiorelli, have uncovered human pain, and every man feels it.”

Luigi Settembrini (1813-76)

On 24 August 79 CE, Mount Vesuvius erupted and buried the Roman town of Pompeii and its neighbours — Herculaneum, Oplontis, Stabiae and Boscoreale — in the southern Italian region of Campania with volcanic mud, ash and pumice. All the towns perished within two days and were only rediscovered in the 18th century. In 1863, Luigi Settembrini, a professor of Italian literature at the University of Naples legitimised the success of Giuseppe Fiorelli's discoveries in Pompeii when he commented on the plaster casts of bodies of victims found in Pompeii. Giuseppe Fiorelli (1823-1896), director of the archaeological works in Pompeii from 1860 to 1875 and curator of the National Archaeological Museum in Naples from 1863 to 1875 had invited his friend, Settembrini to view the body casts. Fiorelli made use of his training as a numismatist and applied the method of plaster casting to his archaeological work. Volcanic ash had hardened around the bodies of the victims and the flesh of the bodies had decayed. Cavities were formed and Fiorelli ordered a mixture of water and plaster to be poured into these cavities, revealing not only the shapes of the bodies but also their clothing and facial expression.

William Dean Howells, (1837-1920) the American consul in Naples then, wrote in 1864 upon seeing four body casts displayed in a temporary museum in Pompeii. He mentioned about the victims “whose shape the settling and hardening ashes took; whose flesh wasted away, and whose bones lay there in the hollow of the matrix till the cunning of this time found them, and, pouring liquid plaster around the skeletons, clothed them with human form again, and drew them forth into the world once more.”



Figure 1: Resin cast of a crouching man discovered during excavations at the southern walkway of Pompeii's Large Palaestra.

To this day the body casts of Pompeii still leave a striking impression on visitors, evoking a mixture of compassion and simultaneous morbid curiosity about the way the victims have died and their identities and former lives. Take for example, the famous body cast of the 'crouching man' (Figure 1). Discovered at the southern walkway of Pompeii's Large Palaestra, the man had covered his mouth with the edges of his cloak as the toxic fumes and volcanic ash overcame him. His pose is typically rigid due to the high temperatures of the eruption which caused muscle spasms and contractions.

Another extreme example of body contortion can be seen in the body cast of a dog found in the House of Orpheus (Figure 2). Left chained to a post to guard the house while its occupants fled, the dog attempted to save itself by climbing up the lapilli that filled the house from the *compluvium*¹ of the atrium². As the pumice fall-out deepened, the dog climbed higher— until eventually it ran out of chain and was suffocated. The bronze studs around its neck are all that remains of a leather collar. Its contorted position during its death made it difficult to cast.

It has been gathered from excavation reports that a total of 1,047 victims have been found in Pompeii and a total of 103 casts have been made of them.³ The population of Pompeii has been estimated at 12,000 and if there were only that many victims found in the town itself, it meant that many did manage to escape after all.

The moving evidence of the almost instantaneous deaths of the volcano's victims encapsulated in the body casts



Figure 2: Resin cast of a guard dog from the House of Orpheus in Pompeii.

are not the only reasons which make Pompeii and the Vesuvian archaeological sites so intriguing and famous. The importance and uniqueness of the sites lie in the fact that they possess wide-ranging evidence of Roman urban life, despite post-eruption disturbances. From the public and domestic architecture which has been uncovered, to wall decorations, mosaics, pottery and metal work, it was possible for archaeologists and historians to piece together a fairly accurate picture of the daily life and culture of Roman society in the 1st century CE.

One could easily visualise the entertainment sports they enjoyed, or the food they ate and the gardens they relaxed in, simply from the amazingly well-preserved archaeological evidence of the sites, in particular, those from Pompeii. While Rome offered a glimpse into the grandeur of imperial life, the remains found at Pompeii and its neighbours reflect the liveliness of the daily lives of ordinary citizens, freedman and slaves living in the provincial towns of the Roman empire.

Amongst the most spectacular and interesting finds which gives us a glimpse into the daily lives of the Pompeians are those related to public entertainment, in particular the gladiatorial gear found in the Quadriporticus⁴ of the theatres. Gladiatorial contests were the most popular form of public entertainment. These games were originally linked to funeral rites and staged as a tribute to the deceased. They evolved into gladiatorial contests (*munera*) that were sponsored by magistrates and political aspirants, in order to win the support of the people.

Gladiators were mostly prisoners of war or those condemned to death. Slaves and forced labourers could also become gladiators and literally fight their way towards freedom. On occasion, free men who were forced by circumstances or who were attracted to fame and fortune signed on to become gladiators. Victorious gladiators could keep the bulk of their earnings and accumulate large sums of money, and win the hearts of many fans. Nevertheless, they led hard lives for they could die at any moment during combat and, if defeated, were at the mercy of the spectators.

There were many types of gladiators, each distinguished by their different combat gear and strategies. This helmet (Figure 3) with an angular crest and visor is unique to the *murmillio* gladiator and is amongst the 15 helmets, 14 shin-guards, six shoulder guards, and other bronze gladiatorial parade weapons found in the Quadriporticus of the Theatres. Built between the second and beginning of the 1st century BCE, the Quadriporticus was transformed into the training and housing barracks for gladiators when the earthquake of 62 CE heavily damaged the gladiator barracks in Insula V and put it out of use. A bronze and silver round shield (Figure 4) is also amongst the spectacular finds of the Quadriporticus. It was probably used by a *hoplomachus* gladiator who also fought with a lance and sword. Encircled by laurel wreaths for victory, the medallion in the centre bears the head of the legendary Gorgon Medusa, whose gaze is said to have turned men into stone.

If we want to know what the Pompeians ate, it is not difficult to deduce their daily diet from the carbonised remains of food found in Pompeii. Carbonised olives, barley grains, walnuts,



Figure 3: Bronze gladiator's helmet, Quadriporticus of the Theatres, Pompeii



Figure 4: Bronze and silver decorated shield, Quadriporticus of the Theatres, Pompeii



Figure 5: Fresco of a garden, House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii

peach stones, broad beans, figs and oyster shells have been found in the homes and villas of Pompeii. Hence we know for example that the Pompeians ate a good variety of seafood as Pompeii was after all situated near the sea and fish sauce was also found in abundance in the storage jars used in homes and take-away shops known as *thermopolia*. Carbonised breads were also found throughout Pompeii in these shops as well as homes and bakeries. Besides actual examples of food found in Pompeii, their depiction in frescoes or wall paintings further suggest the range of food the Pompeians enjoyed.

Our knowledge of Greek and Roman paintings are largely derived from the abundant examples of frescoes that have survived from Pompeii and its neighbouring sites. These fresco paintings reflect the ideals and aspirations of their patrons. In emulating Greek styles, the Romans sought to distinguish themselves as cultivated and refined people. These painted wall decorations further served to extend the small confines or windowless rooms of Roman house. They bring one into an imaginary realm beyond the physical confines of an enclosure. Take for example, this sumptuously painted garden fresco painted within three frames (Figure 5). Found in the House of the Golden Bracelet in Pompeii, a rather luxurious villa built over three levels and overlooking the sea on the western slope of Pompeii, this fresco originally covered the entire back wall of a summer dining room. Its painting of a garden created the illusion of a lush garden populated with birds within a dining room. Each panel depicts the scene of a garden framed in niches by a light trellis structure. Two *oscillas* (decorated roundels) and a mask are depicted as hanging from the centre of each panel. Exotic motifs such as a pair of facing sphinxes also feature in this fresco. Dotted amongst the rich vegetation depicted are various birds in a multitude of poses.

Apart from this beautiful fresco, the house was decorated with many other frescoes on the two lower levels containing the bedrooms (*cubicula*), dining rooms (*triclinia*), reception

rooms and garden. In its garden were also buried fragments of finer examples of frescoes which were destroyed in the earthquake of 62 CE. These were possibly previously used to decorate the dining rooms or garden.

Apart from wall decorations, sculptural decorations excavated from the gardens and villas of Pompeii gave us an idea to the environment they lived in. Elaborate peristyled gardens (*viridaria*) were often filled with herms, statues, fountains, garden furniture and even aviaries. With the construction of aqueducts in the 1st century CE, water features such as fountains became common in Pompeian gardens.

Garden sculptures often represented the god of wine Bacchus and his entourage of satyrs and maenads, alluding to the wild side of nature. This bronze statue of a young Bacchus (Figure 6) would have stood in the garden of a private home. As the god of wine and enjoyment, the imagery of Bacchus was appropriately found in the garden. The cult of Bacchus was a popular one and just outside of Pompeii was a large temple dedicated to his worship. Herms such as the one in figure 7, featuring a young and old Bacchus often decorated the gardens of the Romans too. Herms are originally pillars serving a protective function for travellers and found at crossroads during Greek times. They were later adopted into Roman towns serving the same functions but went beyond the crossroads and into the gardens of the Roman people as decoration.

From the time it was discovered since the 18th century till today, Pompeii does not cease to amaze for the plethora of archaeological finds when pieced together, not only coherently tell the story of how the ancient Romans lived but also trace the foundations of modern society. From their political system to trade and commerce to the aqueducts and even forms of public and domestic architecture, the Romans have left behind a rich legacy on which modern society was built.



Figure 6: Bronze statue of Bacchus, Pompeii

Furthermore, although the forms may have changed, the ideals, aspirations and inclinations of human beings have not changed very much over time. In fact in many ways, we are much more alike to the ancients than we realise. The violence of the gladiatorial games for example, have transcended to that of computer games, whilst the aspirations of human beings to surround ourselves with beauty and imagery alluding to another world, have not changed too. Furthermore, Mother Nature still reigns over mankind, not matter how much we think we have conquered her.

POMPEII: LIFE IN A ROMAN TOWN 79CE IS PRESENTED BY THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE AND ORGANISED BY SOPRINTENDENZA SPECIALE PER I BENI ARCHEOLOGICI DI NAPOLI E POMPEII AND THE MELBOURNE MUSEUM. THE EXHIBITION RUNS FROM 16 OCT 2010 TO 23 JAN 2011 AT EXHIBITION GALLERIES 1 & 2, BASEMENT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE.

NOTES:

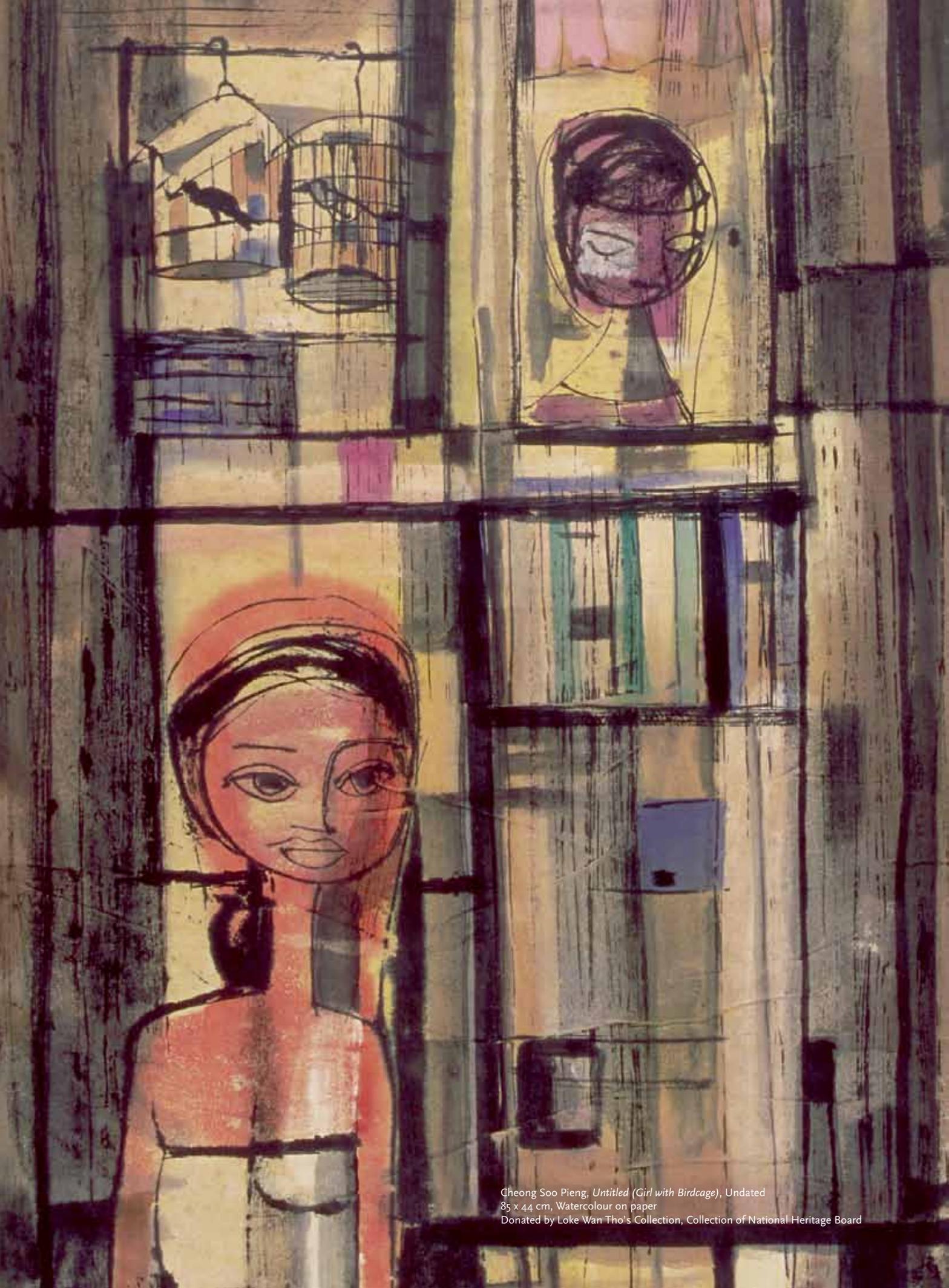
1. An opening in a typical Roman-Italic atrium house which allows light and rainwater in.
2. The central hall of a Roman house which has a skylight opening.
3. Soprintendenza Speciale per i beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompeii, *One at a Time: The Casts*, Boscoreale Antiquarium, 2010, page 10.
4. A colonnaded foyer used for holding spectators during intervals of performances or during rain. The Quadriporticus in Pompeii is believed to have been used as a barracks for gladiators in the last years before the eruption of 79CE.

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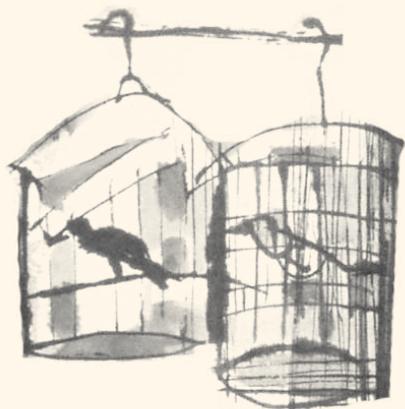


Figure 7: Marble herms with the two faces of the god Bacchus, Garden of the House of the Vetti, Pompeii



Cheong Soo Pieng, *Untitled (Girl with Birdcage)*, Undated
85 x 44 cm, Watercolour on paper
Donated by Loke Wan Tho's Collection, Collection of National Heritage Board

Cheong Soo Pieng - Art and Patronage



Cheong Soo Pieng (1917-1983) is generally regarded today as one of the most innovative and influential Singapore artists of the 20th century. Essays on him usually focus on his experimental spirit and formalistic innovations, often highlighting his synthesis of Western and Chinese art traditions. For an artist whose practice was so rich and diverse, there remain many fertile areas for future research, of which art patronage is one.

Artists do not live in a vacuum. In early 20th century Singapore, many China-born and trained artists such as Cheong had to initially make a living by teaching art full-time, either in an academy like the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) or local schools. This meant that they had little time for their own practice. Amongst the early NAFA lecturers in the 1940s and 1950s, only a few such as Cheong and Chen Wen Hsi (1906-1991) eventually had the good fortune of early retirement to become full-time artists. Nevertheless, they had to continue to give private art tuition, work on commissions or even start businesses (as in the case of Chen who owned two art galleries) to ensure an alternative income source. What gave them the confidence to give up their full-time jobs to pursue art must, in part, have been the support they received in Singapore and abroad from patrons whom they could count on to either buy their works or recommend them to other collectors.

In Cheong's case, he started teaching at NAFA in 1947, one year after settling down in Singapore. He eventually left his job in 1961. Between 1946 and 1961, he held three successful solo shows in Singapore (1956), Kuala Lumpur and Penang (1957). He later travelled to Europe for two years and held exhibitions in London (Frost and Reed Gallery, 1962; Redfern Gallery, 1963), Munich (Galerie Schöninger, 1962) and Oxford (Bear Lane Gallery, 1963). In 1962, he was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal by the Government of the State of Singapore. He was later honoured in 1967 with a retrospective exhibition at the National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur (his 12th solo show) in celebration of his 50th birthday and 25 years as an art teacher.

The support he received from patrons between the late 1940s and the early 1960s likely gave him the confidence and means to become a full-time artist who could travel around the world. This essay is a preliminary examination of Cheong's practice in relation to the burgeoning art market during this period and especially his ties with a key patron from that era – Dato Loke Wan Tho. In particular, it will analyse some of Cheong's works that were collected and later donated by Loke and

museings

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IMAGES:
NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD
FAMILY OF CHEONG SOO PIENG



(From left to right) Ho Kok Hoe, Cheong Soo Pieng, Mrs Cheong, Mrs Loke and Dato Loke Wan Tho at the artist's exhibition opening in 1963. Photograph from Cheong Soo Pieng catalogue (1991).

his estate to the then National Museum of Singapore (now part of the National Heritage Board collection). Hopefully, future research will throw greater light on the critical roles played by various patrons in the development of Cheong's practice and the reception of his works in Singapore and abroad.

ART SCENE IN SINGAPORE

After the devastation caused by World War II in Singapore, the local art scene slowly regained its footing. In 1946, teaching resumed at NAFA where Cheong became a teacher a year later. During that period, art groups like the Society of Chinese Artists re-established themselves, whilst new ones like the Singapore Art Society (SAS) and Society of Malay Artists (*Persekutuan Pelukis Melayu*) were set up in 1949. Such societies provided much-needed platforms for artistic exchange and joint exhibitions.

With the erosion of ties with China especially after the start of communist rule in 1949, the idea of a regional Malayan or Nanyang¹ identity began to take root amongst the Chinese in Singapore. They started to identify themselves with the region, rather than the place of their birth. This was especially evident in literature and later, the visual arts. Interestingly, the need for a Malayan identity was also echoed by the British colonial government then. The Malayan Emergency took place from 1948 to 1960, during which the British government imposed severe measures to counter the communist insurgency in Malaya. The British also embarked on a cultural strategy to win the hearts and minds of the Malayan public against acts of terror by the Malayan Communist Party. In order to achieve this, the British hoped to create a shared Malayan culture to unite the Federation of Malaya, Singapore, Brunei, Sarawak and North Borneo to stand against the Communist threat. Hence, the authorities worked closely with organisations like the SAS. For instance, in the 1950s, the British Council Hall was made available to many cultural and welfare groups, and the SAS even had its administrative office in the council premises.

In the 1950s, the concept of regionalism also dovetailed with growing nationalist sentiments and calls for decolonisation in the region as Singapore moved towards independence in

1965. This need for a Malayan identity continued even after Singapore gained self-government in 1959. One of the first ministries the new local government set up was the Ministry of Culture which was "vested with responsibility of formulating policies needed to create a common Malayan culture".²

ART MARKET IN SINGAPORE

The abovementioned circumstances brought forth a flurry of exhibitions in Singapore, especially those organised by groups such as SAS. An editorial entitled "Singapore Wakes Up" in the 1955 SAS magazine reported, "It is probable that visual arts have received more attention and publicity in Singapore in the first eight weeks of 1955 than in any corresponding period in local history. There have been seven exhibitions, seven broadcasts, six public lectures, an unprecedented number of meetings of the various committees of Singapore Art Society, and *The Singapore Artist* has been widely bought and read."³

In the 1940s and 1950s, there were no private art galleries in Singapore. Although venues like the Straits Commercial Art Company shop provided some space for artists like Cheong to display paintings, their primary business was not the sale of artworks. So, in those early years, exhibitions such as those organised by SAS provided critical opportunities for artists to show and sell their works to the public. For instance, the first exhibition held by SAS in 1950 featuring 278 works by 76 local artists, attracted over 6500 visitors and garnered sales of \$3363.⁴

The buyers of such works then were mostly European expatriates and affluent locals. Amongst the more prominent in the former group were art promoter Frank Sullivan⁵ and art historian Michael Sullivan.⁶ In the latter group, the most famous was Dato Loke Wan Tho. Although there were other well-known collectors in Malaya then, like Tan Tsze Chor and Wong Man Sze, they tended to collect only Chinese art and antiquities, and had few or no works by contemporary Malayan artists like Cheong. The one exception was Loh Cheng Chuan from Penang who was not only a well-known collector of Chinese art but also a keen patron of local artists.

A KEY PATRON OF THE ERA: LOKE WAN THO (1915-1964)

To many, the late Dato Loke Wan Tho is best known for leading the Cathay Organisation to become an important producer and distributor of Malay and Chinese films in the 1940s and 1950s. His regional business empire included cinemas, film studios and hotels. He was a much sought-after public figure and chairman of major institutions such as the Malayan Airways Ltd and Singapore Telephone Board. Often seen in the company of high government officials and glamorous film stars, he was very much one of the leading members of the Malayan establishment then.

Loke was a man of diverse interests and talents. A keen sportsman, he had a great love for nature. He was an accomplished ornithologist and photographer, and combined both interests to become an award-winning photographer of birds. Loke was also known as a great philanthropist. In particular, he was a tireless supporter of the arts and gave generously of his time and collections to various museums. Through his gifts, Loke supported the founding of the



Chua Mia Tee, *Portrait of Dato Loke Wan Tho*, 1995
Oil on canvas, 89 x 59 cm, Collection of National Heritage Board

University Art Museum at the University of Malaya in the 1950s.⁷ As a collector, his interests were eclectic, ranging from Chinese ceramics⁸ to local modern art. In the latter, he was ably assisted by his personal secretary of 24 years, Ms Ann Talbot-Smith (1905-1983), who was herself also greatly interested in local artists.⁹

A sampling of Loke's activities as an art patron in the 1950s and 1960s reveals that he was supportive of a wide range of local artists. He was the guest of honour for the opening of exhibitions by established artists such as Chen Wen Hsi¹⁰ as well as younger ones like Lu Chon Min.¹¹ For the latter group, these shows mattered a great deal as the artists often relied on the sales proceeds of such exhibitions to fund their overseas studies.¹²

By the early 1950s, Loke was already active with the SAS, having organised its first photographic exhibition with his good friend and SAS president Dr Carl Gibson-Hill in 1950. And Loke continued to maintain close ties with the SAS through the 1950s and early 1960s. For instance, besides serving as patron of the society in 1960,¹³ he also opened many of its shows as guest of honour and bought many works at such events. Loke's secretary Talbot-Smith was also closely associated with the SAS, having served as its secretary for a time.¹⁴

By the late 1950s, Loke was regarded as having Singapore's largest collection of works by local artists, numbering some

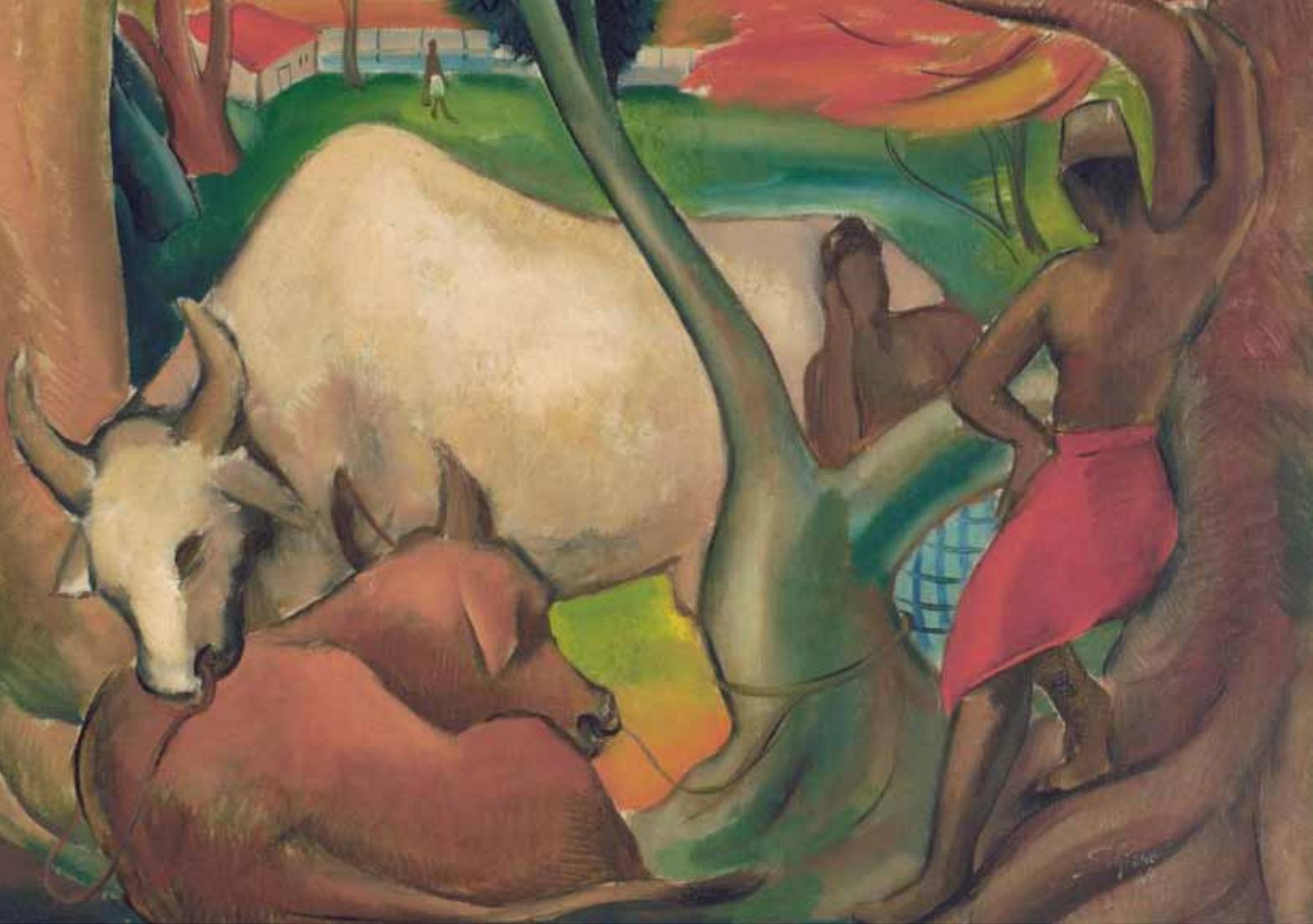
80 works. This was later augmented in 1957 by his purchase of another 64 works from Frank Sullivan who was then SAS vice-president.¹⁵ Loke had planned to display them with his own collection in Singapore's first community art gallery.¹⁶ This eventually culminated in Loke's decision to donate 99 paintings to the Ministry of Culture in 1960. The list of donated works by 50 artists included well-known names like Cheong as well as younger ones like Thomas Yeo.¹⁷ In 1962, Loke added 15 more paintings to the earlier 99 he gave.¹⁸ And after Loke's untimely demise in 1964, his estate made another gift of his collection to the state.

ARTIST AND PATRON

When Cheong arrived from China in 1946, Loke was already based in Singapore, reviving his family's cinema business after the war. At that time, Cheong was busy teaching at NAFA and had not yet had his first solo show in 1956. Although it is not clear when Loke first met Cheong, the latter was already taking part in group exhibitions then.¹⁹ Hence, it is likely that, given his interest in art, Loke would have encountered Cheong's works at annual group exhibitions such as the one organised by the prominent Society of Chinese Artists in 1948 which featured an oil painting by Cheong of a female bather rendered in a cubist-like manner.²⁰ In 1951, Cheong teamed up with Chen Wen Hsi, Chen Chong Swee and Liu Kang, to present a group show called *Four Artists from China* organised by SAS.²¹ The same four artists held another group exhibition in 1953 under the auspices of SAS, after their 1952 trip to Bali. Again, it is highly probable that Loke, given his ties with SAS, would have heard of, if not seen Cheong's works at both shows.

Amongst the works by Cheong donated by Loke, the earliest painting is *Indian Men with Two Cows* (1949). This was listed as 'Kampong Scene' and already in Loke's collection when it was exhibited by the SAS in an exhibition titled *Ten Years of Art in Singapore* in 1956. However, it still does not provide the date of Loke's first purchase of Cheong's works as the painting could have been bought at any time between 1949 and 1956. However, there is an ink portrait by Cheong of Loke's second wife – the beautiful and glamorous Christina Lee – completed in 1953. This indicates that at least, by the early 1950s, Cheong was familiar enough with Loke to have completed a portrait of the latter's wife. Apart from Cheong, Christina Lee was known to have posed for a number of famous artists including Xu Beihong, Basoeki Abdullah, Lee Man Fong and Sun Yee.²²

Three years later in 1956, Loke was the guest of honour at the opening of Cheong's first solo show in Singapore. Organised by SAS at the British Council Gallery, the show featured a wide range of media, including oils, watercolours, batik, gouache, Chinese ink and sketches. It is helpful here to highlight the close connection between Loke and Frank Sullivan, as the latter was the SAS exhibition organiser for the said show. And again in 1963, Loke opened Cheong's exhibition at the Victoria Memorial Hall in Singapore, showing mostly works completed after the artist's trip to Europe in the preceding two years. The fact that Cheong invited Loke to be the guest of honour at his first solo show in Singapore and that Loke, a highly-regarded personality, twice agreed to officiate at Cheong's shows, testify to the growing relationship between the two men.



Cheong Soo Pieng, *Indian Men with Two Cows*, 1949
 Oil on board, 76 x 105 cm
 Donated by Loke Wan Tho's Collection, Collection of National Heritage Board



Cheong Soo Pieng, *Portrait of Christina Lee*, 1953
 Ink and colour on paper, 75 x 54 cm
 Collection of National Heritage Board



Basoeki Abdullah, *Untitled (Chinese Woman in White Cheongsam)*
 Pastel, 66 x 51 cm
 Collection of National Heritage Board



Xu Beihong, *Portrait of Christina Lee*, 1939
82 x 54cm, Oil on canvas
Collection of Xu Beihong Museum



Photograph of Mdm Lee taken at the Xu Beihong exhibition at the Singapore Art Museum in 2008.

It is highly probable that Loke would have shown his encouragement by purchasing Cheong's works at such openings. By the 1950s, Loke was widely known in the art circles for his admiration and support of Cheong. He reportedly bought two to three paintings by Cheong every month and hung them in his office. Loke also gave some of those paintings to his business partners in Europe.²³ Cheong's daughter Leng Guat recalled that Loke's secretary Talbot-Smith used to visit her father's studio periodically to select paintings, usually Chinese ink, for such gifts.²⁴ Talbot-Smith also sometimes brought Cathay's guests to meet Cheong in his studio.²⁵ His student Thomas Yeo recalled that in the late 1950s, many of Cheong's collectors were either British expatriates living in Singapore or friends introduced by Loke. Occasionally, Frank Sullivan and Michael Sullivan also brought visitors to his studio.²⁶

A number of Cheong's mural commissions in the 1950s and 1960s such as those for Cathay Organisation (1955) and Singapore Telephone Board (1959), were also likely made possible through Loke's connections.²⁷ Loke's support of Cheong in the 1950s during the Emergency period was helpful as this was a period when the British colonial government was generally suspicious of artists from China.²⁸ Loke was well-regarded by the British elite in Singapore and on good terms with the then Commissioner-General for the United Kingdom in South East Asia, Malcolm MacDonald.²⁹ The latter, who was also an admirer of Cheong's works, bought paintings for his own collection as well as to give to friends during his tenure in Singapore between 1946 and 1955.³⁰

Over time, Loke and Cheong developed a warm and easy-going relationship. They met fairly regularly, usually conversing in Cantonese. The Cheong family used to visit the Lokes during Chinese New Year.³¹ Cheong also dropped in, sometimes unannounced, on Loke at his Cathay office to either show new works, or introduce promising young artists to him. Despite his busy schedule, Loke often made time to meet Cheong.³² By the time Cheong left for Europe in 1962, he was already quite a successful artist and sufficiently well off to embark on a two-year long trip.³³ Loke continued his support in various ways. During Cheong's European trip, Loke together with others, helped to effect introductions to London galleries such as Frost and Reed, and Redfern, where Cheong eventually held his exhibitions.³⁴ Through his networks with the media industry, Loke was also able to arrange a TV interview for Cheong in the United Kingdom.³⁵ In addition, Loke used his wide business contacts to introduce Cheong to collectors in France and Italy.³⁶

THE LOKE COLLECTION

There are 12 works by Cheong in the NHB collection which were donated by Loke and his estate. Two paintings – *Balinese Selling Toddy* (1954) and *Bali Beach* (1955) – were most probably from the Frank Sullivan collection which Loke purchased in 1957. These two works were likely acquired earlier by Sullivan when he helped to organise Cheong's first solo show in Singapore in 1956.³⁷ The 12 works do not represent an exhaustive list of Cheong's paintings acquired by Loke. There are probably more works in the collections of Cathay Organisation and the extended Loke family.³⁸ However, they

do provide a useful glimpse into the range of paintings Cheong produced after his arrival in Singapore in 1946 and prior to Loke's demise in 1964. They also reflect the types of works that attracted the attention of key patrons like Loke and Sullivan, and conceivably other collectors and admirers of the period. The latter would include personalities in Singapore such as Malcolm MacDonald, Michael Sullivan, Madeleine Enright, Ann Talbot-Smith and Ho Kok Hoe, and those in Malaysia like P.G. Lim, Kington Loo and Loh Cheng Chuan.³⁹

The paintings, evenly divided between six works done in oils and the rest on paper (either Chinese ink or watercolours), amply demonstrate Cheong's proficiency in both Western and Chinese art traditions. Figurative works predominate, with only two landscapes and one still-life. Most of the figurative paintings feature scenes based on rural life such as Indian men tending cows or a Balinese selling toddy (a form of coconut wine). Others highlight local women (be they Malay, Balinese or Kenyah) in traditional dress. In these pictures, the women are usually shown against a backdrop of Southeast Asian motifs like palm fronds, tropical fruits, painted boats and floral patterned batik (a form of wax-resist dyed fabric).

The two landscapes depict scenes drawn from Cheong's immediate surroundings. One shows a row of riverside shophouses – most likely along Singapore River – with boats and cars in the foreground. The other captures rustic wooden houses nestled amongst coconut trees with two Malay



Cheong Soo Pieng, *Bali Beach*, 1955
50 x 63 cm, Oil on canvas
Donated by Loke Wan Tho's Bequest, Collection of National Heritage Board

women in the foreground. These subjects convey an identity that is distinctly Southeast Asian. Consider the painting of a street vendor surrounded by a crowd of onlookers. The hawker's loose singlet and wide-brimmed hat, together with the adjacent shirtless boy, hint at the hot and humid setting of the scene. Likewise for the painting of Singapore River – whilst the building facades may look European, the colourful green and red *tongkangs* (a form of cargo boats) bobbing in the waters are a reminder that such vessels are usually only found in this part of the world.



Cheong Soo Pieng, *Balinese Selling Toddy*, 1954
46 x 37.5 cm, Watercolour on paper
Donated by Loke Wan Tho's Collection, Collection of National Heritage Board

Such localised or Malayan themes were adopted by many local artists from the 1940s to the 1960s, both in response to their immediate physical environment as well as the growing interest in asserting a local identity. Such subjects were also consistent with the then British colonial authority's attempts to create a shared Malayan culture amongst the local populace. Many expatriate collectors would have, understandably, also preferred works with explicitly local subjects as a reminder of the times they had spent in the region. As one of Cheong's admirers Malcolm MacDonald had put it, "...whenever I contemplate one or another of them (Cheong's paintings) I imagine that I had suddenly dropped in at a kampong in Malaya, a sea-shore resort on Singapore island, or a Dayak longhouse in the jungly interior of Sarawak."⁴⁰ Such was the evocative powers of Cheong's works!

Lastly, an examination of three paintings featuring female figures (*Bali Beach*, *Woman Lying Down* and *Untitled [Girl with Birdcage]*) reveals Cheong's innovative approaches between the late 1940s and early 1960s, which so captured his patrons' attention. Whilst all three ostensibly depict similar subjects, the media and styles could not be more different. In the painting *Bali Beach*, Cheong demonstrated his proficiency with a Western medium, namely oil, and the stylistic features of key Western movements such as Primitivism, Cubism, Fauvism and Expressionism. He moved away from a straightforward representation of two topless women by reducing the female forms into simple graceful lines. The latter recall the sculpted features of indigenous wooden figurines as well as the rustic quality of the local way of life. The beach setting is captured by blocks of roughly applied brown, ochre and cream paint.



Cheong Soo Pieng, *Woman Lying Down*, 1949
 37.5 x 94.5 cm, Chinese ink and colour on paper
 Donated by Loke Wan Tho's Collection, Collection of National Heritage Board

The blocks in turn form an interlocking design of angular planes which convey the effect of shifting light cast upon an undulating surface. Cheong also used strong bold colours, forming exaggerated contrasts, in order to accentuate the intensity of light and decorativeness of the tropics. Whilst the two ladies repose serenely on the beach, there is a sense of immediacy as certain elements such the boat, the basket of fruits and the lying woman's feet have been cropped out by the picture's edge, akin to the framing of a camera's lens. The scene also pulsates with tropical fervour through Cheong's application of paint in strong expressive strokes. Details like the patterns on the *sarong* (a loose garment made of a long strip of cloth wrapped around the body) worn by the seated female are sketched with quick fluid flourishes, suggestive of an individualistic spontaneity.

Cheong was also equally at home with Chinese ink painting. In *Woman Lying Down*, he used the long horizontal format associated with Chinese traditional hand scrolls. The latter are conventionally associated with landscape painting where a viewer is meant to experience travelling through the mountains and rivers as the landscape is slowly unrolled with the scroll. However, in this case, Cheong chose the subject of a reclining female which is usually more associated with the Western figurative paintings of Gauguin or Matisse, both known for their depictions of females in exotic locales. In this picture, Cheong had conveyed the feminine charm of his model through soft lyrical lines in ink. The Southeast Asian setting was captured through his careful attention to the woman's elongated ears weighed down by heavy earrings and her floral patterned sarong. The figure's affinity to nature is suggested by the large banana leaf on which she rests, whilst her rural occupation seems to be hinted at, by what appears to be a round woven tray in the background. The relatively flat colour washes used for the figure are in sharp contrast with her background which is completely filled with varying shades of ink. These, apart from bringing the female form into sharp relief, also provides an amorphous setting that alternately suggests receding depth as well as shifting light and shadow, constantly in flux.

Unlike *Woman Lying Down* which is a fairly representational depiction of a female figure, Cheong used a very different approach in the third work *Untitled (Girl with Birdcage)*. It is also an ink painting but this time, the vertical composition is akin to the traditional hanging scroll format. Here, a standing woman is seen in the foreground and her Southeast Asian setting is suggested by her dress and headwear. The female form is now somewhat distorted through the elongation of her neck and arms as well as her heavily lidded eyes. Another person is seen peering through a curtained window in the top left corner of the painting, beside which hangs two birdcages, a common sight in many rural Malay homes. In this work, Cheong departed from Chinese painting aesthetics which conventionally dictate that parts of the paper surface should be left unpainted to suggest the physical setting of subjects, be it the ground, sky or water. Here, Cheong had almost filled up the painting surface with a grid of heavy ink lines and blocks of greens, blues, purples, pinks, browns and greys. Most interestingly, Cheong integrated the two figures into the overall composition of rectilinear blocks, which even extended to the woman's dress. The grid-like pattern recalls the abstract works of Mondrian but, at the same time, also conveys the patchwork quality seen in many wooden stilted houses in Malay villages. The latter often use wooden planks for construction of its walls, which are then painted in bright colours.

These three works amply exemplify how Cheong was able to bring together diverse media, techniques and approaches drawn from many art traditions, in order to capture slices of Southeast Asian life. In an era where the modern artist was celebrated for innovation, Cheong was able to assert his identity as a modern Asian artist in several ways. Firstly, his links with Asia was maintained through his foundation in Chinese ink painting tradition. At the same time, he was able to demonstrate his knowledge of international trends, particularly in Western modern art, both in his oil paintings as well as his innovative Chinese paintings. Thirdly, his Southeast Asian subjects also reflected his immediate reality, both physical and social, which in turn helped to connect him

with his audiences in Singapore. As the art historian Michael Sullivan had succinctly put it in 1960, "His work is modern, yet not beyond the understanding of people of any feeling. It is influenced by modern art, but is by no means an imitation of it. It depicts the Malayan scene and yet does not merely illustrate or record it. It is, in fact, a true expression of the feelings of an artist who is at one with the world he lives in." 41

Note: The author wishes to express his appreciation to the following individuals who had kindly agreed to be interviewed for this essay: Ms Cheong Leng Guat, Mr Choy Weng Yang, Dr Ho Kok Hoe, Mr Tan Teo Kwang and Mr Thomas Yeo.



Cheong Soo Pieng
Drying Salted Fish
1978
70 x 103 cm
Chinese ink and colour on cloth
Collection of National Heritage Board

Take a closer look at Singapore's \$50 currency note and you will see a detail from Cheong Soo Pieng's 'Drying Salted Fish'. Designed for an arts theme, this currency note features the development and achievements of local artists.



- 1 'Nanyang', meaning southern seas, was how the Chinese used to refer to lands located south of China.
- 2 Seng, Yu Jin, "Art and Ideology – The Singapore Art Society and the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960)" in *From Words to Pictures – Art During the Emergency*. Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2007, pp.10-12.
- 3 *The Singapore Artist*, v.1, n. 3, 1955, pp. 2, 50. A year earlier, Dato Loke Wan Tho had made the following remarks as the guest of honour at the opening of the Singapore Art Society's (SAS) fifth exhibition of works by Singapore artists: "I trust there are no longer people in Singapore who speak of this island as a cultural desert; and if there are, they who do so merely nurture a prickly cactus in the waters of their own imagination. In the world of art there has been a constant and sustaining activity... On the walls of this room you will find over 160 pictures, executed in a variety of mediums... They represent the work of artists who are members of many different races – Malay, Chinese, British, Indian and American – so that, in addition to the political and racial tolerance with which Singapore is blessed, we are also fortunate to have the unity of the races within the universal brotherhood of the arts. (Speech by Loke Wan Tho, 9 April 1954)
- 4 *Colony of Singapore Annual Report 1950*, p. 152, as cited in Kwok, Kian Chow, *Channels of Confluences: A History of Singapore Art*. Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 1996, p.69.
- 5 Frank Sullivan (1909-1989) bought his first Malayan painting in Singapore in 1946. He was a major collector who had amassed over 200 works by the 1960s. Sullivan was an Australian journalist who spent much time in Singapore and Malaya, promoting modern art of the region. He was active in organising exhibitions for the Singapore Art Society in the 1950s. He later moved to Kuala Lumpur where he was press secretary to Malaysia's first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman from 1958 to 1966. Sullivan helped to set up the National Art Gallery in Malaysia. For a time, he also ran a private art gallery in Kuala Lumpur (Samat Art Gallery) which promoted local modern art, where Cheong held his 11th solo show in 1966.
- 6 Michael Sullivan, who was with the University of Malaya from 1954 to 1960, bought works for the University Art Museum as well as his personal collection. (Sullivan, Michael, *Modern Chinese Art – The Khoan and Michael Sullivan Collection*. Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2001, pp.16-17)
- 7 Sullivan, Michael, "Introduction", p.16; Sullivan, Michael, "Singapore's Art Scene in the 1950s" in *Twentieth Century Chinese Paintings in Singapore Collections*. Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2003, p.31.
- 8 Loke lent his Chinese ceramic antiques for exhibitions organised by SAS and the China Society in 1952 and 1953. (Catalogue for *A Loan Exhibition of Chinese Art in 1952* and catalogue for *A Loan Exhibition of Chinese Art – Ming and Ching Periods in 1953*)
- 9 Lim, Kay Tong, *Cathay: 55 Years of Cinema*. Singapore: Landmark Books Pte Ltd, 1991, p.62; Chan, Eng Cheong, "A legacy of art", *The Straits Times*, 15 August 1983; Interview with Choy Weng Yang on 10 May 2010.
- 10 Loke opened Chen Wen Hsi's show in Kuala Lumpur in 1958. (*The Straits Times*, 24 December 1958)
- 11 Loke opened Lu Chin Min's show held by SAS in 1955. (*The Straits Times*, 22 August 1955)
- 12 *Jolly Koh*. Malaysia: Maya Press Sdn Bhd, 2008, p.24.
- 13 *The Straits Times*, 24 January 1960.
- 14 Interview with Ho Kok Hoe on 20 May 2010.
- 15 At the time, Sullivan's collection was regarded as second only to Loke's. (*The Straits Times*, 31 October 1957)
- 16 *The Straits Times*, 31 October 1957.
- 17 Singapore Government Press Statement, 18 October 1960 [BYC/MC. OC. 66/60].
- 18 *The Straits Times*, 4 October 1962.
- 19 Frank Sullivan held that Cheong had taken part in every major exhibition held in Singapore from 1946 to 1956. (Sullivan, Frank, "The Art of Cheong Soo Pieng" in *Cheong Soo Pieng*. Singapore: Singapore Art Society, 1956)
- 20 In fact, one of Cheong's early NAFA students Tan Tee Chie recalled that at one of the exhibitions organised by the Singapore Society of Chinese Artists, Loke had thought highly of Cheong's oil paintings. (Tan, Tee Chie, "The Teacher in the Teacher's Eyes: Tan Tee Chie's Thoughts on Cheong Soo Pieng" in *Nanyang Arts* (Singapore: NAFA, 2009), p. 41)
- 21 *Singapore Art Society Souvenir Magazine to Commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Founding of Modern Singapore and the 20th Anniversary of the Singapore Art Society*, Singapore: Singapore Art Society, 1969.
- 22 Christina Lee (1923-2009) was considered a great beauty of her time. She was an accomplished photographer, especially of birds and had co-produced three nature photography books with Malcolm MacDonald. After her marriage with Loke ended in the early 1960s, she remarried, firstly to American film producer Jeffrey Stone and later to Indian businessman Dadi Balsara in the 1970s. With the latter, she started a company called Perfumes of Singapore, which produced perfumes such as "Singapore Girl" and "Christina". (Information about Christina Lee kindly provided by Mrs Jaya Mohideen in 11 Jun 2009)
- 23 Tan, Tee Chie, *Nanyang Arts*, p. 41.
- 24 Interview with Cheong Leng Guat on 20 May 2010
- 25 Interview with Thomas Yeo on 4 June 2010
- 26 These collectors often bought between one and three works each, for about \$100 per piece, and most were Chinese ink paintings of local subjects. (Interview with Thomas Yeo on 4 June 2010)
- 27 Loke was for a time, the chairman of the Telephone Board.
- 28 As recalled by his student Tan Tee Chie: "...Cheong's success was exceptional in Singapore, which was governed by the British Colonial government then in the 1950s. During the 1950s under the British, those who came from China with a Chinese education were treated with suspicion by the British Colonial government as being leftist. Even NAFA was regarded as a left-leaning institution. As such, many artists who graduated from NAFA taught at primary schools, many went into other occupations, and some also became taxi drivers." (Tan Tee Chie, *Nanyang Arts*, p. 41)
- 29 Malcolm John MacDonald (1901-1981) was a politician and diplomat. He was the Governor-General of Malaya (1946-1948) and Commissioner-General for the United Kingdom in South East Asia (1948-1955). In 1958, MacDonald and Loke collaborated on a book on Angkor, with the former writing the text and the latter providing the photographs.
- 30 MacDonald, Malcolm, "Cheong Soo Pieng" in *Soo Pieng*. Singapore: Yu Loonching, 1980.
- 31 Interview with Cheong Leng Guat on 20 May 2010
- 32 Interview with Thomas Yeo on 4 June 2010
- 33 Thomas Yeo felt that when Cheong left for his Europe trip, the latter was already a wealthy man and therefore, could afford the long trip. Although there was no financial need to do so, Cheong continued to sell works in Europe as he wanted to see if his paintings had an international market. (Interview with Thomas Yeo on 4 June 2010)
- 34 As recalled by Thomas Yeo who was in London then and acted as Cheong's informal interpreter for a part of his trip in Europe, there were some miscommunications between Loke and Cheong over the choice of exhibition venues in London. Loke had initially recommended Cheong to approach Frost and Reed in London. Likely, Loke had not realised then that Frost, although a famous antique dealer, was not known for selling modern art. Cheong was not happy with the exhibition outcome at Frost and later asked Yeo to communicate his unhappiness to Loke and request for help to show at another gallery. Loke replied that he had only meant to effect an introduction to Frost and Cheong should not have felt obliged to work with Frost if he was uncomfortable with them. Loke subsequently arranged for an introduction to Redfern Gallery which was a more reputable modern art gallery, having exhibited works by other Chinese modern artists such as Zao Wouki and Lin Fengmian. Coincidentally, there was also a Singaporean Chinese woman named Maggie who was working as a manager at Redfern then. (Interview with Thomas Yeo on 4 June 2010). In addition, another former student Tan Teo Kwang
- who was also in London around the same time, recalled that Cheong's student Mak Kum Siew and a London couple who was friendly with Cheong, had also helped to look for suitable London galleries for his shows. (Interview with Tan Teo Kwang on 22 June 2010)
- 35 Thomas Yeo, studying in London then, was roped in to be Cheong's interpreter for the interview, which likely took place in Oxford in 1963. (Interview with Thomas Yeo on 4 June 2010)
- 36 Thomas Yeo, who travelled with Cheong in France and Italy, recalled that the collectors were largely Loke's industrialist-friends. They eventually bought a number of Chinese ink paintings that Cheong had brought from Singapore as these were more portable to carry around. (Interview with Thomas Yeo on 4 June 2010)
- 37 Looking at Cheong's 1956 exhibition catalogue, there are some works whose titles (*Beach and Toddy Shop*) are similar to the works in the NHB collection. Moreover, in 1965, the National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur held an exhibition *The Sullivan Art Collection*, featuring 332 artworks Sullivan had collected in Malaya since 1946. It comprised 243 works on loan from Sullivan, 40 paintings he donated to the Gallery and 49 loan works from the Singapore government (the latter representing the collection he formed between 1946 and 1956). Amongst the Singapore loan works were two works by Cheong Soo Pieng – *On Bali Beach* and *Balinese Selling Toddy*. Both were stated to be works in poster colour done in 1954. (*Kumpulan Seni Lukis Sullivan [The Sullivan Art Collection]*. Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni Lukis [National Art Gallery], 1965)
- 38 For instance, in the catalogue for Cheong's retrospective exhibition at the National Art Gallery of Malaysia in 1967, a number of works were stated as belonging to Loke's relatives such as Mrs Loke Yew (*Woman Egg Seller*, 1956, oil) and Mrs Choo Kok Leong (*Goats*, 1956, oil). Some listed as coming from Loke himself do not appear to correspond with any of the 12 donated works in the NHB collection (such as *Bali Dancer*, 1952, watercolour; *Kampong Scene*, 1959, watercolour; *Kampong Scene*, 1961, oil) (*Soo Pieng*. Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery, 1967)
- 39 A number of these collectors were listed in the catalogue for Cheong's retrospective exhibition at the National Art Gallery of Malaysia in 1967. (*Soo Pieng*. Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery, 1967)
- 40 MacDonald, Malcolm, *Soo Pieng*, 1980.
- 41 Sullivan, Michael, "Foreword" in *Cheong Soo Pieng*. Singapore: Straits Commercial Art Co, 1960.



Everything In Its Place: Reading Batik as a Marker of Social-Spatial Relations

museings

BY DR FARISH A. NOOR

IMAGES: ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

Let us begin by asking ourselves a rather simple, if mundane, question: Why is it that when we survey the vast repertoire of batik styles and motifs we often come across certain patterns that are rather loud and crude in the manner they are rendered? And how come some of these patterns – such as the *parang rusak* or ‘broken sword’, which happens to be one of the ‘*larangan*’ (forbidden) patterns traditionally restricted to the royalty and aristocracy – were regarded as special and their use limited to the exclusive confines of the palace?

Numerous theories have been advanced to explain this discrepancy in style and taste, and this article does not in any way claim to hold the final answer to the riddle. However we propose that in order to answer the question we need to remind ourselves of what batik is and how it ought to be understood – and more crucially read – as more than just pieces of hand-waxed and painted cloth, but rather as *narratives* containing statements about the wearer of the batik and the world around him or her. Batik is, in short, a form of visual and textual narrative that can be read (after all, batik is *written*, remember¹) and the answers to the questions that it poses before the eye of the modern viewer can be found in the material itself.

¹ Batik is written in the sense that we write it with a wax pen *canting*, not painted with a brush. Also until today in parts of Java the word batik literally means to write, as in ‘*batikin nama bapak dalam buku ini*’.

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BATIK IN TIME, SPACE AND SOCIETY

First of all, let us situate batik in its proper historical-social context : Like language, batik was the lingua franca of the peoples of Southeast Asia and batiks produced in Java and Sumatra were eagerly bought and used by not only the Javanese and Sumatrans but also the communities of the Malay Peninsula, Borneo, Sulawesi and other parts of the Malay archipelago.

However it is to Java that we need to turn to if we are to locate batik in its original setting where the motifs and patterns of the cloth are to be understood and deciphered properly. For it was in Java – particularly between the 18th and 20th centuries – where a highly complex and plural cosmopolitan society emerged that was internally differentiated along the lines of class, wealth, political status and loyalties, ethnicity, language and religion. And in this overdetermined social environment where symbols and markers were constantly being contested and in a state of flux that the motifs and patterns of batik were used as markers of identity and difference.

Elsewhere, we have talked about batik as a marker of ethnic, class, gender and religious identity. But in our attempt to understand and account for the variations of patterns and motifs, and why some were bolder and cruder while others were finer and softer, we need to understand the complex web of social relations and the social hierarchies that were dominant in Javanese society then.

For a start, let us go back to our first question above: Why is it that some of the restricted 'royal' patterns and motifs seem cruder than their socially inferior



Fig 1 - *Parang rusak* pattern batik waistcloth or *jarit* (detail). Mid-20th century, Yogyakarta, Central Java. Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum.



Aristocratic young men in court dress. c 1920, Yogyakarta, Central Java. Photo courtesy of the author.

counterparts? Of course it beggars belief to suggest that the Rajas of Java could not afford the finest batiks of the land; and it goes without saying that the workshops and ateliers of the royal houses did produce some of the most sophisticated batiks of Central and Eastern Java. So, why were patterns like the *parang rusak* deemed preferable to kings, nobles and aristocrats?

THE FABRIC OF A COMMUNITY

Answering such a question necessitates some imagination on our part, and having to imagine how batik was worn, and where and why. The bane of batik research today is the dearth of enough photographic data to show how batik was used on a daily, routine basis by people from all walks of life. In many private and public photo collections, we see batik being worn by those who were clearly posing to be photographed, in situations and settings that were hardly natural.

Nonetheless some leap of faith and suspension of disbelief is required when we try to imagine how batik was worn in the days when it was the common denominator of kings and peasants alike. Living at a time when batik was literally the fabric that held society together and when its use was universal, we need to remind ourselves of the double-faced nature of batik as the universal cloth of Southeast Asia. On the one hand it was the textile that served as the material lingua franca of various communities, but on the other hand, the distinctions between classes, ethnicities, gender and localities had to be inscribed in that same material.

So, if kings and peasants alike wore batik, the only way through which the uneven differentials of power and status between them could be materially reproduced in the public domain was in the material itself, notably its patterns. And in the patterns of batik we may begin to understand the Southeast Asian understanding of the concept of social space, social hierarchy and social distance as well.

CLOSING IN ON AN ANSWER: THE EFFECT OF DISTANCE

Take a look at a sample of *parang rusak* (fig. 1) and you may see what I mean: When looked at closely, the motif – a simple, undulating repetitive pattern in a series of broken waves – seems rather crude compared to the sumptuous batiks of Pekalongan, Kedungwuni, Cirebon or Kudus. Some older pieces of *parang rusak* batik give the impression that they were crudely drawn, almost as if the waxing needle was moved by the hands of an infant playing with a crayon. But therein



Fig. 2 – *Mega mendung* pattern batik waistcloth or *jarit* (detail). 1990, Cirebon, North Coastal Java. Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum.

precisely lies our error: for one is not meant to look at a piece of *parang rusak* close-up, but rather from a distance, and a respectful distance at that.

Indeed, the intended visual effect of the *parang rusak* motif is only evident when viewed from a distance (of say, 10 meters or more) and not when it is held in our hands. The same batik which appears crude when held before our eyes has a more arresting effect when viewed from a distance, and this implies that it is meant to be seen from afar; in turn, this implies that spatial distance is part and parcel of the batik's pattern and effect. This in turn tells us something about the person who wore it (a king or noble) and those who viewed it. From a respectable distance the effect of a *parang rusak* motif is striking: what appears as a crude representation of broken waves takes on the appearance of graceful undulations that exude order and regularity – precisely the intended effect of the cloth's pattern and presumably the intended role of the ruling elite as well, who were meant to embody and perpetuate the order of Javanese traditional society.

By locating ourselves in the social milieu where batik was worn thus, we begin to understand the complex web of social relations that were crucial to the maintenance of order, social norms and values of this highly conservative and traditional society. It was not an accident that the *parang rusak* motif was the preferred motif of the aristocracy, in the same way that the *mega mendung* motif (fig. 2) was likewise the pattern of royal batiks at the court of Cirebon. Both motifs appear crude when viewed up close, but regal and solid from a distance.

Social distancing and the maintenance of social hierarchies were thus part of the function of batik in traditional Javanese society, and such batiks made sense to those who lived in the context of a traditional society where the repertoire of symbols would be available to those who understood how to decipher its hidden meaning.

Such sartorial restrictions – and the social norms and praxis that accompanied them – did not apply to the communities of the north coast where there were no royal houses to set and maintain the standards of society. And in such a milieu, batik motifs and patterns played an altogether different role as they were markers not of social distance but rather social proximity and familiarity.

THE PESISIR BATIKS : A REVERSAL OF SPATIAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

The north coast ports and cities of Java were somewhat different from the royal capitals of Central Java as they had initially been small coastal settlements that only later rose to prominence as a result of colonial rule, international commerce and the settlement of many diverse diasporic communities including Europeans, Chinese, Indians and Arabs. Here a different sort of batik emerged as a result of the melange of different cultures that came together within the ambit of colonial race relations and a different mode of social ordering that was the result of mercantilism and transnational linkages. In time the batiks of the north coast cities would become the norm for most Javanese who lived in the more modern and cosmopolitan urban centres and they would gain recognition from other colonial centres including Malacca, Singapore, Penang and as far as Manila and Bangkok.

The social order of these hybrid colonial settlements was entirely different from that of the royal capitals where social hierarchies were accompanied by their own mode of social distancing and spatiality. The absence of traditional values and norms, as well as the sartorial rules and regulations that maintained the social order in traditional Javanese society meant that the inhabitants of these hybrid cosmopolitan centres could mingle with relative ease and inter-ethnic and inter-religious marriages and relations were not uncommon.

It should also be added that the political economy of these coastal port-cities was dependent on international commerce and not the traditional agrarian based economic production model that was the norm in central and eastern Java. As such, the standards that dictated the hierarchies of class and status were somewhat different, and the notion of cultural capital – which often brings with it

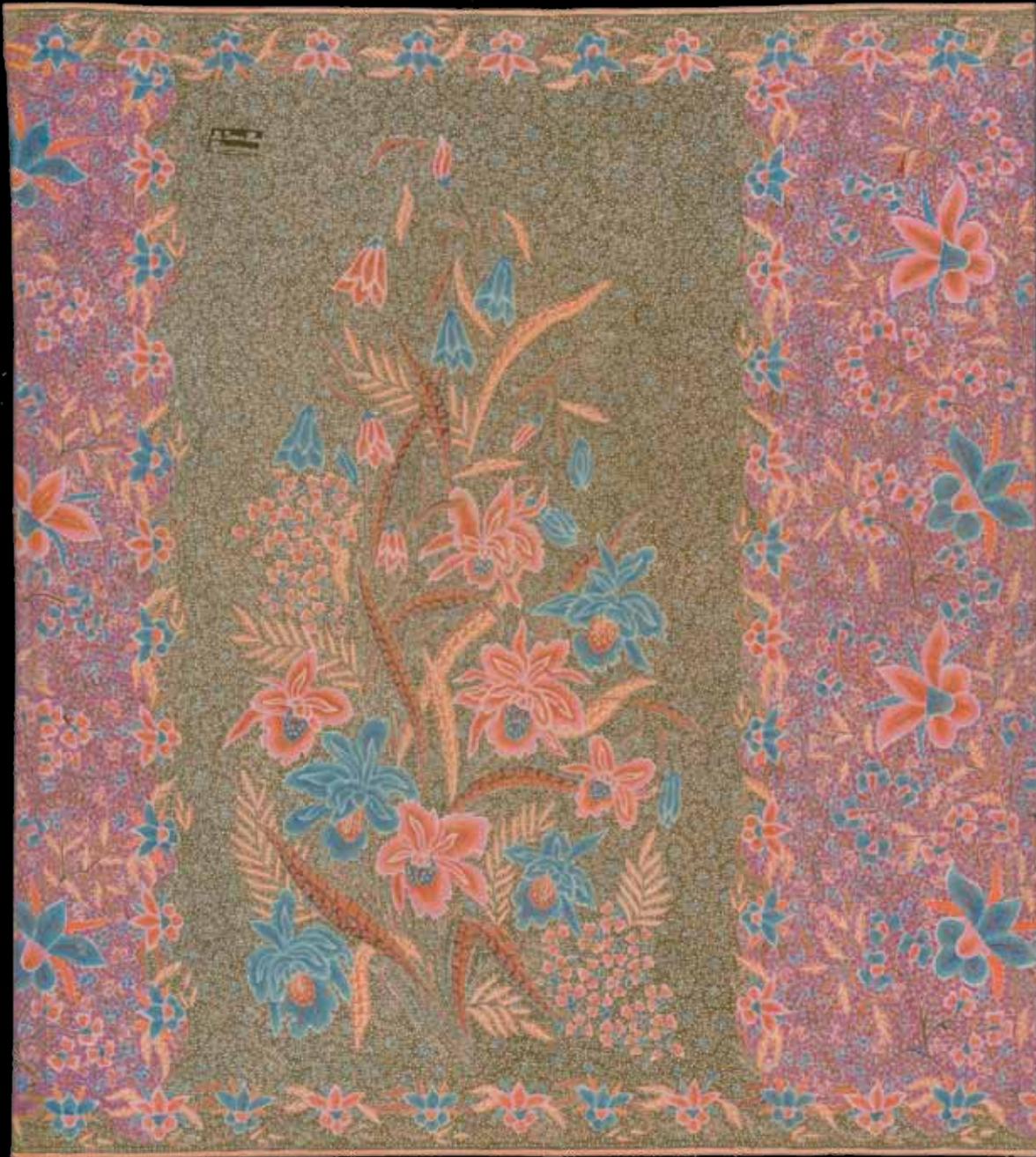


Fig 3 – Hand drawn *batik tulis* sarong in the *Jawa baru* style. c1950s, Kedungwuni, North Coastal Java. Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum

the weight of history and patrimony – did not apply as much in these new social settings. As many of the wealthier members of such coastal settlements were self-made millionaires whose fortunes depended on trade and manufacturing, social markers of distinction in such settings were more often determined by the markers of capital and economic largesse. The new elite in places like Kedungwuni, Pekalongan, Kudus, Surabaya, Indramayu and Jepara were the landed merchant classes; and in some places – like Kudus, the centre of the hugely profitable kretek (clove cigarette) industry – the wealthy merchants had plenty of money to spare on land, furniture, automobiles and of course batik.

MADE FOR A CLOSER LOOK

If traditional central Javanese batik established social distance and hierarchies through a repertoire of restricted patterns that were meant to be viewed at a respectable distance, no such scruples applied in the cities of north coast Java. The opposite seems to have been the case, with batik producers in places like



Fig 3a – detail of sarong



Fig 4 – Block printed *batik cap* sarong in the Jawa baru style. C1950s or 60s, Indonesia. Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum.

Kedungwuni, Pekalongan and Kudus producing batiks of such intricate detail that much of the finesse and sophistication is lost to the naked eye when the cloth is viewed from any distance beyond an arm's length. Indeed, one can only appreciate north coast batiks at their best when looking at them as closely as possible.

Let us compare two pieces of batik from the north coast of Java (fig. 3 and fig. 4). Seen from a distance of more than three metres, both tubular batik sarongs appear similar in appearance, composition and quality. The finery of the work and the detailed craftsmanship are lost when they are seen from a distance.

However, again we come to understand the meaning and value of such batik when we place ourselves in the same situational context in which they first appeared and were worn. Such batiks were made for women, and it has been established that social relations, networking and interaction among women in the colonial settlements were more relaxed than they were for Javanese women in the royal capitals. As such, one can imagine how and when such batiks were worn by the Eurasian, Chinese, Indian and Arab Peranakan women of the coastal towns; presumably during women-only gatherings like tea parties, lunches or the odd game of mah-jong.

It is precisely during such close encounters that the women of these Peranakan coastal communities would be able to stand literally next to their friends and/or rivals, and at close glance fully appreciate (or in some instances, envy) the elaborate details and fine workmanship of the batik worn by the person standing or sitting immediately next to her. One can only imagine the unstated tension and intense competition of batik aficionados who were determined to out-do their rivals at such gatherings, and the chagrin of the Madam who discovered to her horror that her sworn adversary had managed to get her hands on a priceless piece of batik from the workshop of Oey Soe Choen or Eliza van Zuylen! Such a discovery, however, could only be made up close, when both competitors were sitting eye-to-eye in front of each other...



Fig 4a – detail of sarong.

THE DETAILS THAT MATTER

Now let us look at the two batiks again. The first happens to be a fine piece which was painstakingly hand-drawn with the aid of a *canting*, a wax pen used to draw ink onto the fabric (fig. 3a). The second is a run-of-the-mill batik from one of the many non-descript factories which churned out large volumes of batik for mass consumption, of standard value and presumably commanding a standard price (fig. 4a).

In an interesting inversion of the social rules of traditional Central Javanese society, the batiks of the north coast display an almost uniform character: despite the fact that they were produced in locations as far apart as Batavia (Jakarta) and Surabaya, the most common motif happens to be the somewhat static and monotonous *buketan* (bouquet) that was inspired by European floral motifs probably copied from children's drawing books or fashion catalogues imported from the West. Yet the difference between these batiks lie not in their overall format and composition but rather in the rendering of the flowers, birds, bees and butterflies we see in them, rendered in varying degrees of detail ranging from the crude and elementary to the mind-bogglingly precise and microscopic.

This difference in detail in turn served as the benchmark whereby the value and price of such batiks were estimated and sold, with the most detailed pieces commanding the highest prices. Needless to say, in wealthy circles such as those found among the merchants of Batavia and Kudus – as well as Bantam, Singapore, Penang and Malacca – the most expensive batiks that were produced by the workshops of the Pesisir soon found a ready market and a happy home for themselves.

In summing up, we need to remember that batik has to be understood in the situational context in which it found itself, and that understanding the meaning and import of batik motifs and patterns requires some understanding of how batik was situated in extended spatial-social relations where it could perform the social function it had: as a means of establishing social distance and proximity, and a way of keeping everything and everyone in their place. No mean feat for a piece of cloth.



Sarong bukitan from atelier Eliza van Zuylen. 1930s or 40s, Pekalongan, North Coastal Java. Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum.

PRESIDENTIAL PRESENTS: STATE GIFTS FROM 1962–2009

museings

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NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE

IMAGES: NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE

Gifts are an integral part of human interaction. Throughout recorded time, gifts have been given and exchanged in varied situations and transactions. At the highest level of societal interaction, official gifts or State gifts comprise a unique category of gifts. They are symbolic artefacts and the presentation and exchange of gifts among the parties involved in the process shapes the nature of relationships that develop between them. In this exhibition presented by the National Museum of Singapore from 22 September 2010 to 9 January 2011, a selection of 50 State Gifts from the collection of the President's Office at the Istana are being displayed for public viewing for the first time in the museum.

The State Gifts being exhibited cover the period from 1962 to 2009 and encompass the terms of office of the six Presidents of Singapore since independence. The Presidents in their capacity as Head of State received these gifts from foreign leaders or their representatives from countries with which Singapore had diplomatic ties. The gifts were formally presented on occasions such as official State visits or courtesy calls made by foreign dignitaries on the Singapore President or during the President's state visits to foreign countries. These gifts now in the collection of the President's Office have, over time, become a symbolic legacy of the diplomatic contacts established between the Singapore Presidency and its foreign counterparts.

THE SINGAPORE PRESIDENCY

The Singapore Presidency came into existence as a symbolic and ceremonial institution following Singapore's independence in 1965. In the early years of independence, the President became a national symbol both locally as well as in the international arena. At the national level, he symbolised the form and ceremony of constitutional government in Singapore as seen in his formal opening of Parliament and delivery of the Opening Address. In the international arena, he became a symbolic manifestation of the new nation's identity and values in his interaction with representatives of sovereign nations.

A significant development in the evolution of the Singapore Presidency took place in 1991 when Parliament passed a Constitutional amendment to create an Elected Presidency with custodial powers. Since then, the President has been elected by citizens to a six-year term of office and given veto power over the national reserves and key appointments in the civil service.

Over a 45-year period, the Singapore Presidency has grown from a largely ceremonial role to one with an element of independence by virtue of veto powers as defined in the Constitution and vested in the President. In retrospect, the Singapore Presidency has also been shaped by the personal character and stature of its respective incumbents. This can be seen, for example, in the public usage of the term "the people's President" to highlight the close symbolic link that has emerged between the Presidency and the citizenry.

THE PRESIDENTS – AN OVERVIEW



Silver Punch Bowl with Black Stand

The oldest artefact on display, this silver and wood punch bowl is a gift by His Royal Highness Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia to the late Encik Yusof Bin Ishak in 1962.

ENCIK YUSOF BIN ISHAK (1910 to 1970)

Encik Yusof bin Ishak was the first President and served from 9 August 1965 to 23 November 1970. Born in Perak on 12 August 1910 and of Minangkabau descent, he was educated in the former Victoria Bridge School and Raffles Institution in Singapore, and then went into journalism. He rose to become the first Managing Director of the newspaper *Utusan Melayu* in 1939. After World War 2, he continued in journalism until 1959, when he entered public office.

When Singapore attained self-government on 3 December 1959, Encik Yusof Ishak became the first Malayan-born Yang di Pertuan Negara. After Singapore's separation from Malaysia in 1965, he became President of the newly independent country. In this respect, his role reflected the transitional stages by which Singapore evolved into an independent nation.

As President, Encik Yusof Ishak was determined not to play a wholly ceremonial role and toured many constituencies in order to have direct contact with the people. He also emphasised the new nation's multicultural identity in the aftermath of the failed merger with Malaysia. On the regional and international level, he regarded his role as one that could showcase Singapore's determination to succeed as an independent nation. He died in office on 23 November 1970.

DR BENJAMIN HENRY SHEARES (1907 to 1981)

Dr Benjamin Henry Sheares was the second President and served from 2 January 1971 to 12 May 1981. He was born in Singapore on 12 August 1907 and was educated at, among other schools, Raffles Institution and the King Edward VII College of



Silver Tea Set

The late Dr Benjamin Henry Sheares was presented this silver tea set by the late Tun Abdul Razak Bin Hussein Al-Haj, Malaysia's second Prime Minister.

Medicine. He began a career in obstetrics and gynaecology, and rose to become Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University of Malaya in Singapore in 1950. After retiring, he went into private practice, having built up an international reputation in his field. It was during this period that he was appointed as President.

Less than a fortnight after assuming his new role, Dr Sheares was thrust into receiving the Heads of Commonwealth delegations arriving in Singapore for the first-ever Commonwealth Conference held in Singapore. He went on to serve two terms of office. Those who knew him noted his readiness to read and ponder over a range of topical subjects when preparing himself for meetings and discussions with foreign dignitaries. He died on 12 May 1981, during the tenth year of his presidency.



Dagger from Oman presented to the late CV Devan Nair
Courtesy of Janadas and Janamitra Devan, Trustees of the Mr and Mrs CV Devan Nair Trust.

MR C V DEVAN NAIR (1923 to 2005)

Mr C V Devan Nair was the third President and served from 24 October 1981 to 28 March 1985. He was born in Malacca on 5 August 1923 and was educated at Rangoon Road Primary School and Victoria School in Singapore. He became a teacher, and in 1949, the General Secretary of the Singapore Teachers' Union. Although he was detained for extended periods by the British colonial authorities due to his anti-colonial activities, he continued to be a prominent trade union leader. He became the first Secretary-General of the National Trade Union Congress



Silver Medal of Pope

His Eminence Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino presented the Silver Medal of Pope to President S R Nathan in 2006.

and later, its President in 1979. Mr Nair was elected as Member of Parliament for Anson in a by-election in 1979. He resigned in 1981 to become President. He resigned from the Presidency in 1985 due to health reasons. He died on 7 December 2005.

DR WEE KIM WEE (1915 to 2005)

Dr. Wee Kim Wee was the fourth President and served from 2 September 1985 to 1 September 1993. He was born in Singapore on 4 November 1915 and was educated at Pearl's Hill School and Raffles Institution, which he left in 1930 to join the Straits Times as a clerk. In 1941 he went on to join the United Press Association (UPA) until the Japanese invasion. At the end of the Japanese Occupation in 1945, he rejoined the UPA. In 1959, he joined the Straits Times as Deputy Editor (Singapore) heading the editorial department.

When Dr Wee was nearing retirement, he was appointed Singapore's High Commissioner to Malaysia in 1973 and subsequently served as Singapore's Ambassador to Japan and Korea. He had a range of experience in public service as well as in community work by the time he became President in 1985. He was in office in 1991 when the constitutional amendments for an Elected Presidency came into effect, hence becoming the first incumbent to hold the new constitutionally-vested veto powers. He died on 2 May 2005.

MR ONG TENG CHEONG (1936 to 2002)

Mr Ong Teng Cheong was the fifth President and served from 2 September 1993 to 1 September 1999. He was born in Singapore on 22 January 1936 and was educated in Chong Cheng Primary School, the Chinese High School and at the University of Adelaide. He also obtained a post-graduate degree of Master of Civic Design (Town Planning) from the University of Liverpool in 1967. Following this, he joined the Planning Department of the Ministry of National Development.

In September 1971, Mr Ong resigned from the civil service to set up his own practice. His community work led to a political career. In 1972, he was elected as Member of Parliament for Kim Keat constituency, a position he retained for 20 years. In 1975, he was appointed to his first political office as Senior Minister of State for Communications, culminating in 1985 with his appointment as Second Deputy Prime Minister. Between November 1990 and August 1993, he was Deputy Prime Minister. He resigned from his government positions in August 1993 to stand for the Presidential Elections and was sworn in as Singapore's first Elected President on 1 September 1993.

Mr Ong stepped down when his term of office ended, to return to private practice as an architect and planner. He died on 8 February 2002.



Nielloware Bowl with Plate

Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand presented this nielloware ornament to the late Mr Ong Teng Cheong in 1999.

MR S R NATHAN

Mr S R Nathan is the sixth and current President beginning his service from 1 September 1999 onwards to the present day. He was born in Singapore on 3 July 1924 and was educated at, among other schools, Victoria School and the University of Malaya in Singapore, where he graduated with a Diploma in Social Studies (Distinction) in 1954. He joined the civil service the following year, beginning as a medical social worker and, over a long career, rose to various leading positions, retiring as Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was made Executive Chairman of the Straits Times Press (1975) Ltd in 1982 and also held directorships in several companies.

In 1988, Mr Nathan was appointed Singapore's High Commissioner to Malaysia, and in 1990, Singapore's Ambassador to the United States, where he served until 1996. Upon his return to Singapore, he was made Ambassador-at-Large and concurrently Director of the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies at Nanyang Technological University. He resigned from these positions to stand for the Presidential Elections and was sworn in as President on 1 September 1999 for a six-year term. He was re-elected for a second term on 1 September 2005.



Porcelain Bowl

President S R Nathan was presented this bowl as a gift by President Hu Jintao of the People's Republic of China in 2009.

STATE GIFTS AND DIPLOMACY

In the first decades of the twentieth century, a French sociologist by the name of Marcel Mauss (1872-1950) wrote *The Gift* which became a classic work and is still in print. This work has profoundly helped to shape our understanding of the nature and function of gifts. Mauss based his observations on a study of pre-colonial Polynesian as well as Pacific/North American tribes.

According to Mauss, the process of gift-giving in these societies carried with it a mutually binding obligation to receive and to reciprocate. Gift-giving facilitated a circulation of desired commodities as well as symbolic capital in its various forms to flow among the participating tribes, thus linking them closely together. In other words, the gift contributed to human solidarity and this formed the basis of Mauss' social theory of the gift.

Extending this conceptual understanding of the gift to the realm of the State, we find that the presentation and exchange of State gifts was a long-established tradition among sovereign kingdoms and countries. For example, Egyptian pharaohs presented gifts to their neighbours, the Hittite rulers, who were linked to them by peace and defence pacts as well as by dynastic marriages.

Although the presentation of State Gifts often took place in a situation of normative mutual equality among the involved parties, this was not always the case in the past. For example, the Imperial Chinese court regarded foreign ambassadorial missions bearing official gifts as "tribute missions", implying a submissive allegiance on the part of the foreign countries. Another example of a sovereign-vassal context of gift-giving was the Siamese court receiving gifts of the *bunga emas* (golden flowers) from the kingdoms of Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu on the Malay Peninsula in the 18th-19th centuries.

However, in the contemporary world of international relations, the presentation and exchange of official gifts is shaped by norms of cultivating mutually beneficial diplomatic ties and friendships among sovereign nations.

CRITERIA FOR STATE GIFTS

State gifts are viewed as unique by the parties presenting or exchanging such gifts. The exchange is regarded as affirming a mutual relationship that symbolically links the giver and the recipient.

State gifts are also associated with a certain prestige and status reflecting the position of the giver as well as of the recipient. The prestige of such gifts is determined by the ascribed, intrinsic value of the gift in the society or country of the giver, such as its conspicuousness and its rarity, or the type of material such as gold, silver, diamonds and precious stones. Other factors that contribute to the value of the gift include its cultural, artistic motifs and symbols grounded in the history and heritage of the country, and its ceremonial significance. These factors help to position the gift as an appropriate object to be presented at the highest levels of state authority.

The official gifts that are displayed in the exhibition illustrate this range of criteria. As official gifts are representational objects and thus multifaceted, these criteria should be viewed in terms of a holistic combination contributing to the significance of the gift. Some examples include:

GOLD AND SILVER NIELLOWARE CIGARETTE BOX –THAILAND

This gift was presented by His Majesty King Bhumibol and Her Majesty Queen Sirikit to President Nathan, 17 January 2005. President Nathan was on a state visit to Thailand from 17-21 January 2005 at the invitation of the King of Thailand. This was the first state visit to Thailand by a Singapore President.

Nielloware is a prominent and unique decorative object in the history of Thai traditional crafts. Niello is a metal alloy comprising sulphides of silver, copper and lead that is applied as a decorative inlay and results in colours ranging from blue-grey to rich black. The alloy is applied after the object is crafted with silver and gold, and with designs and images on



Gold and Silver Nielloware Cigarette Box –Thailand

the base metal. Nielloware was associated with power and authority. As such, it became a tradition for Thai monarchs to present nielloware objects as gifts to foreign dignitaries.

MARBLE OCTAGONAL BOX – INDIA

This gift was presented by President Dr Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam to President Nathan, 1 February 2006. President Abdul Kalam called on President Nathan at the Istana during his state visit to Singapore from 1-2 February 2006. As part of the visit, President Kalam delivered the 27th Singapore Lecture, “Evolution of Enlightened Societies on our Planet”, on 1 February 2006.

Indian marble inlay work was prominent during the Mughal period and continues till today. A brass plate with floral or geometric designs would be placed over the marble and the pattern drawn onto it, after which the marble was carved accordingly. Inlay work consisted of inserting polished semi-precious and precious stones into the marble, and further polishing the surface and edges of the marble.



Marble Octagonal Box – India

OCTAGONAL SILVERWARE – BRUNEI

This gift was presented by Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah to President Nathan on 27 February 2003. The Sultan and Her Majesty The Raja Isteri called on President Nathan at the Istana during the Sultan’s second state visit to Singapore from 27 February to 1 March 2003.

This receptacle, known as a *calapa*, is made of silver and crafted with attractive designs and motifs. The main body of this octagonal *calapa* normally contains several small receptacles which are used to keep betel leaf, areca nuts, gambier and lime and *kalakati* (areca nut cutter). The *calapa* is used in important and special occasions such as weddings, coming of age ceremonies and other festivities.

TOMBAC BOWL – TURKEY

This gift was presented by President Dr Abdullah Gul to President Nathan, 8 June 2009. President Nathan made a state visit to Turkey from 8 to 14 June 2009.

The term *tombac* refers to articles made of copper or a copper alloy plated with a gold-mercury mixture. It is an enduring method of copper plating where the gold dissolved in mercury penetrates the pores of the copper utensil. It is still practised in its traditional form in Turkey.



Arabian Dagger – Bahrain

ARABIAN DAGGER – BAHRAIN

This gift was presented by Crown Prince HRH Shaik Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa to President Nathan on 27 March 2000.

The Crown Prince called on President Nathan at the Istana on 27 March 2000 during his official visit to Singapore from 27-28 March 2000. This was the Crown Prince’s first official visit to Singapore. The gold-layered *khanjar* (curved dagger) with a steel blade is a ceremonial ornament that is part of male attire at weddings, formal dinners or important civic events.

SILVER DAGGER – JORDAN

This gift was presented by King Abdullah II Bin Al Hussein to President Nathan on 3 March 2006. His Majesty King Abdullah II called on President Nathan at the Istana during his working visit to Singapore on 3 March 2006.

The silver *khanjar* (curved dagger) with steel blade is a ceremonial ornament that is part of male attire at weddings, formal dinners or important civic events.

CONCLUSION

State gifts are different from other types of gifts as they are presented in the international arena at the highest level of state authority and so help to facilitate a measure of international diplomacy and relations among sovereign countries. As stylistic works of craftsmanship and meaning, they are invested with an “emotional geography” that can help contribute to cross-cultural appreciation. State Gifts are meant to be enduring symbols in the sense that over the passage of time, they serve as a collective reminder of a nation’s legacy of interaction and cultivation of ties with the international community.

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Octagonal Silverware – Brunei



Tombac Bowl – Turkey

Tragedy
2007
Oil on canvas
200 x 180 cm
Private collection





After Painting

museings

BY MICHELLE HO
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IMAGES: SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

PREDICTIONS of the end of painting have been with us for over a century. The invention of the *daguerreotype*, the precursor of the photograph in 1839, led French painter Paul Delaroche to declare: “From today, painting is dead!”¹ A century later, American art critic Clement Greenberg’s 1948 treatise “*Crisis of the Easel Picture*” postulated Modern art’s successive styles from Cubism to Abstract Expressionism as forms of anti-aesthetics that were destined to dissolve any further form of figurative possibilities in painting.² As the photographic image began to challenge painting as the objective medium for depicting the real, newer forms of art-making such as the development of conceptual, performance and new media art emerged to contest the canvas as a site for critical expression.

While such theoretical dialectics that question painting as a valid medium have been known to define the form and reception of representation in Western art, it remains questionable whether such a premise is truly applicable within the context of pictorial developments in Southeast Asia. The debate on the death of painting, stemming from the critical anticipation of future modes of representation beyond painting in the West, did not emerge from the region. This is not to say that the region is steeped in the more traditional modes of representation. Certainly, Southeast Asia has seen a wide range of contemporary art in installation and conceptual practices especially in the past three decades, and artists and commentators are aware of such discourses emerging from the West. Yet painting continues to feature among these newer forms and understanding of representation, and with much criticality. Unlike the West where the evolution of the painting subject matter took on a more internal, self-conscious approach that questioned the very being of the medium itself, painting in Southeast Asia evolved through a distinctive aesthetic sensibility of external references, resultant from social and political situations that remain exceptional in providing critical subject matter for artistic representation.



Micro History of Politic No. 3 – Lost
2007
Oil on canvas
180 x 160 cm
Private collection

According to Ushiroshoji Masahiro, Southeast Asian art from the late 1980s reveals a tendency towards social and political content as artists turned to local reference points as an expression of identity through immediate social realities. This trend can be seen as a measure to break away from the early modern frameworks of representation noted in the region, namely, the process of adopting Western stylistic conventions while maintaining individual cultural sensibilities and traditions.³ Rejecting the notion of a one-way West-to-East dissemination of artistic influences, John Clark argues that the region's art histories have to be considered through the multiple contexts of pre-histories, modes of colonialism, and the varying circumstances of how knowledge have been imported from one country to another. These include the manners of regional transformation, the influence of micro-histories, existing institutional frameworks, neo-traditional art and the impact of nationalism projects that shape the forms of representation in Asia.⁴

THE ESSENCE OF A NATION

In considering the specificities of cultural contexts within which a region's art-making is conceived, the case of Thailand shows its pre-modern art forms having been chiefly inspired by Buddhist beliefs and literature during the Sukhothai Kingdom (1238 – 1419). It was during the 17th century of the Ayutthaya period (1370 – 1767) that the painting of non-religious subject matter, such as the depiction of common everyday life, began to emerge.⁵ The reigns of King Rama IV to Rama VI (1851 – 1925) witnessed much contact with the West which introduced new concepts and ideologies in the national development and culture of Thailand even though the country was never colonised. In 1911, a government agency known as the Fine Art Department was established under the auspices of King Rama VI to protect Thai identity from the influx of Westernisation through the promotion of its art and culture.⁶ The establishment of Silpakorn University in 1943 saw the introduction of the foundations of Western academic painting in Thailand. Somporn Rodboon noted the emergence of artists who incorporated both Western and



Tales of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow
2009
Oil on linen
240 x 200 cm
Singapore Art Museum collection



Celebrate to the Truth and Nothing
2000
Oil on canvas
170 x 200 cm
Bangkok University collection

traditional Thai elements to pave the way for a contemporary art that nonetheless, maintains “the essence of ‘Thainess’”.⁷

NATEE UTARIT AND THE TRUE NATURE OF IMAGES

The exhibition *After Painting* is conceived in relation to Thai painter Natee Utarit, whose practice is apt in examining the domain of painting as a form of critical representation in Southeast Asian contemporary art. A prolific painter whose career spans over two decades, Natee’s practice can essentially be summarised in two questions: “What is the truth in/of painting?” and “Is it possible to express ideas through a traditional medium like painting?”⁸

The unique aspect of Natee’s practice, and one which differentiates him from other contemporaries in Southeast Asian painting, is his points of inquiry which on the one hand are steeped in Western idioms, but on the other, reveal sophisticated strategies which critique that very tradition. In this sense, *After Painting* also reflects a crucial imperative within the artist’s practice of examining the history of the

tradition before embarking on the trajectory of more current local concerns.

The first 15 years of Natee’s practice centred on the laborious study of the various styles of Western painting, as seen from his works in the 1990s that systematically explored established modes of image-making such as figuration and landscape painting. From 2000, Natee delved into the deeper dimensions of Western art history; his works at this time included pictorial references that range from Classical sculptures to Renaissance painting, Baroque still-life to ready-made contemporary mass media images. His works can be seen as a series of dialogues and debates with the canons of established Western painting conventions. Natee appropriates images from the Old Masters as well as references to European philosophies of aesthetics. From 2007, he started to use still-life as a way to make veiled commentaries on the larger social issues at stake in Thailand.⁹ The nation’s social and political upheavals during this time is of particular importance if one recalls the events

of 19 September 2006, where a military coup d'état overthrew a democratically elected government, and marked a turning point in Natee's practice.¹⁰

"Being able to recognise in a work, an object that reveals a more direct link with the sentient world seems to satisfy an intense urge for gratifying images, in which the object can be identified, and thus classified. The onlooker can return to the reassuring practice of identifying the subject: it is a landscape, it is a portrait. Although reassuring, it says little or nothing about the true nature of the image we are contemplating."¹¹

An important domain of Natee's works is his interrogation of the true nature of images, and in particular, the photographic image. *After Painting* has to be seen in the context of the alleged contestation between the two mediums of painting and photography. From 1839 until now, advancements in photographic technologies with its provision for more objective images have entirely changed the modes of representation in art, altering the ways in which images are created, disseminated and received. The questioning of images as systems of meaning and communication thus requires a deeper analysis into the relationships between paintings and photographs and how they are interpreted. In Marco Francioli's study of painting and photography in the last two decades of the 20th century, he notes:

This condition of uncertainty regarding the true nature of images parallels the concerns of Natee, and his diverse practice from 1998 to 2006 displays a variety of artistic tactics that interrogate the attributes of representation in photography.

WHAT COMES AFTER?

After Painting also alludes to the notions of finality in stylistic conditions that often emerge in discussions about contemporary art. Witnessed through the course of the 20th century is a perspective on representation that seems to be spurred by the quest for the next, or premises of succeeding representative forms. Francesco Bonami characterises this climate in art history as one of "endless conclusions, or a chain of endless beginnings" in propositions of new directions

regarding the future of representation. The ensuing attempts to define art of the 1990s through names such as "post-conceptual", "post-identity politics", "post-multicultural" or "post-colonial" are limiting as he points to the need to turn back to the study of artworks that operate beyond hasty suppositions enmeshed within the exclusive formalism of modern art.¹²



The Baroque No. 2
2007
Oil on canvas
200 x 240 cm
Private collection

To ask what happens *after*, is also to assume that a particular moment in time is over, and *After Painting* is an attempt to see if these conceptual propositions, within the context of Southeast Asian contemporary painting practice, necessarily hold true.

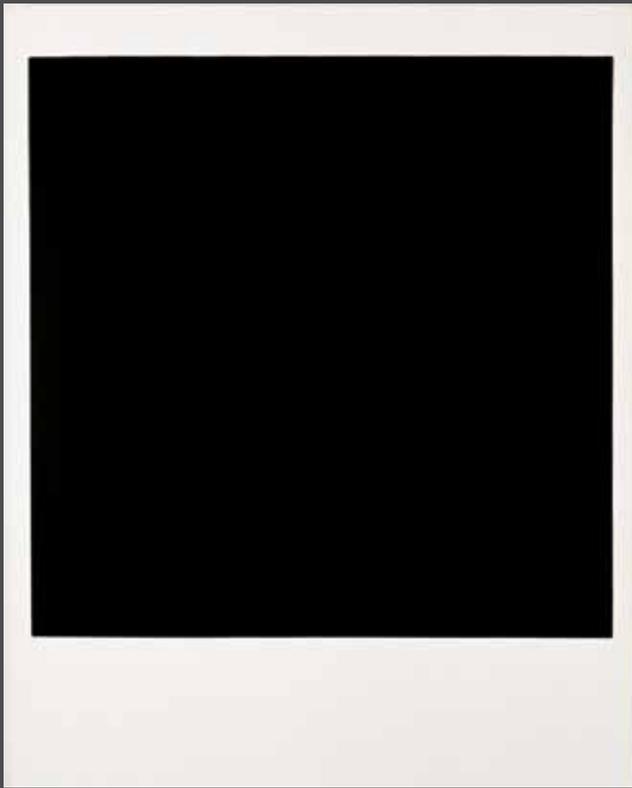
Through the four sections of the exhibition, *Painting As Narrative*, *Painting About Paintings*, *Painting After Photography* and *Beginning After Painting*, the painting medium as form of representation is investigated under various contexts of its history, its properties and its forms of expression in other cultural domains. They reflect Natee's practice which stems from the scrutiny of Western painting conventions, and provide, possibly, other ways of considering the case of representation within the context of Southeast Asian contemporary art today.

PAINTING AS NARRATIVE

Narrative painting is a genre which refers to paintings that contain allegorical meaning. This section of the exhibition looks at Natee's recent work from 2005 to 2009 which feature a variety of everyday life objects as his way of telling stories.

Of significance during this period, is his shift in focus to the social situation in Thailand which becomes a vital subject matter for the first time in his career. The artist, who was known before for paintings that engage with Western stylistic conventions, also revisits still life, a genre that is traditionally considered secondary to established categories like Mythology, History, Portrait and Landscape paintings.

Some of the works here, which have been presented in his exhibitions such as *The Amusement of Dreams, Hope and Perfection* (2007) and *Tales of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (2009), reveal three new emergent themes in his practice: the association of fairytales and fiction to grand national



Pictorial Dialogue at 17.45 pm
2000
Oil on canvas
140 x 116 cm each
Private collection



narratives; the portrayal of Thai symbols in a monochrome palette of colour; and the deployment of toy objects that serve to signify a host of powerful meanings.

PAINTING ABOUT PAINTINGS

From 2000 to 2006, Natee's works were an intensive investigation of the nature of the image, through the depiction of classical motifs and subject matter from the Western tradition.

Behind many of these works are references to historical paintings by masters such as Caravaggio, Courbet and Titian, and the artist revisits them through a variety of critical ways. Sometimes, Old Master paintings are contrasted with Thai landscapes as a way of questioning the conventional belief in the truth of images, as seen in works from his *Pictorial Statement* series from 2000. Other works of extracted imageries from iconic paintings and sculptures are rendered with layers of stains to remove them from their original context, and question classical notions of beauty. This vast body of works, also known as his *Reason and Monsters* project that began in 2001, takes its title from a well-known Francisco Goya painting.

Noted in the diverse works from this period is his strategy of using reproduced images in his artworks, from photographs of existing art to pictures of mass-media images. By

revealing these processes of image-making, the artist shows how constructed images have the power of shaping one's world view.

PAINTING AFTER PHOTOGRAPHY

For a long time, painting was the primary means of representing what we see until the invention of photography, which allowed for images of more objective representations. This section of the exhibition encompasses Natee's works that deal with the medium of photography, as part of his enquiry into the issue of authenticity within the world of images.

From 2000 to 2001, Natee's paintings are an analysis of the pictorial elements that define photography, and noted are his techniques that reframe photographs and employ distortion in pictorial scale as a way challenging the assumptions of the represented image. A significant development in his practice stems from his 1999 *Appearance and Reality* exhibition, which illustrates his concerns with images and the distinction between what appears to be real, and what is in fact real.

Other important and highly personal works of Natee include paintings of 1970s' family photographs and his mother. These pieces of recollection reveal how time and memory play crucial roles in shaping the construction of one's reality.



Interior
1999
Oil on canvas
100 x 80 cm each
Artist collection

BEGINNING AFTER PAINTING

Among his generation of painters who had undergone training in Academic painting in Thailand, Natee Utarit is unique in his relationship with the painting tradition. Throughout his career, he worked towards achieving technical mastery over celebrated forms of Western art, while critically analysing the basis of structures in painting.

The exploratory gestures in his early works from 1991 to 1996 are centred on figuration, one of the most elementary forms of image-making that is considered outdated in terms of innovation in contemporary art. In 1997, Natee started painting landscapes. By using abstract motifs as a way of

portraying perceptions of the landscape, he reveals how mental processes are equally vital in the field of defining representation, as seen in his body of *Internal Landscape* works.

These early works are notable in expressing his enquiry into the nature of images that would form the basis of his later important works, as shown in the exhibition section “Painting About Paintings”. As seen from the early 1995 renditions of the *Mother Figure* in painting and sculpture, Natee’s depth of knowledge in pictorial analysis would culminate in the highly celebrated later versions of the same subject matter in 1998.

NOTES:

- 1 A *daguerreotype* is a form of photographic representation invented by Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre in France, comprising of a positive image on a silver plate of mirrored surface. It produces a single image unlike the photographs of today that can be reproduced in multiples. Wells, Liz (ed), *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, New York : Routledge, 2004, p46-47.
- 2 Greenberg, Clement, “*Crisis of the Easel Picture*” in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1989, p154-156.
- 3 In Ushiroshoji’s view, this departure also signals the end of the Southeast Asian framework of modernity. Masahiro, Ushiroshoji, (translated by Stanley N. Anderson), “*Southeast Asian Art in the Nineties*” in *Contemporary Art Symposium*, Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, 1994.
- 4 Clark, John, *Modern Asian Art, Honolulu*, University of Hawaii Press, 1998, p19-23.
- 5 Bhirasri, Silpa, *Contemporary Art in Thailand*, Thailand: Promotion and Public Relations Sub-Division, Fine Arts Department, 2001, p21-23.
- 6 The department featured the sections of sculpture, painting, music, dancing, rhetoric, architecture and liberal arts that were in relation to Thai heritage. Two years later in 1913, Thailand’s first art school Poh Chang School which taught Thai craft was inaugurated by King Rama VI. Mukdanee, Vichoke, *Six Decades of Contemporary Art in Thailand, 1943 – 2003*, Bangkok: Art Centre, Silpakorn University, 2004, p9.
- 7 Silpa Bhirasri, a former Italian sculptor by the name of Corrado Feroci, has mostly been credited as “the father of Thai modern art” with his introduction of Western art and aesthetics to Thai students when he, as the Dean of the Faculty of Painting and Sculpture at Silpakorn University, formulated the department’s curriculum. He was known to promote Thai art through encouraging his students to maintain their local references in their works. Rodboon, Somporn, Turner, Caroline (ed), “*Developments in Contemporary Thai Art*” in *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific*, Canberra: Pandamus Books, 2004, p278 – 279.
- 8 Utarit, Natee, *Views and Transference: Artist’s Statement (2000) and Interview By Vipach Phurichanon (2007)* in Natee Utarit: *Survey: 1991-1996*, Bangkok: Numthong Gallery, 2009, p235, p131.
- 9 Natee evokes the notion of “cultural myths” as coined by French language theorist Roland Barthes, where socially-constructed concepts and customary beliefs appear as the norms of society. Utarit, Natee, *Artist Statement* in Natee Utarit: *Tales of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, Kuala Lumpur: Richard Koh Fine Art, 2009.
- 10 Lenzi, Iola, “*Beyond The Object*” in *The Amusement of Dreams, Hope and Perfection*, Bangkok: Numthong Gallery, 2007, p8.
- 11 Francioli, Marco, “*The Image Regained: Painting and Photography From the Eighties to Today*”, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2002, p17, 33, 37.
- 12 Bonami critiques what he calls, “the post-modern End-ism of the recent past” as a result of the state of art being influenced by shifts in media affecting mass popular attention. Bonami, Francesco, “*The Road Around (or, A Long Good-bye)*” in *Echoes: Contemporary Art at an Age of Endless Conclusions*, New York, Monacelli Press, 1996, p11, p16-17.

THE OLYMPIC SPIRIT



BLAZING THE TRAIL
SINGAPORE 2010
YOUTH OLYMPIC GAMES





Celebrating Excellence, Friendship and Respect

THE YOUTH OLYMPIC GAMES GALLERIES

museings

BY LUCILLE YAP
SENIOR CURATOR
SINGAPORE PHILATELIC MUSEUM

IMAGES: SINGAPORE PHILATELIC MUSEUM

In conjunction with the recent inaugural Youth Olympic Games held in Singapore from 14-26 August 2010, the Singapore Philatelic Museum (SPM) was appointed by the Singapore Youth Olympic Games Organising Committee (SYOGOC) to curate the Olympic Exhibitions for the inaugural Youth Olympic Games (YOG).

Developed as part of the event's Culture and Education Programmes (CEP), the Olympic Exhibitions are a unique feature of the YOG, with the aim of sharing with the local public the story of how the YOG originated as well as the history of the Olympic Games, while promoting Olympism, the Olympic Spirit and Olympic Values.

The Olympic Exhibitions were held at three key venues. At the Youth Olympic Village (YOV) at the National Institute of Education campus, the Olympic Gallery was opened from 10-26 August 2010. The target audience at the YOV included more than 6,000 youth athletes and team officials, delegates, SYOGOC staff and volunteers.

At the Suntec International Convention Centre (ICC), the Olympic Gallery was opened from 15-25 August 2010 to more than 20,000 members of the public and games spectators. Suntec ICC was one of the YOG competition venues with arenas that hosted six of the YOG sports – boxing, fencing, handball, judo, taekwondo and wrestling.



Blazing the Trail: Singapore 2010 Olympic gallery at Suntec ICC.

The key highlight of the exhibitions were the rare Olympic torches, on loan from The Olympic Museum in Lausanne, Switzerland. The complete collection of 16 original torches was on display in Singapore for the first time. Eleven of the torches were on display at Suntec ICC together with the YOG torch and medals, as well as Tan Howe Liang's silver medal for weightlifting from the 1960 Rome Olympic Games and the three silver medals won by Singapore's Women's Table Tennis Team from the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. The remaining five Olympic torches were on display at the YOV, together with the YOG torch and medals.

Many of these exhibits, excluding the Olympic torches, have been transferred back to SYOGOC Learning Centre at Kay Siang Road. The Singapore Philatelic Museum is currently working with SYOGOC to convert the Learning Centre into the Singapore Youth Olympic Museum, the first Youth Olympic Museum in the world – another first in the history of the Olympics.

THE MAKING OF THE OLYMPIC GALLERIES

The Olympic Galleries were designed with the audience and surrounding spaces in mind. Interesting visuals and audio-visual elements were used to

engage the visitors and convey a lasting impression in their minds and senses.

Here are some of the highlights of the exhibitions.

THE JOURNEY THERE

This part of the exhibition provided a historical background to the modern Olympic Games and traces the development that led to the introduction and creation of the YOG.

The vision of the YOG is to inspire young people around the world to participate in sports and adopt and live by the Olympic values of Excellence, Friendship and Respect. Targeted at athletes between the ages of 14 and 18, summer and winter editions of these Games will be held every four years, starting with the Summer Youth Olympic Games in 2010 in Singapore followed by the Winter Youth Olympic Games in 2012 in Innsbruck, Austria.

One of the key differentiating features of YOG from the Olympic Games is the Culture and Education Programme (CEP) integrated with the sporting competitions. Athletes have the unique opportunity to participate in fun activities where they learn about important global and sporting issues, experience different cultures, and discover how they can contribute to society. Young people across the world are encouraged to embrace, embody and express the Olympic values of Excellence, Friendship and Respect.

THE OLYMPIC SPIRIT

The Olympic Games represent more than records and medals. At each Games, the Olympic flag, the Olympic torch and the lighting of the Olympic Flame remind us of the three Olympic values – EXCELLENCE, FRIENDSHIP and RESPECT.

“By creating the Youth Olympic Games on 5 July 2007, the IOC played its role as a catalyst for the sports movement. It showed that its commitment to the youth of today and tomorrow is about action, not just words, by offering them an event of their own in the spirit of the Olympic Games.”

Jacques Rogge, IOC President



(top and bottom): The Journey There – an Olympic timeline tracing the milestones of the Summer Olympic Games from 1896 to 2008 and the creation of YOG up to Singapore 2010 & Innsbruck 2014.



In the centre of the circular timeline were the display of YOG medals, and the Singapore Women Table Tennis Team's Silver medals from the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, as well as Tan Howe Liang's Silver Olympic medal for weightlifting from the 1960 Rome Olympic Games.

“We dared to dream, we worked hard to pursue our dream despite the odds, and now the dream will become a reality. It is a great honour and privilege for Singapore and every Singaporean. We will be the focus of a new era of Singapore, for Southeast Asia, and for the Olympic movement.”

Lee Hsien Loong, Prime Minister of Singapore

The goal of personal excellence is conveyed at each Games through the Olympic motto: *Citius – Altius – Fortius* / Faster – Higher – Stronger. The flame of the torch symbolises friendship between peoples with the torch relay travelling through different places. The rings on the flag represent respect, as the Olympic Games brings together different nationalities from the five continents without discrimination.

“These five rings represent the five parts of the world now won over by Olympism, ready to accept its fruitful rivalries. In addition, the six colours combined in this way reproduce the colours of every country without exception. The blue and yellow of Sweden, the blue and white of Greece, the tri-colour flags of France, England, the United States, Germany, Belgium, Italy and Hungary, and the yellow and red of Spain are included, as are the innovative flags of Brazil and Australia and those of ancient Japan and modern China. This, truly, is an international emblem.”

Pierre de Coubertin, 1914

The inaugural Youth Olympic Games adds a new dimension to the Olympic ideal through an emphasis on the youth of the world, inspiring them through an integrated sports, culture and educational experience to embrace, embody and express the Olympic values of Excellence, Friendship and Respect. In living these values, the youth will also inspire all those around them to do the same.



The first Olympic torch – used during the 1936 Berlin Games – on display at Suntec ICC, on loan from The Olympic Museum.



The YOG torch and medals on display at the Olympic Gallery in YOY.



A 4-screen AV installation featuring athletes in slow-motion at the entrance of the Olympic Gallery at Suntec ICC.

AUDIO VISUALS & INTERACTIVES

Interesting audio-visual elements were used in the exhibitions to promote the Olympic Values of Excellence, Friendship and Respect, and to provide an insight to the training some the young Singapore YOG athletes had to go through.



The Kinanthropometric exhibit at Suntec ICC. Visitors could match themselves against the body type of athletes such as sprinter, gymnast, swimmer, weightlifter, and basketball player. In the foreground were three touch-screens featuring AFP flash animations of the 26 YOG sports.

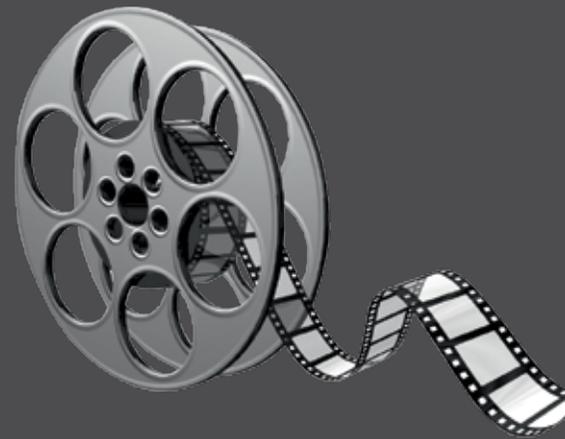


Beyond the Apu Trilogy: The Cinema of Satyajit Ray

museings

BY DILIP BASU

IMAGES: SATYAJIT RAY FILM AND
STUDY CENTER, UCSC.



Satyajit Ray is best known in the world of cinema as the maker of the Apu Trilogy (*Pather Panchali*, *Aparajito*, *Apur Sansar*), which is regarded as the greatest three-part film ever made. The Apu Trilogy is the most well known work of Indian cinema around the world. It is not so much about the storyline, but how it poetically captured life in a rural Indian village. In fact, the films do not have a conventional dramatic plot, but instead are episodic and follow the rhythm of the lives of the people they portrayed. But few if any apart from devoted Ray aficionados know that he made many more equally great films. Ray's 36-film oeuvre comprises great and near-great films. Unlike his famed contemporaries like Bergman, Kurosawa, Fellini and Antonioni, who made a few "bad" movies along with some great ones, Ray never made a substandard, imperfect film. As the noted film critic and scholar Peter Rainer remarked: "Nobody made films like Ray before him, and it is unlikely anybody will after him." Each film Ray made is original and unique. No one can accuse him of "self plagiarism". What is also remarkable is the incredible diversity and variety in his works.

Biographers of Satyajit Ray and film scholars writing on his prodigious output have tried to pigeonhole him in one way or another. He has been called a Bengali Bergman, a Calcutta Chekhov or a sort of reincarnated Renoir. One critic, Michael Sragow, describes Ray as the most sublime filmmaker to emerge since Renoir and



Satyajit Ray.

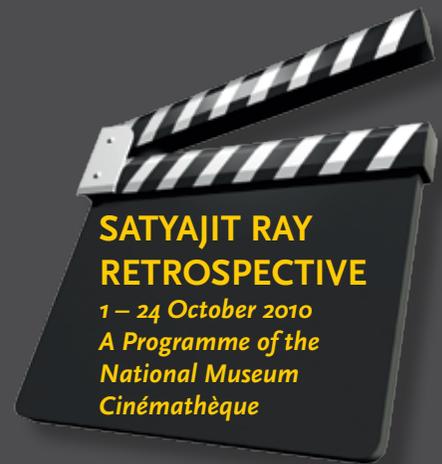
De Sica. In the West, most scholars assume that Ray, artistic and somewhat offbeat, must have emerged from India's large and prolific motion picture tradition. In India, Ray was initially dismissed as a peddler of poverty, someone who made low budget features with foreign markets, international film festivals and awards in mind. The more discriminating marvel at Ray's genius and call him the last titan of the nineteenth century Bengal renaissance. On the other hand, to the post-colonial theorists, Ray is a modernist in the European sense and whose work, after all is said and done, is not really as Indian as Bollywood. A proper appraisal of Ray's cinema and his luminous legacy is still in order.

In 1950, Satyajit Ray was asked by a major Calcutta publisher to illustrate a children's edition of *Pather Panchali*, Bibhuti Bhushan Banerjee's semi-autobiographical novel. On his way back from London, with little to do on a two-week boat journey, Ray ended up sketching the entire book. These formed the kernel and the essential visual elements in the making of *Pather Panchali*, Ray's very first film and the one that brought him instant international recognition and fame. At the 1956 Cannes Film Festival, Ray received in absentia the Best Human Document Award for this hauntingly beautiful film with its carefully executed details of the joys and sorrows in the life of a little boy named Apu in a tiny village in Bengal during the 1920s. Instant fame, however, did not bring in its wake, instant fortune.

During his life and filmmaking career, Ray received many honours. In addition to the Honorary Academy Award for Lifetime Achievement, which he received in 1992 in his hospital room a few weeks before he passed away, he was also presented with the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour. Oxford University conferred on him an honorary doctorate; the University of California, Berkeley, awarded him the Berkeley Medal. In 1989, President François Mitterrand of France went to Kolkata (Calcutta) to personally award him the Légion d'honneur.

INDIA IN RAY'S VISION

One can identify three major compositional periods in Ray's life. The first period (1955-1964) was remarkable for its robust optimism, celebration of the human spirit and creative satisfaction. Ray was not only directing and scripting, but also



The National Museum of Singapore is proud to present a retrospective of Satyajit Ray, one of the masters of world cinema.

Winner of an honorary Academy Award in 1992 for Lifetime Achievement, Ray gained international acclaim with his first feature film, *Pather Panchali* (1955), the first part of the celebrated Apu trilogy that includes *Aparajito* (1956) and *Apur Sansar* (1959).

A master storyteller, Ray's cinema is known for its humanism as well as keen observations of society and life. Although his films are made in Bengali, they possess a universality that transcends cultural and national barriers, making him one of the most beloved filmmakers in the world. As commented by the great Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa, "not to have seen the cinema of Ray means existing in the world without seeing the sun or the moon".

The Satyajit Ray Retrospective is a showcase of Ray's immense cinematic legacy through a career spanning almost four decades. Comprising 25 feature films, rarely seen short films and documentaries as well as a roundtable discussion by film experts and critics, the retrospective will provide audience with the opportunity to discover the vast riches and diversity of Ray's cinema.

For more information, please visit www.nationalmuseum.sg.



Chaire Baire.

scoring the music and taking charge of the cinematography. During this period, he directed, arguably, his greatest films. This period coincided with India's early years of independence and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's experiments with secular democracy based on humanism, internationalism and modernism.

The second period (1965-1977) saw India come under a dark spell. There was war with China (1962) during Nehru's last years, followed by a war with Pakistan (1965). Growing urban unemployment and an agricultural crisis brought about by a command economy created near-famine conditions in various parts of the country. The Vietnam War and the Cultural Revolution in China had radicalised Kolkata's youths, artists, writers and intellectuals. Revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence gripped the city. Kolkata, once known as a friendly and safe city, became a dangerous place to live. The Bangladesh War (1971) caused an influx of millions of refugees fleeing the Pakistani army, filling Kolkata and its outskirts. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, battling massive opposition to her government, imposed "Emergency" rule on the country. India came under draconian control, but there were few signs of serious protests: people followed orders, the streets looked cleaner, the economy showed growth, and the trains were running on time.

Ray was troubled. The films he made during this period clearly projected a troubled vision of India. *The Calcutta Trilogy: The Adversary* (1970), *Company Limited* (1971), and *The Middleman* (1975) created powerful portraits of alienation, waywardness, and moral collapse. *Days and Nights in the Forest* (1969) and *Distant Thunder* (1973), made during the Bangladesh War on the subject of the Bengal famine of 1943, showed rape and violence in a straightforward manner. *The Chess Players*, (1977) made during the "Emergency," used the metaphor of a chess game to show how the king of Oudh, more a poet and composer than a ruler, submitted to the British takeover of his kingdom in 1856 as his people fled their villages. The two short films *Pikoo* (1981) and *Deliverance* (1981) raised the issues of adultery and untouchability. Even his so-called escapist films – the *Goopy and Bagha* (1968) musicals and the

detective film *Golden Fortress* (1974)– carried messages against wars, criminality and greed. In midlife, at the height of his creative powers, Ray seemed to have adopted a dark worldview. Socially, he became increasingly isolated.

In the third and last phase (1977-1992), Ray's worldview came full circle. In the 1980s he became even more isolated and distant. In the films he made during this period, he related his messages in definitive terms. Unlike his early work, his films became didactic and frank. Gone were the carefully crafted shades of grey. *Home and the World* (1984), based on a Rabindranath Tagore novel, is a diatribe against nationalism, the mix of religion and politics, and political opportunism and dishonesty. Although the theme is the Swadeshi movement¹ of 1905, *Home and the World* addressed issues of critical concern in the 1980s.

Stricken by two heart attacks, Ray was not able to make films with his characteristic vigour. He made modest family dramas, shot indoors under the watchful eyes of his doctors. He made three films, all based on his own stories, in 1988, 1989 and 1990. The first, *Enemy of the People* (1988), an adaptation of the Henrik Ibsen play to Bengali language, addressed questions of capitalist corruption and manipulation of religion, people, politics and environment. *Branches of a Tree* (1989) also addressed issues of capitalism as it impacts family values and ethics. The protagonist, a heart patient like Ray, is obsessed with honesty, mediated by mood swings of music and madness. The third film, *The Stranger* (1990), literally carries Ray's own voice as he sings in parts of the film. The protagonist is clearly Ray himself. His global concerns are articulated locally. Who is an artist? Who is civilised and who is primitive? The protagonist is against narrowness of all sorts, against boundaries and borders. "Don't be a frog in the well," he tells his grandnephew as the film comes to an end.

Ray was a product of the Anglo-Bengali encounter of the nineteenth century. His cultural, intellectual and ideological roots can be traced to what is known as the "Bengali Renaissance." The Bengali Renaissance refers to the flowering of Bengali arts and culture in the 19th century. As a powerfully creative artist, his craft was influenced as much by the West as by the Bengal School. One can argue that, in the final analysis, he was more than a product of the "Calcutta modern" – a synthesis of the East and the West. His creativity, he once remarked, remained grounded both in what is uniquely Bengali and in what is universal.

THE ART OF RAY

Let us try to situate Satyajit Ray in his art. Our primary concern here is with his creativity – the process of creation and the person. Aristotle defined the principle of creation as *nous poietikos*, the poetic reason. It is a principle that can apply to the creation of the universe itself – the creative act brought into existence something



Pather Panchali.

¹ The Swadeshi movement is part of the Indian independence movement from the British and it involves boycotting British products in favour of domestic made Indian products.





Jana Aranya.

that did not exist before. A human artist, by definition, cannot produce what the Great Creator has done, and produce something out of nothing. The human act of creation always involves a reshaping of given material, whether physical or mental. What are the objective conditions of this given material and its reconstitution in creative work? Philosopher Thomas Nagel has argued that objectivity cannot be studied in just Universalist terms, what he terms a view from “nowhere”. It must be identified with a positional perspective, a view from “somewhere”. In Satyajit Ray’s work, there is a creative dialogue between what is universal and what is unique to his objective conditions, between the global and the local.

MUSIC

Music is another profound and uniquely personal aspect to Ray’s film art. He said while making films he thought musically – all his film narratives are structured like sonatas.

I argue that Ray, like Tagore, was a modern innovator in revolutionising Indian music. The challenge to Ray came from the music he needed for his films. He relied at first on great musicians like Ravi Shankar, Vilayat Khan or Ali Akbar Khan. However, he was dissatisfied and started to score his own music. Here he was at his innovative best, first in *Charulata*, and then in his *Goopy & Bagha* adventure films.

What kind of music did Ray compose? To what extent is it based on the traditions of India and Europe? What about his poster designs, drawings and costume sketches, book jackets, calligraphy and illustrations? And finally, what about his films?

What in the final analysis emerged in all of Ray’s art is his own agency and the originality of his creation. Looking at his designs, graphics, and posters one finds a grand artist assured in the practice of his media and using it deftly to realise the idea and intent. His music has a playful melodic geometry, reduced to the barest essentials, with a focus usually on one or two timbres. The flute presents a series of apeggiated phrases forming a musical signature of its own. One can say the same thing about his films: they show a radical simplicity, concealing layer upon layer of ingenuity and complex composition. These defy all labels, and the only one that seems apt and appropriate is Ray’s own unique signature in all his work.

When an interviewer addressed Akira Kurosawa “the master”, he responded by saying “Not me. Ray is the master. Not to have seen his films is like living on earth and not seeing the Sun and the Moon.”

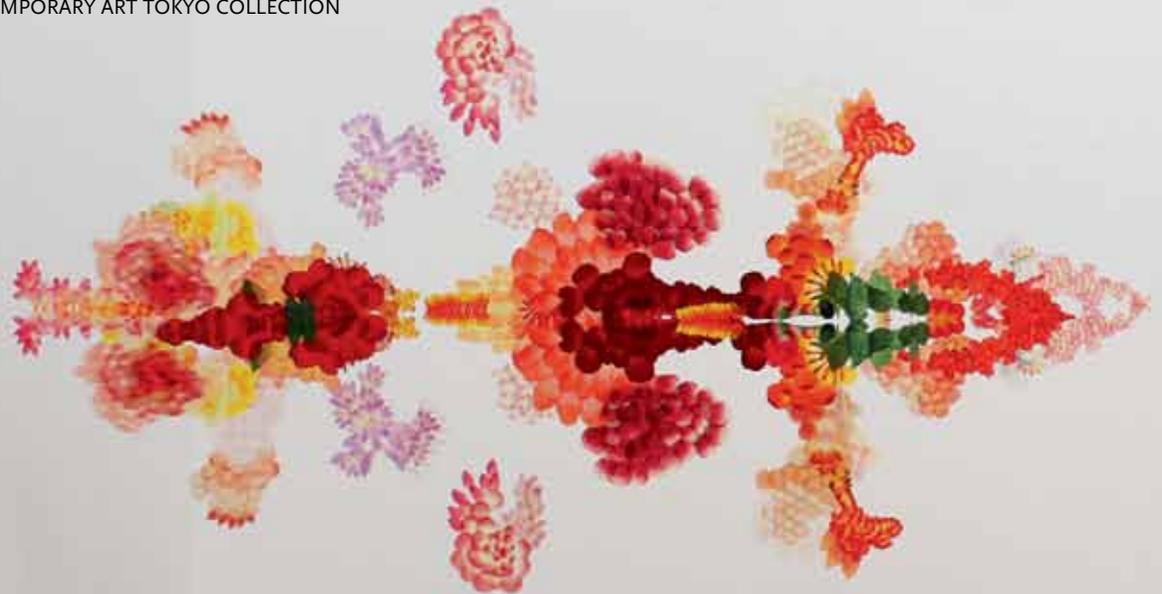
About the writer:
A consultant for the Satyajit Ray Retrospective organised by the National Museum of Singapore, Dilip K. Basu has established a world class Archive and Study Center on Satyajit Ray (Ray FASC), and an innovative, culturally focused South Asia Studies Center at University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC). With the cooperation of the Ray FASC at UCSC and the Ray Society in Calcutta, Basu coordinates the restoration and preservation of Ray’s films. The work is done at the Academy of Motion Pictures Archives in Los Angeles. To date, out of Ray’s 37-film oeuvre, 22 have been fully restored.

THE FUTURE OF JAPANESE ART IS COOL

museings

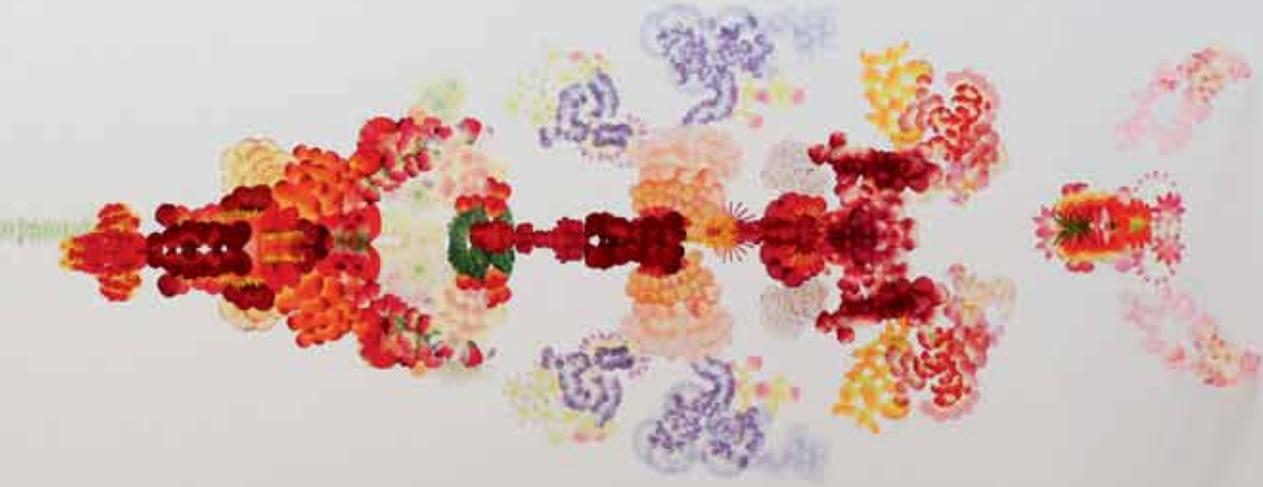
BY DAVID CHEW
ASSISTANT CURATOR
SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

IMAGES:
MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART TOKYO COLLECTION



Haruka Kojin
reflectwo
2006
Mixed media (artificial flowers)
Size variable
Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo Collection

From Yayoi Kusama's pioneering works of abstract expressionism to Takashi Murakami's works that express Japanese Pop Art, the exhibition *Trans-Cool TOKYO* provides an opportunity to view works by groundbreaking Japanese artists who have made an indelible impact on contemporary art. Featuring over 40 works from the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo collection, this exhibition also tells the story of how Japanese artists, since the second half of the 1990s, have established their own creative identities within the context of global pop culture. Working across all mediums, from painting and sculpture, to performance, photography and video, the featured artists have created works in response to the onset of the information age and the greater freedom and uncertainties in contemporary society. *Trans-Cool TOKYO* is co-organised by the Singapore Art Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo. It will be on from 19 November 2010 to 13 February 2011.





Yasumasa Morimura
Criticism and the Lover A, B, C
1990
Transparent medium on colour photograph
180 x 225 cm (set of three)
Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo Collection

THE FORMATIVE 60s AND 70s

After Japan's defeat in the Second World War, many Japanese artists born or practising their art in the 1950s sought to redefine their identity with reference to Western culture. This is typified by the work of Yasumasa Morimura (b. 1951) in this exhibition. Here, Morimura depicts himself in well-known Western paintings, such as in *Criticism and the Lover A, B, C* where his face is inserted into each of the apples and oranges of the famous still-life paintings by French impressionist Paul Cézanne.

Suffering from psychoneurosis and schizophrenia since early childhood, Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929) experienced hallucinations in which everything she saw was covered with polka dots and negative forms. Transforming otherwise common objects and scenes into seemingly repetitive but unique organic shapes, Kusama's work is a manifestation of intense focus and obsession. Her work *Walking on the Sea of Death* (1981) comes from a mental image she had of a boat covered with silver rhizoids (phalluses) printed repeatedly all over the inside of a room.



Yayoi Kusama
Walking on the Sea of Death
1981
Mixed Media
58 x 158 x 256 cm
Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo Collection

THE POSTMODERN 80s

Artists who started their practice in the 1980s had less of an inferiority complex towards, or an over-awareness of the West. This was also a time of economic boom in Japan, where the strong Japanese Yen made it easy for these artists to travel abroad. These artists adopted a more international perspective and tried to develop a visual language that would enable them to stand on par with Western artists.

The works of Yoshitomo Nara (b. 1959) and Takashi Murakami's (b. 1962) have come to be part of Japanese pop art and exhibit the Japanese quality known as *kawaii* (suggesting cuteness). The adult world and its sensibilities were rejected for immaturity and innocence. Nara's *manga-esque* children in his paintings react to the state of the world with suspicion and anger, glaring at the viewer. Murakami's works of animal *anime* icons that divide and proliferate at a cellular level appear as cute yet at the same time creepy protean monsters.

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the end of the economic bubble, resulting in a "lost decade" of low economic growth. This insecurity over the future translated to Japanese artists taking inner, personal exploration even further, continuing ways to connect with personal communities otherwise overlooked by governments and conventional organisations. Artists such as Kohei Nawa (b. 1971) and Haruka Kojin (b. 1983) belong to this generation of artists.

"The late 80s and early 90s saw the end of the economic bubble, resulting in a "lost decade" of low economic growth."



Yoshitomo Nara
Sayon
2006
Acrylic on canvas
146 x 112.5 cm
Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo Collection

Nawa, who searches for stuffed animals in online auctions and then covers the surface of these animals with small and large crystal balls, depicts how we perceive two visual worlds – the virtual and the real, playing with the ambiguity between our perception and reality.

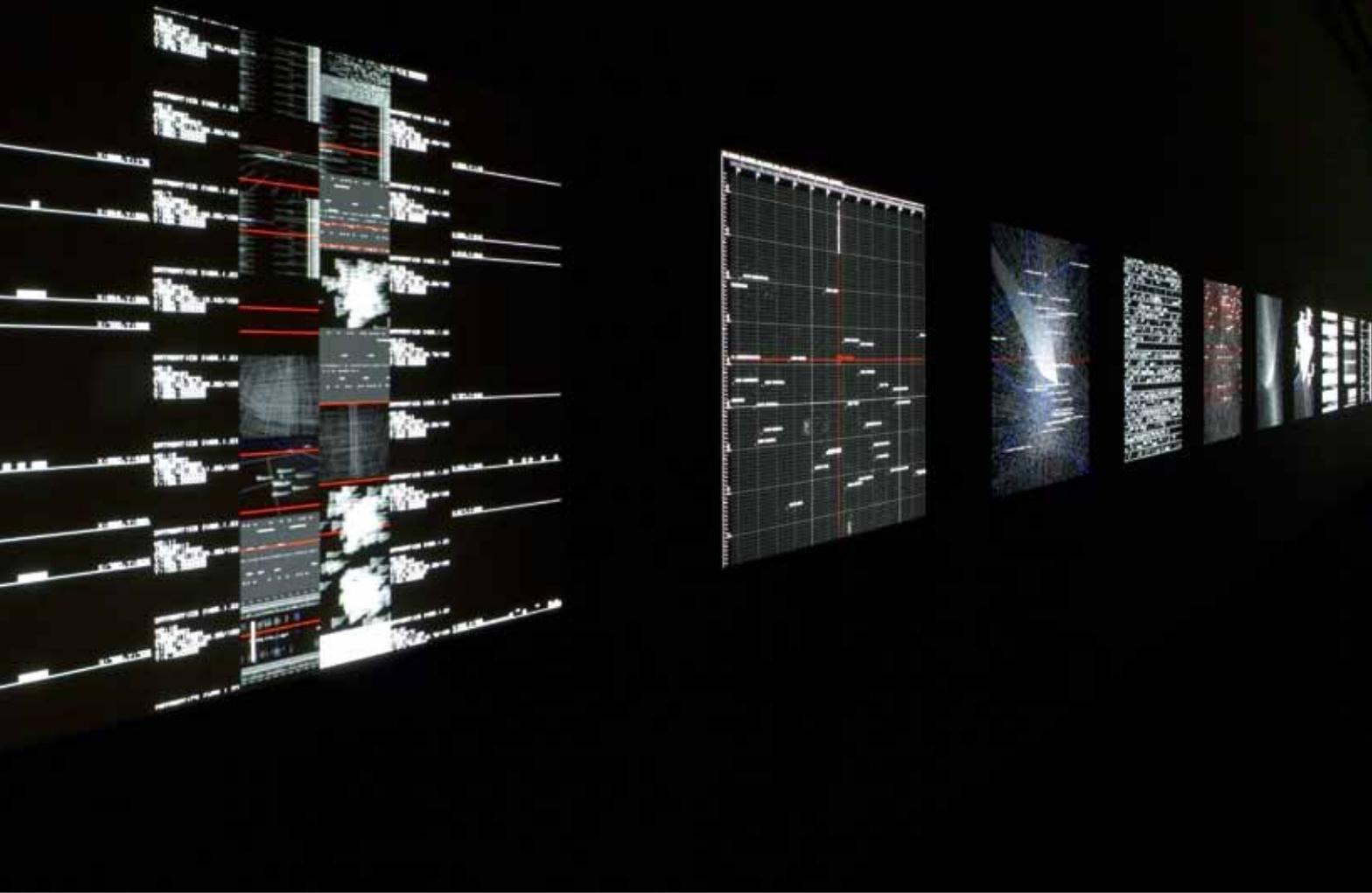
Kojin's floating installation of petals of artificial flowers is like a 3-D Rorschach ink-blot test that when viewed from different angles alters one's perception of the work.



Kohei Nawa
Pixcell-Deer #17
2008-9
Mixed media (stuffed deer & glass beads)
200 x 170 x 150 cm
Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo Collection

NEW JAPANESE ART

One of the foremost characteristics of Japanese contemporary art of today is a growing interest from its artists in their own culture rather than that of overseas culture. Perhaps due to the declining Japanese economy, falling birth rates and ageing population, there is increased conservatism, conformism and introspective tendencies among Japanese youth today. Art is no longer viewed as something equated with privilege and prestige; instead it is increasingly tied closely to everyday life, and art overlaps with other fields more now, such as fashion, design, video, film and technology.



Ryoji Ikeda
data.matrix [no 1-10]
2006-9
10 multi-projection audiovisual installation
360 x 2480 cm
Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo collection

Ryoji Ikeda (b. 1966) composes his works based on reducing from our environment the behaviour of sound and light waves into the very basic elements known to man such as pixels and sine waves (a mathematical construct that deciphers and decodes sound into its different wavelengths). Wanting to make visible the invisible, Ikeda reduces the daily stimuli we encounter in our everyday lives and then puts them back together digitally, re-composing our environments into art installations with light and music that re-interact with our physical bodies on a digital plane.

Recycling a telephone booth into a one-man disco, Kiichiro Adachi's (b. 1979) work *e.e.no. 24* sheds light on the relationship between people in society by introducing elements of the fantastic and the magical. The work allows the shy dancer, too self-conscious to dance in front of others, to do so in its magical mirrored interior so that he or she is only able to see himself or herself. The booth, whose walls are one way mirrors, however, also reveals the dancing figure within to those standing on the outside.

What will be the future direction of Japanese contemporary art? If the works shown in this exhibition provide any clue, aesthetics and sensibilities still rooted in local culture, yet informed by globalism, will inspire new Japanese contemporary art. This art will remain deeply connected to the individual in society, and will be part of the ongoing search to understand the relationship between oneself and the world.

(right)
Kiichiro Adachi
e.e.no.24
2004/8
Mixed media (telephone box, music & video)
257 x 98 x 97 cm
Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo collection



Definitely Un-Borat: Kazakhstan at a Glance

musetravels

BY TAN CHUI HUA

IMAGES: ONG LIU CHING AND TAN CHUI HUA

Before 2006 and the film *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*, mention “Kazakhstan” and the average person on the street would probably have had no idea where the country is. But after the mockumentary, *Borat*, was released worldwide, the bleak Romanian village it was filmed in summed up the impressions most people harboured of the remote Central Asian state.

Which cannot be further away from the truth, to say the least. When I first told my friends I was going to Kazakhstan, one said after a long pause, “But there’s nothing there.” The mere fact that Kazakhstan, straddling Europe and Asia, is the ninth largest country on earth should suffice to alert anyone that there has to be quite a lot of things there. Diversity, in fact, defines Kazakhstan today.

Like most post-Soviet nations, Kazakhstan’s capitalist fervour is loud and clear in its cities such as Astana and Almaty, where casinos, shopping malls, rolling limousines and sparkling modern buildings herald a new era. Gas, oil and uranium drive its economy. Mega supermarkets offer goods from all corners of the world. Craving for a chocolate and orange flavoured yoghurt? Just pick it out from the other 50 brands and flavours paraded along the aisle.

This modern façade, however, is only one of the many aspects of the nation. Like an onion, Kazakhstan is an amalgam of layers. Some are easily accessible; others require seeking and revelation. The geology of the country is one of the clearest cues that all is not as Borat concocted. Flanked by the Tien Shan mountain range on its southeast and the Altay mountains in the northeast, Kazakhstan has almost every geological feature you can name – snow-capped peaks, deserts, tundras, steppes, wetlands, canyons and lakes.



The pristine Altay Mountains





The sculpture of Russian writer Dostoevsky, who is remembered in a museum in Semey, with his friend Valikhanov.

FROM COMMUNISM TO A NEW NATIONALISM

It is in its culture and history, however, that Kazakhstan truly displays a startling diversity. Today, busts of Lenin and Stalin have been largely stripped from the nation, which gained independence only in 1991. Despite a surge in nationalism, the Soviet legacy remains apparent in industrial cities such as Karagandha, Soviet-era buildings, street names, town planning and monuments. In Almaty, an impressive sculpture at Panfilov Park continues to hail the heroism of 28 Soviet soldiers who died fighting Nazis outside Moscow in 1941. Ballet and opera performances, many of them Russian or Soviet, are held regularly at the Abay Ballet and Opera Theatre, opened in 1934 by the Soviets.

The darker side of Soviet rule is perhaps best encapsulated in the city of Semipalatinsk, also known as Semey. West of the city, the Soviets carried out nuclear tests over 40 years on a steppe. More than 400 nuclear bombs were exploded, resulting in severe health and environmental repercussions. A 40-metre tall memorial depicting a mother sheltering her child from the nuclear fallout was erected in 2002 to remember the victims.

Peel away the Soviet layer and you can see signs of 19th century Russian imperialism in Central Asia. The candy-coloured Zenkov Cathedral, constructed in the 1870s, survived the Soviet era and once again welcomes Orthodox Christians in Almaty. A number of cities in the north such as Ust-Kamenogorsk began as early Russian forts built to establish Russia's presence in Central Asia.

As a far-flung post of the Russian empire, Kazakhstan was a place to which political exiles were sent. One of the most famous exiles was the Russian writer, Fyodor Dostoevsky



Ballet and opera shows are held regularly at the Abay Ballet and Opera Theatre.

(1821-1881), who spent five years in Semey. Today, the wooden house he stayed in is conserved and a museum dedicated to the writer stands next to it.

Finding remnants of Kazakhstan's pre-Russian past is harder. Under Russian imperialism and Stalin's policies such as forced collectivisation, Kazakhstan's free-roaming nomads have been largely eradicated. The new Kazakh government is determined to revive and promote a Kazakhstani identity, which is largely based on Kazakh culture.

Kazakh is instituted as the first official language, and Russian relegated to second. New edifices, Kazakh-style, are commissioned and icons from Kazakh culture such as snow leopards, horses and eagles have been revived and popularised. Animals, both mythical and real, play a major



The darker side of Soviet rule is remembered in this memorial to nuclear test victims.



The Khoja Ahmed Yasawi Mausoleum complex was built in the 14th century under Timur the Great (1336-1405).



Uzbek and Kazakh ladies selling fruits by the bucket at the bazaar.



One sees all kinds of faces in Kazakhstan.

role in Kazakh culture. Winged unicorns are commonly used to represent immortality and spiritual riches. The snow leopard, for instance, is a symbol of wisdom, persistence, independence and the ability to leap forward. One example of the use of icons is a towering structure at Almaty's Republic Square, which depicts a warrior standing atop a winged snow leopard. Traditional horsemanship, sports, music and hunting are promoted through state-sponsored events etc.

A VERITABLE MELTING POT

For an inkling of what Kazakhstan used to be like before the Russians arrived, head down to the south. Ancient trading settlements along the Silk Road continue to function as cities today. At Shymkent, lively open-air bazaars operate with the same spirit of haggling as traders did centuries ago. In Turkestan, devout pilgrims throng the 14th century mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, a Sufi mystic and teacher who lived in the 11th century.

With its myriad cultures and histories, Kazakhstan continues to be a veritable melting pot today. Walk down the streets of Almaty, the former capital of the country, and you will see Russians, Ukrainians, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Koreans and even Belarusians. At last count, there are more than 100 ethnic groups in the country. This is largely the legacy of Stalin, who mass-deported people from other parts of the Soviet Union to Kazakhstan during the 1930s and 1940s.

What is most memorable about Kazakhstan, however, is the overwhelming hospitality that cuts across the diverse cultures. On the train from Almaty to Astana, my fellow traveller and I were treated to countless rounds of vodka, wine, salted fish and sausages by Kazakh passengers. In Semey, a Russian lady, Indian student and Kazakh driver took us on a memorable tour of neighbouring steppes for free. Over at Korghalzhyn, the Russian mini-bus driver kindly rerouted to deliver us to a Non-Governmental Organisation at a nature reserve. With such a wealth of heritage, both natural and cultural, as well as a living tradition of hospitality to travellers, Kazakhstan deserves to shed the misinformed impressions gleaned from *Borat*. Visitors planning a trip to the country should be prepared to be blown away by this multi-layered Central Asian state.



Trading takes place in the same spirit of haggling as it did centuries ago in Shymkent.

TRAVEL TIPS

VISA APPLICATION

Singaporeans visiting Kazakhstan no longer require a letter of invitation from the country to apply for a visa. All you need to do is to fill out an application form (downloadable at www.kazakhstan.org.sg) and apply at the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The embassy is located at Great World City, 1 Kim Seng Promenade.

GETTING THERE AND ABOUT

There are no direct flights from Singapore to Kazakhstan. You need to fly via Kuala Lumpur, Seoul or major Chinese cities such as Urumqi. Arranging for a flight may be tricky as it requires you to switch airlines. Check Air Astana, Asiana Airlines and Lufthansa for schedules. Alternatively, you could take a train or bus from China. Travellers usually depart from Urumqi or Yining. Given the recent unrest in western China, you should check if the borders are still open before planning.

Put 3-4 days aside for getting in and out of the country in your itinerary. Take note that Kazakhstan is a huge place and getting from the south to the north may take a day at least by train. It is impossible to cover the whole country within just a few weeks, so do your research and factor in transportation time and contingencies such as cancelled buses. As tourists are not allowed to extend their visa, you have to allocate enough time to get out of the country before the visa expires.

Pick up some Russian before you go. It will go a long way in reading street signs and menus and getting help from locals. Minimally, you should know the numbers, directions and greetings.

BEST TIME TO GO

Avoid winter unless you want to experience sub-zero temperatures. The best times to visit are during spring (April to June) or autumn (September to October).

ACCOMMODATION

Tourism is a relatively new industry in Kazakhstan. Business hotels and motels can be found in major cities. Backpacker facilities are rare. There are various interesting homestay programmes organised by NGOs. Check www.eco-tourism.kz and www.wild-natures.com for more details.

The Zenkov Cathedral, built entirely of wood, continues to serve Orthodox Christians in Almaty.



KAZAKH - THE FREE PEOPLE

The word *Kazakh*, Turkic in origin, means “free” or “independent”. The Kazakh people emerged sometime in the 15th century from Turkic-Mongol tribes, following the gradual disintegration of the Mongol empire in the 14th century. The term Kazakh was coined to establish their independence from other powers around them.

For centuries, before the onset of Russian imperialism, Kazakhs led a largely nomadic lifestyle. Migration defined their existence as they moved with each season in search of pastures for their cattle, sheep, horses and goats, with yurts serving as their dwellings on the go.

Skills in horsemanship and hunting were greatly prized and the Kazakhs were known for staging highly competitive games involving dexterity in handling horses. Their culture revolved around the themes of nomadic migration, horsemanship, hunting and independence. Shamanism, animism and various schools of Islamic thought shaped their world views. The Kazakh identity, however, suffered greatly under Russian imperialism and later, communism. The nomadic life was banned and many cultural practices disallowed. Those who resisted were usually killed or sent to gulags. Today, the Kazakh culture is actively revived in the newly independent nation.

A NEW NATION AND ITS 5000 YEARS OF HISTORY



Little is actually documented of Central Asia's history, of which Kazakhstan constitutes the largest area. Archaeological findings reveal that farming communities inhabited southern Kazakhstan as early as 5000 years ago. Over 1500 sites, with detailed petroglyphs dating back as early as 3000 years, have been identified in Kazakhstan to date.

The Silk Road, a network of trade routes, played an important role in the development of Central Asia. A number of these routes crossed present-day Kazakhstan, along which trading settlements were established.

As early as 300 BCE, Turkic and Mongol tribes began migrating to Central Asia from the east. As more clans moved westward, power struggles and wars ensued over the course of the next 1000 years. In the 13th century, the rise of the Mongol empire brought about a new unity from China to Europe. The unity, however, did not last long as the Mongol empire began disintegrating in the 14th century. This led to the emergence of Kazakh hordes, which united numerous disparate Turkic-Mongol tribes and clans.

In the 15th century, the Kazakh Khanate, the first approximate of a Kazakh state, was established by the hordes. Power struggle within the khanate was rampant as loyalties belonged to tribes rather than the khanate. Weakened by infighting, the khanate fell when Russia conquered Kazakhstan in 1868. Mass migration of Russians to Kazakhstan took place and traditional pastures of the Kazakh nomads were confiscated. It is estimated that a million Kazakhs died from starvation and massacre under Russian rule.

As tsarist rule increasingly destabilised within Russia due to uprisings, Kazakhstan declared itself to be an autonomous state in 1920. In 1922, the Soviet Union was formed and its rule extended over the autonomous Kazakh state. Kazakhstan was fully absorbed by the Soviets in 1936. The reign finally came to an end with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and Kazakhstan declared its independence along with 14 other post-Soviet states.





FROM SCHOOL TO STATELY FACILITY

*9 King George's
Avenue (former
Victoria School)*

musedesign

IMAGES: ARCHITECTS 61

Through sensitive restoration, an elegant institution for young pupils is now the headquarters of the People's Association.

From its humble origins as an English class in Kampong Glam Malay School in 1876, Victoria School has grown to become one of Singapore's premier boys schools with an illustrious alumni of notable scholars, professionals and leaders. Victoria School is now based in Siglap, but for over half a century, the institution occupied a site off Jalan Besar between Tyrwhitt Road and King George's Avenue, which was designed and built in 1933 by Frank Dorrington Ward, an architect for the Public Works Department who also designed the old Supreme Court building and Hill Street Police Station (which currently houses the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts).

OLD SCHOOL CHARM

With elegant proportions and a finish of Shanghai plaster, the original school consisted of a handsome, flat-roofed, neoclassical building with a long frontage and upper storey corridor. Housing the main classrooms and administrative offices, this block terminated at one end with a school hall bearing concrete arcs. In 1967, a modern style hall-cum-canteen block was added, which served as an aesthetically pleasing and easy-to-build prototype for later schools. This block housed a second storey multi-purpose hall supported by slender concrete columns at the ground floor canteen area, and is the only surviving school building to



feature this design and configuration. Together with the unique 1933 building, the two structures are architectural treasures that serve as tangible reminders of how school design evolved in the pre- and post-war years.

Approved for conservation in January 2007, the school premises were restored and refurbished under the direction of Design Director, Mr Gieto Sugianto of Architects 61, to house the headquarters of the People's Association (PA). Costing \$48 million, the result is a facility that combines elegant form and contemporary function, with the former school field serving as rehearsal grounds for events such as the Chingay and National Day parades.

SENSITIVE NEW TOUCHES

The polish of the completed project belies a number of complex challenges that confront the design team. By 2007, the old buildings were replete with structural defects that had to be rectified before they could be put to contemporary use. Thus, to satisfy minimum threshold levels for structural integrity, the entire ground floor slab of the main classroom block had to be raised by 200mm and supported by additional micro-piling.





Existing Art Deco-style balustrades and railings were modified to meet minimum height requirements. These new touches, along with adaptations for air-conditioning, were done with minimum visual impact to the original building, which also underwent a meticulous restoration of its Shanghai plaster walls. Meanwhile, the former hall-cum-canteen block was converted into practice studios and storage areas, and a new five-storey wing was built to house the PA's offices.

The restored school blocks and the adjacent new offices convey a sense of gradual, natural transition, thanks to the use of a series of link bridges to connect the old and new structures. Lush landscaping and the incorporation of naturally ventilated passages add to the feel of seamless connectivity between the exterior facets of the facility.





The internal spaces, too, were enhanced by the extensive use of natural ventilation and lighting. Creative reconfiguration of the former narrow classroom corridors of the 1933 building permitted the architects to carve out new spaces for offices. The original light shelf, which allowed sunlight to penetrate the interior, was enhanced with a ceiling profile that serves the dual purpose of bringing in more natural lighting while concealing the mechanical and electrical components.

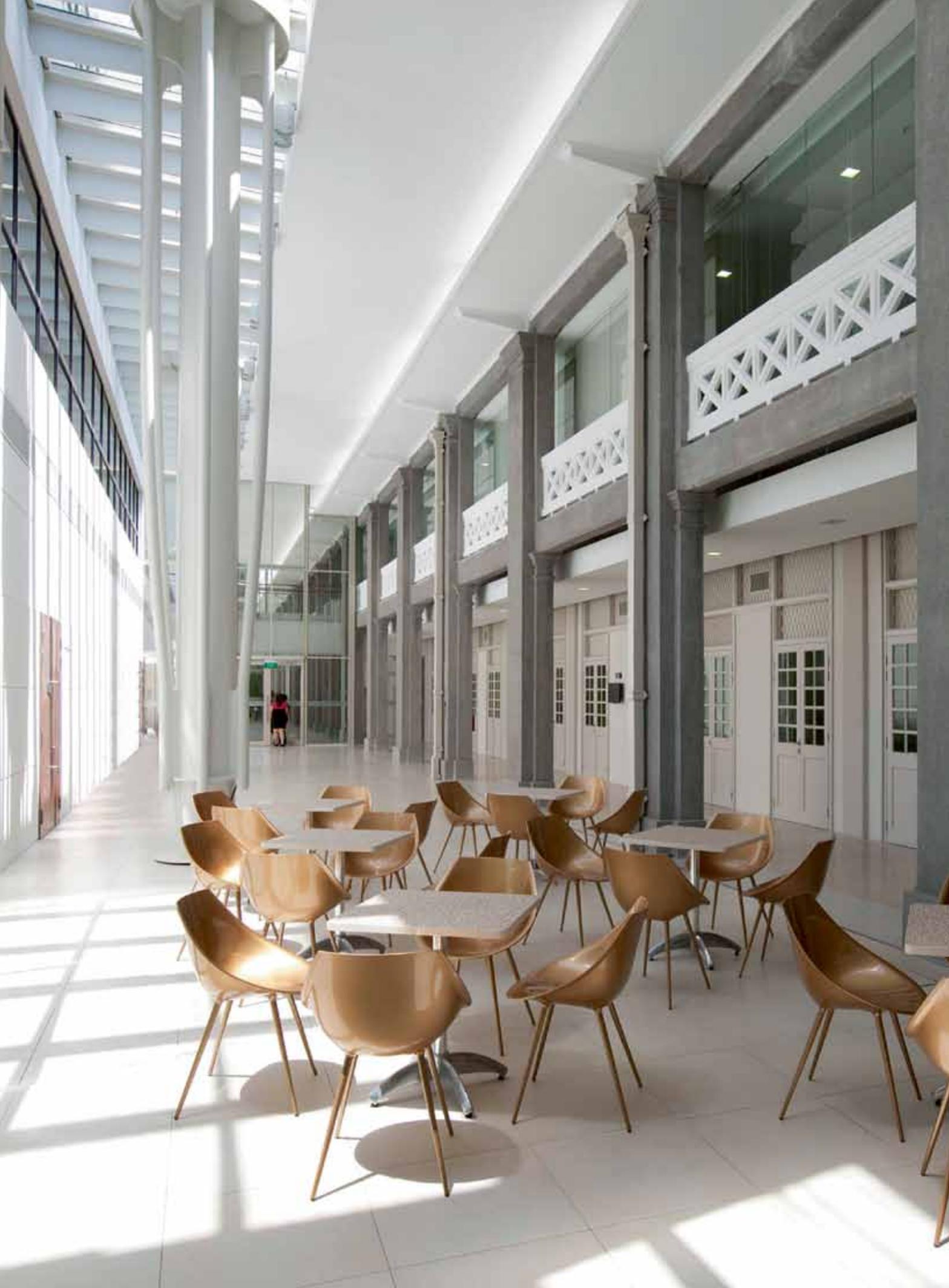
This restoration, which retained distinctive elements and features familiar to many old boys, pays tribute to the legacy of the Victoria School as well as addresses the current needs of the PA for modern premises that are both environmentally- and people friendly. In its current guise, the facility continues to stand out as a prominent urban and community landmark in the Jalan Besar precinct and this success was duly acknowledged through an Architectural Heritage Award (AHA) by the Urban Redevelopment Authority in 2009 under Category B for projects that display exemplary sensitivity in the integration of new elements with old structures.

THE PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION CROSSES THE HALF-CENTURY MARK

The new headquarters of the People's Association (PA) at 9 King George's Avenue was officially opened on 29 January 2010, a date that marked the start of the PA's year-long celebration of its 50th anniversary.

Founded on 1 July 1960, the PA's remit was to help foster racial harmony and social cohesion in a new nation through community centres in housing estates that served as meeting places for Singapore's various ethnic, language and religious groups. The multiracial and multi-religious participation garnered for the PA's activities organised by the community centres helped to bring people and promote unity.

Apart from managing Citizens' Consultative Committees and later, Residents' Committees and Neighbourhood Committees, the PA is probably best known for organising the annual Chingay street parade, which began in 1973. Usually held during the first weekend after the Lunar New Year, the Chingay parade was originally a purely Chinese procession featuring lion dancers and other martial artists. It has since grown to embrace cultural performances from Singapore's diverse communities and even foreign troupes.



with Kwa Chong Guan, Chairman, National Archives Board



Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

*What challenges lie ahead for oral historians as well as those who seek to tell the Singapore story? Offering his thoughts on these critical issues is Mr Kwa Chong Guan, Chairman of the National Archives Board. Mr Kwa was also Director of the Oral History Centre from 1985-1994 and concurrently, from 1989, Director of the old National Museum which he led through a strategic planning process to transform the old Museum into three museums under the National Heritage Board today. Mr Kwa is one of the co-authors, with Prof Tan Tai Yong and Dr Derek Heng, of the NAS publication *Singapore: A 700-Year History; From Early Emporium to World City*.*

Q: HOW DID THE ORAL HISTORY CENTRE BEGIN?

The beginning of the Oral History Department goes back to a retired United States Brigadier-General named Theo C. Mataxis. He was a Ministry of Defence Consultant when he recommended to then Defence Minister Dr Goh Keng Swee in early 1974 that the Ministry start an oral history programme to record Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) history and enliven the study of this history at the Command and Staff College. Mataxis further proposed that recording oral history could extend beyond the SAF to document other aspects of Singapore's past. Dr Goh was evidently sufficiently impressed to approve this proposal for an SAF Oral History Programme, and four years later, in 1978, initiated a national oral history programme.

Mrs Lily Tan, then the Acting Director of the National Archives and Records Centre was tasked to start-up an oral history programme under the National Archives and Records

Centre. I was seconded from the Ministry of Defence in 1985 to take the Oral History Unit from the Archives and establish it as a Centre on its own.

Q: DO YOU THINK THE ORAL HISTORY CENTRE HAS ACHIEVED MUCH OF WHAT IT SET OUT TO DO?

Well, achievement is an evaluative question, depending on who is evaluating and to what criteria. So if you are evaluating by Dr Goh's criteria, then it's arguable as to whether it has achieved what he set out to do. The then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew is on record in Parliament saying that the unit was moving too slowly, not recording quickly enough the stories of our pioneers who are dying.

And if you go by the criteria of what is now called the Fajar Generation, then what the Centre is making is not a very objective set of interviews, which the contributors to the book *The Fajar Generation* would claim demonises the opposition

to the PAP. So it all depends on whose viewpoints and objectives you are taking into consideration. As the director, I had to take into consideration these different views and evaluations which will meet the needs of our stakeholders and audiences.

Q: HOW DOES ORAL HISTORY HELP ONE PIECE TOGETHER A NATION'S HISTORY?

On one level, we are recording the lives of ordinary citizens and various communities who make up the nation. I believe that most people we have interviewed can identify with this effort, and we hope it has been useful in documenting the transformation of a colonial plural society into a nation state. The other level is at the political and policy level, documenting what Dr Goh Keng Swee has referred to as the “cloak-and-dagger” struggle between the PAP and the Communist Party underground to lead Singapore to independence.

In our oral history project on the political development of Singapore we have tried to capture both the PAP views as well as those from the opposition who are prepared to come forward. One example would be Dr Lee Siew Choh, although we have missed others like Mr Lim Chin Siong. The intent is that these two oral history recording strategies will complement each other to provide a more nuanced and empathetic understanding of our past than an often incomplete and equivocal documentary record.

Q: WHAT MAKES FOR AN EFFECTIVE ORAL HISTORIAN?

There is a fairly standard list of qualities which we all look for in our interviewers or train our interviewers to acquire. Top of the list are good listening skills and the ability to relate well to the interviewee. Listening skills mean you are able to pick up the underlying themes of the story the interviewee is relating. There's a huge amount of implicit, often unstated and embedded, assumptions in what our interviewees say, and it is for the interviewer to be able to discern them, and prod and probe the interviewee deeper. It is more than just interviewing for content. It is searching for the deep narrative and meaning of what the interviewee is telling. It is not only listening for what the interviewee is telling us, but more important, why is he telling us this?

Q: ARE THERE ANY GAPS YOU WOULD HAVE LIKED TO PLUG IN RECORDING SINGAPORE'S PAST?

There will always be plenty of people we have missed interviewing: PAP leaders, their opposition and other key figures. Have we recorded enough of Mr Lee Kuan Yew as well as Dr Goh Keng Swee before Dr Goh passed away? What about Mr J B Jeyaratnam? Have we interviewed him in sufficient depth before he passed away? It is in part an evaluation of how in-depth we want to interview. But what the Oral History Centre can do is also in large part dependent upon how co-operative the interviewee is. At the levels of people's memories of their daily lives, how wide a sample do you want to go for? Can we be satisfied with 10 interviews on for example, how we celebrated the Lunar New Year ten or twenty years ago? Or do you want 20? At what point does it become repetitive?

Q: WHAT CHALLENGES OR ISSUES LIE AHEAD FOR ORAL HISTORIANS?

Oral history is a methodology for capturing memories. It is how various people want to use that methodology for

different ends. You could use it as therapy for senior citizens to recollect their past and put off dementia – that's one use which we have not thoroughly explored.

However, for the more traditional historian, it is the written document that counts. The oral history record is problematic because our memories are effervescent, reconfiguring in response to our present. So there is the perennial debate as to which is the more authentic documentation of our past, our memories of a meeting, or the minutes of that meeting. Arguably, the minutes of a meeting are also the memory of the Chairperson's or Secretary's memory of the meeting. Every document which finds its way into the archives is finally about our memories that we decided sufficiently important to be written and archived. We should realise that the papers are nothing more than some institution's, some committee's or somebody's social memory of what should be more permanently recorded.

This leads to one challenge for the future in an era of electronic records, plus a plethora of paper records: how do you get a sense of the discussions and debates leading to a policy decision? In the old hierarchic bureaucratic office, one file moved up and down the hierarchy, recording in the margins of memorandums how issues were discussed. But the e-mails in a networked and paperless office today may not fully capture the embedded assumptions of what drives a policy issue. Where are the critical decision nodes in that networked institution that is moving the policy debate and whose records need to be archived? The records may be increasingly brief and very truncated, recording only decisions, so when we want to write a history of the policy issue, we may find that the electronic records may be incomplete or elliptical.

I therefore argue that increasingly we would therefore need an oral history record. We need somebody who was present in the meetings or a participant in the policy process to explain the assumptions of those who made that policy at that point of time that were not fully captured in the documents. My own guess is that this will be an increasingly significant use of oral history. We are already witnessing this in the increasing number of corporate histories of both government and other agencies turning to oral history interviews to reconstruct their institutional history.

Q: IS THERE ANY VALUE TO RECORDING THE STORIES OF RECENT MIGRANTS TO SINGAPORE?

This has always been the intent of the various oral history projects on the communities of Singapore – how they migrated and assimilated into the mainstream colonial society of Singapore in the late 19th and 20th centuries. So recording the story of more recent migrants is a continuation of a long standing interest. The issue here is how far forward we want to carry this interview process. Do we move to interview somebody who has just settled in Singapore in the past one year, two years or three years on why he decided to relocate in Singapore and how he views himself settling down in his new home? Or do we wait 10 or more years before interviewing him? This is a decision that the oral historian will have to make.

But the wider implication, another main challenge for oral history, would be documenting or capturing the social memory

of these different communities in a globalised Singapore. In the 19th and into the 20th century there was no need or ability to record oral testimony. Migrants came and left Singapore. There was no issue of documenting social memories to root a migrant population to a colonial port city. But today as a nation-state we need to build cohesion and resilience among our citizens. Oral history can help capture the memories that define who we are as a community and nation. There is a project to capture Singapore memories, which I believe the Ministry of Communication and the Arts has allocated \$23 million over the next several years. When you want to capture memories on that national scale, oral history methodology becomes a critical tool.

Q: WHAT WILL BE THE CHALLENGES FACING THE BUILDING UP OF A COLLECTIVE MEMORY FOR SINGAPORE MEMORIES?

At one level would be the methodology: how many people do we want to interview on what issues. The other level would be the ethical, moral, political choice of whom do we interview and how in-depth. We can be a good vacuum cleaner and capture all the memories, but what do we keep, what do we allow out, what do we throw out or forget? There is a process here that we have not taken cognisance of.

We cannot remember everything. Things must be forgotten. There must be a process of forgetting. We have not thought enough about forgetting. But how do we do that? How do you decide what can be forgotten in our past? At the personal level, we all make decisions as to what we want to remember and what we want to forget. These could be embarrassing events; it could be emotional, traumatic events we want to forget. Every family has its dark secrets that it doesn't mention and is best forgotten. What about at the national level? How do you decide what events are best forgotten? Should they be forgotten? Who makes these choices?

Q: WHAT ABOUT THE METHODOLOGY OF ORAL HISTORY? WHAT CHALLENGES LIE AHEAD?

I think the issue that we will confront as we use oral history as a tool is making out what the interviewee decides to tell us. The critical task is to reveal, evaluate and understand what the interviewee is telling us. Are our memories like computer hard disks, where events are remembered as bytes in our brains to be recalled at will, or are our memories transient, always reconfiguring? In 1996, Dr Goh Keng Swee revised our understanding of Separation when he decided to remember and recall that he was the one who engineered Separation from Malaysia. How many more such memories do we have in our memories of things that were apparently forgotten but could be remembered later, of memories of events changing over time in response to present needs?

We have to recognise that when we interview, we are not be interviewing for what the interviewee can recall, like a computer. Rather, we are asking the interviewee for an ethical or moral decision: "Do I want to remember that event you are asking me about?" How is the interviewee making that decision on what to tell us? Or, what not to tell us?

In traditional, mainstream oral history methodology, memories are like marks on a wax slab, as Greek philosophers like Plato who thought about how we remember things suggested. In this mainstream view we look at the interviewee

in a clinical fashion and assume that what he's telling us is what he can remember. Today we have to look at it as something different, as a complex weave of multilayered networks that are stimulated by incoming and inhibitory signals. That would mean a major shift in our oral history interviewing. Our interviews are not requests to reach into the archives of static long-term memories but a stimulus to their minds to restructure their memories to provide an output to us. The interviewee is making a moral choice every time he answers. We are not interviewing for what people remember, but what they choose to remember.

Q: HOW HAS THE ROLE OF HISTORY IN SINGAPORE EVOLVED SINCE INDEPENDENCE?

For the first 10 years after 1965, the trauma of separation, the preoccupation of whether we would survive led us then to not be very concerned or interested in our history. Then in the late 70's and early 80's, with the confidence that we will survive, we started looking at how do we explain our success. So we started looking back to reflect on where we got it right. That was the beginning of the writing of the Singapore story. The turning point would be the 25th anniversary of self-government exhibition at the old World Trade Centre in 1984, where each ministry was allocated space to put forward an exhibit of how it has contributed towards Singapore's development since 1959. After that we started to put in place more exhibits on Singapore's history in the old National Museum.

Thereafter we continued to tinker with that storyline of economic development and progress as the underlying plot of our history in various exhibitions and textbooks. But this story of progress and modernisation begs the question of what made this modernisation leading to Singapore today possible, especially since Singapore did not have any natural resources that according to mainstream economic thinking are a prerequisite to development. The answer to this question is in a second interrelated theme of communist-, leftist- and communalist-inflected politics of the 1950s and 1960s from which the Lee Kuan Yew-led faction of the PAP emerged victorious to lead Singapore's drive to economic takeoff. This story of economic progress and political development driven by an ascendant PAP culminated in the July 1998 multi-million dollar exhibition "The Singapore Story: Overcoming the Odds" and the memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew with the same title as the exhibition.

The textbook, *A History of Singapore*, edited by Ernest Chew and Edwin Lee represents this effort to view Singapore's history as a city-state with its own sense of identity. This writing of Singapore's history as a nation-state challenged the prevailing and mainstream view of historians led by Mary Turnbull that Singapore's history after 1965 is essentially a continuation of British colonial history, that we can write the history of Singapore as part of a British Empire that was decolonising, looking for ways to hand over power, make the transition and nurturing a colonial nationalism to hopefully create an elite to whom independence could be transferred.

Within the longer historical context this rewriting of Singapore's history as a nation-state can be compared to what happened in Europe at the time of the French revolution when European nation states were being formed. It was an era of romantic historiography, an attempt to define a national history on its own terms – a national awakening. How



Participants at a group interview conducted with members of WICARE Widows Support Group at the Oral History Centre in February 2010. From right: Oral history interviewer Ms Nur Azlin, Madam Joyce Lye (Founder-Chairman WICARE), Madam Tan Po Hong (Vice-Chairman) and Madam Joan Swee (Honorary Secretary). Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

“We really appreciate your questions... It is really healing for us to be able to share... to walk back the memory lane is really healing.”

different is the Singapore Story we have reconstructed and are debating from the 5-volume *History of England* by Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859) which critics, including Lord Acton, have criticised as being a naively optimistic and romantic Whig view of English history? Or, how different is our Singapore Story from the highly romantic 7-volume *Histoire de la Revolution francaise* by Jules Michelet (1798-1874)? The US equivalent of this genre of romantic nation building would be George Bancroft's (1800-1891) multi-volume *History of the United States*. In Australia, Manning Clark's (1915-1991) *A History of Australia* fulfilled a similar function of promoting Australian self-awareness.

The point I am making is that the Singapore Story is in the same genre of romantic historiography of nation building exemplified in the work of Macaulay, Michelet or Bancroft and Clark. They all fulfilled a need for self-awareness central to the process of nation building. The Singapore Story, cumulating in the 1998 exhibition at Suntec City and the Minister Mentor's memoirs, is in that vein of writing romantic historiography. And as romantic visions of their past, all these works have been challenged by succeeding generations of historians.

The challenge to it comes from people who argue that history has to be more empirical and objective. We are seeing a similar challenge here in Singapore from those who feel that the Singapore Story is too political, too romanticised, too in favour of the nation state. So we have proposals for alternative historiographies, alternative histories that challenge the central role of the state and the PAP in the state. We have books like *Paths Not Taken*, *The Scripting of a National History* and more recently, *The Makers and Keepers of Singapore History*. These are all attempts by a group of largely younger historians to arrive what they believe is a more nuanced and balanced writing of Singapore history.

The challenge is, I would argue, not which alternative history is to be preferred over the Singapore Story, but how to

reconstruct a more holistic interpretation of our past which can accommodate variant versions of events in our history. Thus an anti-government or ethnic riot could be understood from the perspective of the rioters and what moved them to riot; or from the viewpoint of the Police tasked to enforce law and order or the politician deciding how the riots shapes his political options and choices and how to react to the rioters.

This, then, will be the challenge for projects to put in place an overarching and dominant narrative of our past. Where and how are we going to locate different perspectives of the same event in one narrative? Will there be a master narrative at all? I suspect it will be increasingly difficult to justify one dominant master narrative in which all the documents and all the memories fit in coherently to tell a great story. There will always be nagging alternative questions, side stories, different stories, doubts. The memories of those who were left out, the vanquished – are they to be given a space, a place in our history?

Q: IS THERE A GROWING ACCEPTANCE, IF NOT TOLERANCE, OF ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES?

It's a matter of give and take, of accepting and tolerating that there will always be different ways of remembering an event. This applies as much to historians arguing for alternatives and variations to the dominant narrative as to those defending the dominant narrative.

October – December 2010

National Heritage Board

Explore Singapore! 2010 20 November – 12 December 2010

Explore Singapore! is back with an exciting line up of events across various museums that promises to delight! Be mesmerised by the magic of museums with magic shows, toy carnivals, bus tours and much, much more. Embark on fun and fascinating journeys to discover our colourful past, rich heritage, exciting art and vibrant cultures. *Explore Singapore! 2010* features an eclectic and unique brew of enriching yet entertaining activities happening at our island's museums and heritage attractions. Visit www.museums.com.sg/esio for details.

Asian Civilisations Museum

Sumatra: Isle of Gold 30 July – 7 November 2010

Known in ancient times as the 'Island of Gold', Sumatra was an early point of arrival for trade, new religions and ideas in Southeast Asia. These cross-cultural exchanges have created the unique and diverse Sumatra of today. Discover Sumatra's forgotten histories and unexpected richness through over 300 artefacts from the collections of the National Museum of Indonesia, the Museum Volkenkunde (National Museum of Ethnology), Leiden, the Asian Civilisations Museum and private collections. Look out for Bronze Age artefacts, treasures from shipwrecks and even royal heirlooms such as the gold crown worn by the Sultan of Siak.

SuperMighty! Heroes of Asia 24 July 2010 – 13 February 2011

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

Congo River: Arts of Central Africa 10 December 2010 – 10 April 2011

For the first time in Southeast Asia, encounter the artistic traditions of Central Africa at this exciting new exhibition. Home to diverse landscapes and peoples such as the Kota, the Fang, the Songye and the Punu, the Central African nations of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo and Gabon also share surprising cultural and artistic similarities. Explore these connections through sculptures, masks, ancestor figures and other beautiful objects from the musée du quai Branly and other lenders. See how famous European artists like Picasso were inspired by these African forms.

Peranakan Museum

Ramayana Revisited: A Tale of Love & Adventure 15 January 2010 – 27 February 2011

A timeless epic poem from India, *The Ramayana* recounts the life of Rama, Prince of the Ayodhya kingdom, and his quest to rescue his wife Sita from Ravana, King of Lanka, with the help of an army of monkeys. This exhibition will feature

shadow puppets, paintings on paper and cloth, and photographs of ancient monuments associated with the *Ramayana* from across South and Southeast Asia.

Ramayana Revisited Fun Day 12 December 2010

Come enjoy some fantastic Ramayana dance performances. Children can also enjoy making their own *wayang kulit* puppets and Peranakan crafts. There will be a special tour organised for young ones, opportunities to dress up in *sarong* and *kebaya* as well as explore our reading corner and handling collection of Peranakan objects.

National Museum of Singapore

Presidential Presents – State Gifts from 1962 to 2009 22 September 2010 – 9 January 2011

Throughout history, the presentation and exchange of official gifts has been an established tradition and is regarded as a form of international diplomacy. Presented on formal occasions such as courtesy calls by the foreign dignitaries or during the President's overseas state visits, these gifts have become a symbolic legacy of diplomatic ties established between the Singapore Presidency and its foreign counterparts. In this exhibition, more than 50 selected official gifts from the collection of the President's Office at the Istana are on display in the National Museum for the first time.

Satyajit Ray Retrospective 1-24 October 2010

The Satyajit Ray Retrospective is a showcase of the late Indian filmmaker's immense cinematic legacy through a career spanning almost four decades. Comprising 25 feature films, rarely seen short films and documentaries, as well as a roundtable discussion by film experts and critics, the retrospective is an opportunity to discover the vast riches of Ray's cinema. Winner of Lifetime Achievement, an honorary Academy Award in 1992, Ray gained international acclaim with his first feature film, *Pather Panchali* (1955), the first part of the celebrated Apu trilogy that includes *Aparajito* (1956) and *Apur Sansar* (1959).

Pompeii: Life in a Roman Town 79CE 16 October 2010 – 23 January 2011

In 79 CE, the Roman town of Pompeii and much of its surrounding area was buried under volcanic ash from Mount Vesuvius. It was not until the mid-18th century that Pompeii was slowly revealed to the world through archaeological excavations. Over 270 objects from the Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei (SANP), including jewels, frescoes, sculptures and household items, will be on display to reconstruct Pompeii. Highlights include body casts of eight victims, who were 'immortalised' during their final moments, gladiatorial gear, a mosaic fountain and frescoes from the House of the Golden Bracelet.

Human Faces

21 October 2010 – 28 November 2010

The group exhibition *Human Faces* features a stunning range of contemporary portrait works by emerging photographers in Asia, mainly from Singapore and South Korea. As part of the Singapore International Photography Festival and Korea Festival, renowned photographer Oh Soon-Hwa from Nanyang Technological University has created an international platform for the

exchange of cutting edge photographic portrait works between Singapore and South Korea. This exhibition examines various ways of working in contemporary portrait photography, with the selected works focusing on issues of personal, public, and national identity. These works take on various forms, from studio portrait photography, family photo album, to highly digital manipulated images that focus on faces, bodies, forms, and objects.

Silent Coercion: Sumatra's East Coast through a Colonial Lens 23 November 2010 – 30 January 2011

The Dutch actively sponsored photographic missions during the peak of their colonial rule in the East Indies (now Indonesia) with the aim of advancing a broader political and economic expansion. Within this colonial milieu, German photographer Charles J. Kleingrothe published a portfolio titled Sumatra's O. K. (*Oost Kust*, "East Coast" in Dutch) around 1910. Originally commissioned by plantation companies, this unique album consists of 64 photogravure prints documenting various facets of colonial lives in Sumatra's East Coast. The thought-provoking images from Sumatra O.K. will be situated in their historical context, showing the role of photography in colonial discourse and exploring what the camera did not or chose not to capture.

Imprints: Designing from Memories 4 December 2010 – 1 January 2011

Twenty local industrial designers known as the Little Thoughts Group come together to explore the relevance of heritage and culture in contemporary design. Using multiple media including reclaimed objects, state-of-the-art materials and manufacturing techniques, the designers challenge the notion and origin of "Singapore Design". The Little Thoughts Group invites you to take a ride back in time as objects from Singapore's cultural past are transformed into innovative modern-day treasures, simultaneously invoking and rejecting nostalgia on the journey of creative reinvention.

Singapore Art Museum

Natee Utarit: After Painting

1 October 2010 – 13 February 2011

The Singapore Art Museum presents *After Painting*, a mid-career survey of Thai artist Natee Utarit, whose stunningly vivid paintings have for a long time been a series of dialogues and debates with elements of established Western painting traditions. The artist's recent work, however, has increasingly been commentaries on Thai society and identity, and place him among his fellow Southeast Asian artists who use visual art to reflect on the changing social-political situations in the region. This exhibition features more than 60 paintings drawn from the Singapore Art Museum, Bangkok University, the Queensland Gallery of Art as well as private collections.

Films from Thailand

15 – 23 October 2010

In conjunction with *Natee Utarit: After Painting* and *Manit Sriwanichpoom: Phenomena and Prophecies* (see below), the Moving Image Gallery presents three feature and two short film compilations by Thai filmmakers. These layered works are their respective and idiosyncratic interpretations of the contemporary Thai experience, ranging from rural superstition to urban ennui, religious schism to political unease,

and images of poetic beauty amidst modern-day struggle. Presented alongside veterans Nonzee Nimbutr and Pen-Ek Ratanaruang are up-and-coming directors such as Jakarawal Nilthamrong and Taiki Sakpisit. For list of screenings, please visit www.singaporeartmuseum.sg. Tickets cost \$10. Please email nhb_sam_programs@nhb.gov.sg or call 6332 3220.

Moving Image Gallery **15 – 23 October 2010** **Moving Image Gallery**

The Moving Image Gallery presents three features and a compilation of short films by Thai filmmakers in conjunction with *Natee Utarit: After Painting*. Depicting their idiosyncratic and energetic takes on contemporary Thai experience, these films tackle topics ranging from political struggle to folkloric belief, and religious schism to the amalgamation of cultures. Many of the works are concerned with depicting locally specific preoccupations and practices that structure much of daily life and living. This screening programme highlights the work of young, up-and-coming Thai directors. For list of screenings, please visit www.singaporeartmuseum.sg. Tickets cost \$10. Limited seating, please email nhb_sam_programs@nhb.gov.sg or call 6332 3220.

Manit Sriwanichpoom: Phenomena and Prophecies **7 October – 7 November 2010** **SAM at 8Q**

Manit Sriwanichpoom's photographs deals with themes of consumerism and other Thai social and political issues through his strategies of critical documentation, as well as staged satirical compositions of the state of Thai society. The myriad appearances, or phenomena, which his works conjure reflect the artist's belief in the power of brutal truths which surfaces at times in the form of painful prophecies. They also highlight his peculiar artistic role as one that treads on the thin line between merely recording and composing history at a time where even historical narratives are not exempt from the disguised reality of mass media constructions. Featuring more than 100 photographs from Manit's vast oeuvre, the exhibition is guest curated by Bangkok University Gallery curator Ark Fongsmut and is co-organised by the Singapore Art Museum and the Singapore International Photography Festival for the 2nd Singapore International Photography Festival. A panel discussion with Manit Sriwanichpoom, Ark Fongsmut and poet Sompong Thaweewill be held on 12 October. Admission is free but registration is required. Please email nhb_sam_programs@nhb.gov.sg or call 6332 3220.

Films from Japan **10 – 18 December 2010** **Moving Image Gallery**

The Moving Image Gallery presents a visual feast of feature films and artist documentaries in conjunction with *Trans-Cool TOKYO*. The three feature films selected alternately portray legendary tales with a postmodern flourish, depict subcultural lifestyles in louche artist neighbourhoods, and transform the gritty city into a manic dream playground. Artists Yayoi Kusama and Yoshitomo Nara, whose works are featured in the exhibition, are captured in two documentaries that chart their artistic practice and offer a rare peek into their lives. This screening programme highlights directors and artists with a strong, unique visual sense. Their works all confidently mine the contemporary and the mythic in very personal ways. For list of screenings, please visit www.singaporeartmuseum.sg. Tickets available for purchase at \$10 each at SAM at 8Q. Limited seating, please email nhb_sam_programs@nhb.gov.sg or call 6332 3220.

Trans-Cool TOKYO **19 November 2010 – 13 February 2011** **SAM at 8Q**

From Yayoi Kusama's pioneering works of Japanese Pop Art to Yasumasa Morimura's role-playing in his portraits from the 1980s, *Trans-Cool TOKYO* provides an opportunity to view works by these groundbreaking Japanese contemporary

artists. Featuring over 40 works from the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo collection, this exhibition also tells the story of how Japanese artists have established their own creative identities within the context of global pop culture. Working across all mediums, from painting and sculpture, to performance, photography and video, the featured artists have created work in response to the onset of the information age and the greater freedoms and uncertainties that are available in contemporary society. *Trans-Cool TOKYO* is co-organised by Singapore Art Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo.

Singapore Philatelic Museum

Indonesia – Land of Dance and Dragon

4 October 2010 – 4 March 2011

Land of Dance and Dragon explores the diverse beauty of Indonesia. Besides the extensive selection of indigenous flora and fauna, the archipelago offers a rich source of living traditions. Experience the splendour of Indonesia's culture – of graceful dances by masked actors and the crowd-pleasing shadow puppets – through stamps, philatelic materials and objects.

Iron Man CollARTible Exhibition

9 October – 21 November 2010

Fans of Iron Man are in for a real treat as the trusty superhero comes to the Singapore Philatelic Museum! See up close colourful philatelic materials of Iron Man, and one-of-a-kind figures created by leading designers from the USA, Japan, Korea and Hong Kong. This exhibition is a special collaboration with Hot Toys and Big Box International.

National Stamp Collecting Competition – Community Curate! Project

December 2010 – March 2011

This is a chance to view the 10 most popular entries of the National Stamp Collecting Competition 2010! See these winning exhibits put together by primary and secondary school students. The entries were awarded Gold awards at the annual national competition held in September this year.

The Originals of G.R. Lambert

2 August 2010 – 2 January 2011

This exhibition features a rare collection of original G.R. Lambert & Co. photographs from the 19th century as well as historical picture postcards from the late 19th to mid 20th century. This collection is donated by Mr Koh Seow Chuan, an avid and renowned collector in Singapore. Visitors can get a glimpse of the landscape and people of early Singapore through the eyes of GR Lambert, a famous German photographer who arrived in Singapore in 1867. Lambert opened his photographic studio in 1877, and produced the first picture postcard of Singapore in 1897.

At the Post Office - with Max & Phily

Till December 2010

Targeted at children aged 5 to 10 years, this exhibition aims to introduce children to the post office as a service provider for the community. Children can learn geography such as the location of different countries on the world map and the continents in the world. They can find out about the history of the postal system and see different types of mail boxes from around the world. Families can loan out "My Own Mail Learning Kit" which includes a weighing scale, envelopes, stamps and play money to role-play the activities at the post office such as buying stamps, and calculating postage rates according to weight and distance.

National Archives of Singapore

Joint exhibition with State Archives Administration of China: "Milestones of the China-Singapore Connection: Friendship and Cooperation, Growing from Strength to Strength"

20 – 31 October 2010

Luxe Art Museum (<http://thelam.sg/>)

In line with the 20th anniversary celebrations of Singapore-China diplomatic ties, this joint travelling exhibition presented by the National Archives of Singapore and State Archives Administration of China traces key developments in early relations between the two countries. Through photographs and archival material, visitors can learn how the seeds of friendship between Singapore and China were sown as a result of private trade missions and visits of sports teams. With mutual visits of top leaders from the mid-1970s, there was an increase in various exchanges and cooperation in the areas of economy, culture and science, among others. This eventually led to the establishment of formal diplomatic ties on 3 October 1990, a historic day for Singapore-China bilateral relations.

Seminar: "The E-Discovery Challenge: Digital Wasteland or Digital Oasis"

2 – 4 November 2010

Venue: Asian Civilisations Museum and Memories at Old Ford Factory

Managing records has become increasingly interdisciplinary in nature. Records professionals and managers not only need to be familiar with records management and preservation concepts and practices, but also need to continually seek professional development in related disciplines such as digital forensics, legal issues, cyber security, digital imaging and risk management. This is especially so for e-discovery, which is the process of identifying digital records and data for the purpose of producing evidence in litigation. Records professionals and managers are thus faced with two scenarios: a digital wasteland where records cannot be located or are not trustworthy, or a digital oasis where records can be retrieved and are admissible as trusted sources of evidence in courts. "The E-Discovery Challenge: Digital Wasteland or Digital Oasis" will address these issues from both an international and local perspective on the management of digital records.

Bencoolen & Singapore: Tales of Two Cities, Legacies of Raffles

2 November 2010

National Archives of Singapore Lobby Gallery

Jointly presented by the National Archives of Singapore and Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, this travelling exhibition traces the historic links that connect these two former colonies administered by Sir Thomas Stamford Bingley Raffles. Through rare photographs, maps and other archival documents, the exhibition brings us back to the 17th and 18th centuries, a time of power struggles between the British and Dutch for control of the East Indies that forever changed the fortunes of these two trading powers.

Preservation of Monuments Board

Of Monuments and Memories

Feast your eyes on an artistic photography exhibition by the photographers who brought you the book *Resonance Songs of our Forefathers*. Featuring Singapore's 27 National Monuments, the exhibition is a chance to learn about the built heritage of Singapore as well as the stories behind their facades. Watch out for the exhibition at Wisma Atria Shopping Centre, Woodlands Regional Library and Changi Airport. Visit www.pmb.sg for more details on the exhibition dates and venues.

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

MADE FOR SAM

From end-October 2010
SAM

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TO PRESENT TO YOU,
40 EVERYDAY OBJECTS BY
40 SINGAPOREAN DESIGNERS.
MADE FOR SAM, EACH IS
A WORK OF ART AND
WILL TAKE YOUR BREATH
AWAY. OWN THEM
BEFORE THEY GO!**

SAM is proud to present MADE FOR SAM, a new range of locally-designed products that reflect Art in everyday objects and which visitors can own and take home with them. MADE FOR SAM is a curatorial collaboration between SAM with FARM, a local cross-disciplinary design studio known for its collaborative approach, and with Hans Tan, alumnus of Design Academy Eindhoven and lecturer of Industrial Design at National University of Singapore. 40 artists and designers in Singapore were approached to create 40 unique everyday products, presented for sale in the SAM Lobby.

MADE FOR SAM is true to the nature of SAM as a contemporary art museum, reflecting the accessibility of Art and its inherent presence around all of us in everyday objects. Own a piece of art product before they disappear!



Christmas Gifts @ The Museums



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE
Old Singapore tin lunch box: \$20

SHOP FOR A PIECE OF HISTORY OR ARTWORK FOR YOUR LOVED ONES AT OUR MUSEUMS THIS HOLIDAY SEASON!
OUT OF GIFTING IDEAS? WE COME TO YOUR RESCUE WITH OUR FINEST RECOMMENDATIONS OF MUSEUM INSPIRED MERCHANDISE THAT YOU CAN'T GO WRONG WITH!

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Soul Lock pendant and chain: \$280



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"Ang Ku Kueh" notebook: \$10 - \$15



PERANAKAN MUSEUM
Kam Cheng, comes in 4 sizes:
\$145, \$165, \$180 and \$250



SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM
Walter the Rabbit: \$39



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE
Mooncake ceramic paper weight: \$18



SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM
Anthony Poon cups set (2 cups/
saucers per set): \$69.30 for 3 sets.

GIG EXPECTATIONS: Young and Originals Rock On At SHF's Finale Concerts

IMAGES: NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD

Ministry of Rock with Jatt Ali

Now in its 7th year, the Singapore HeritageFest (SHF) would be unthinkable without a sterling line-up of musical acts that rekindle fond memories as well as introduce a new generation to timeless tunes and performers. For those who missed an evening of fun and entertainment at the Campus Green of the Singapore Management University on 20th and 21st August, here's a sampling of the bands and singers whose voices and talents made each session a night to remember.

WENDI KOH

Described as a "livewire", Wendi has dazzled audiences all over Singapore and Southeast Asia with slick dance moves, powerful vocals and her "I feel good!" stage presence. Her repertoire also includes popular TV shows as an actor and as an entertainer, with recent performances including the 2004 NDP theme song "Uniquely You", headlining a Singaporean ensemble with Kumar in Berlin, and singing "Gutsy Girl" accompanied by the Singapore Symphony Orchestra on April 2004 for its 25th Anniversary Gala Ball.

THE ACOUSTIC TRIP FEATURING MEDY, BOY AND OLIVER

Led by Medardo (Medy) Audije Diaz and accompanied by Oliver Oliver and Boy T, The Acoustic Trip is a well-known Singapore group who has played gigs in Germany, the Maldives, Bali and Vietnam. The trio's music is an "unplugged" marriage of folk, rock and blues, performed with an engaging stage presence, sophisticated harmonies and a lively style.

TANIA FEATURING ZUL

Formed in 1976, this evergreen band is fronted by veteran musicians and founders Alban de Souza (vocals) and Zul Sutan (vocals/guitar). For the past 19 years, Tania has been performing cover songs from legends like Santana, the Beatles, Dire Straits, the Eagles, and many more. Apart from the frontmen, Tania's current line-up consists of Mansoor "Al-Hallaj"

(keyboard), Ibrahim Zainal (bass), Zainal Abidin (drums) and Brain Paul (sax/blues harp).

GYPSY FEATURING MEL AND JOE FERDINANDS

A pioneering band that helped introduced rock music to Singapore, Gypsy began in 1979 when five brothers got together to perform in leading local clubs including Rainbow, Peppermint Park, Time Tunnel and Sparkles.

MINISTRY OF ROCK FEATURING JATT ALI

Jatt Ali is a legendary household name in Singapore's rock music scene, with over 48 years in the field as a recording artist, composer, singer and drummer. He currently fronts his band, the Ministry of Rock, which performs at the House of Rock pub at Tanjong Pagar.

LEENA SALIM

A truly international singer-actor-comedian-show host, Leena Salim gives new meaning to the word "versatile". Her repertoire ranges from Jazz, Contemporary, R&B and Soul, through to Cabaret, and Musicals. Now based in Australia, Leena has shared the stage with the likes of the Australian Army's 1RAR jazz band in a series of tsunami charity concerts, co-hosted a daily morning radio show on North Queensland's 4ttt-FM, and produced and presented three daily music radio programs.



Wendi Koh



The Acoustic Trip

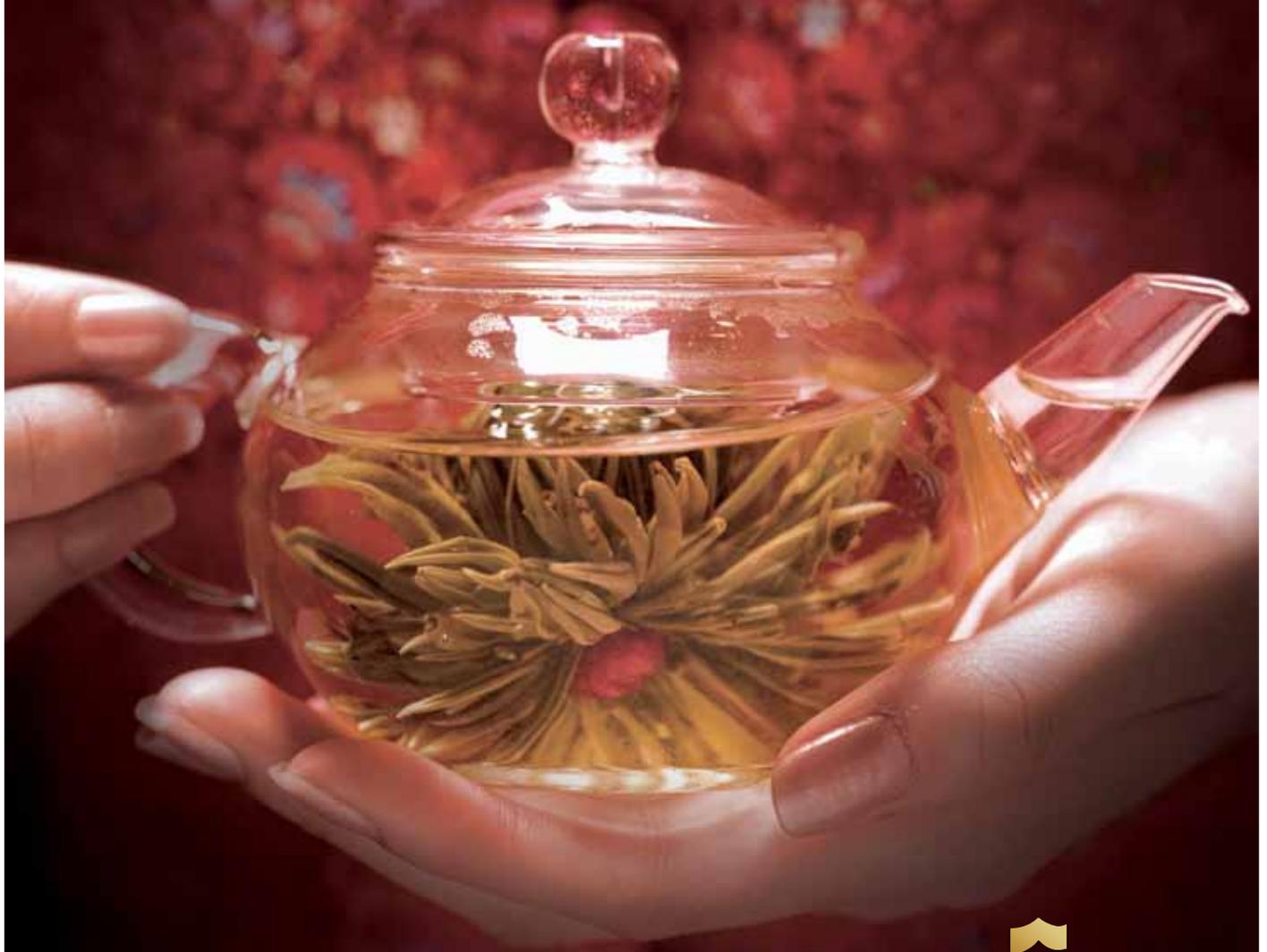


Gypsy featuring Mel and Joe Ferdinands



Leena Salim

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