

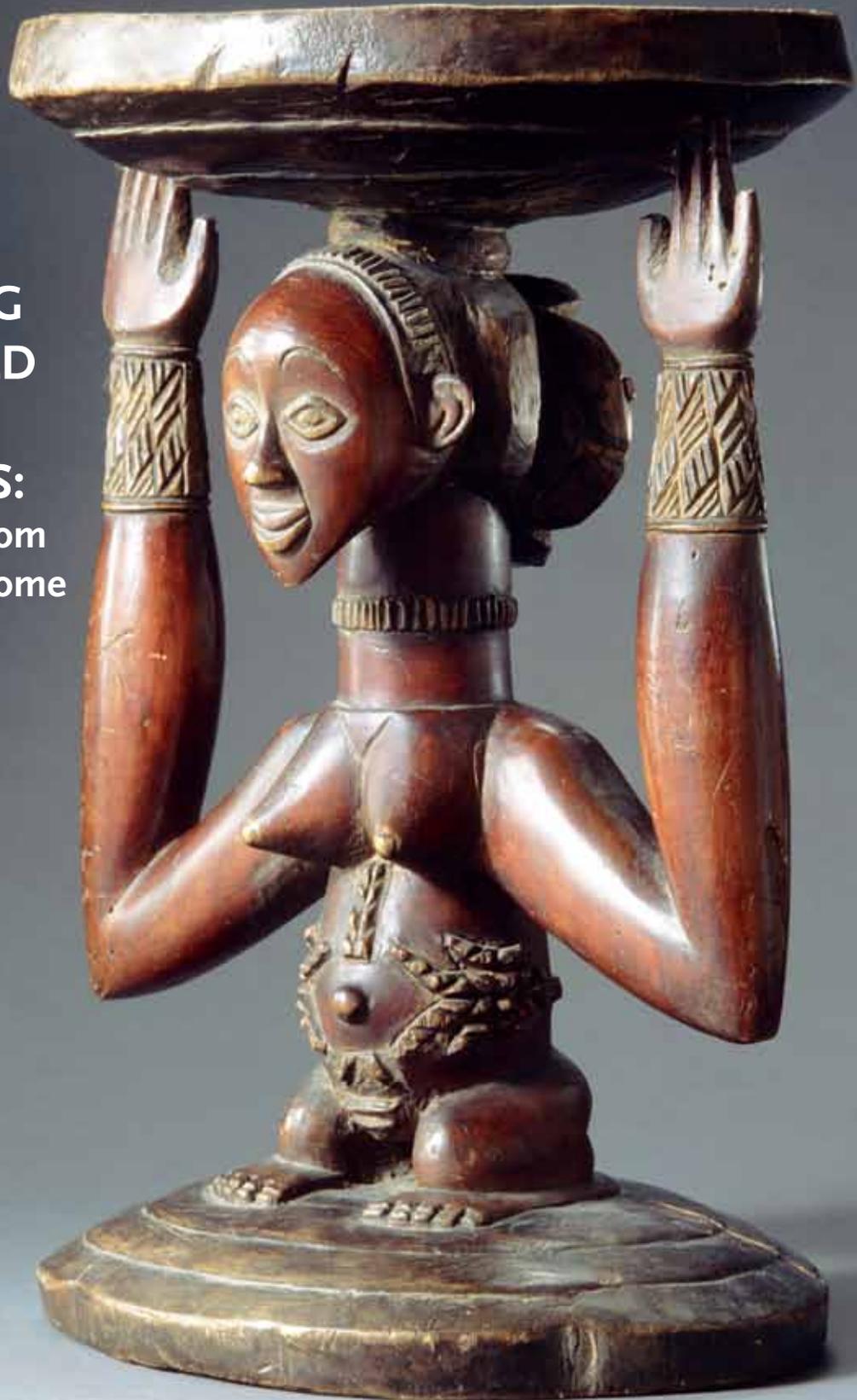
be MUSE

Vol 4 Issue 01 ISSN: 1793-5261

JANUARY - MARCH 2011

EXPLORE. DREAM. DISCOVER

**EXPLORING
THE WORLD
THROUGH
ARTEFACTS:**
Discoveries from
Afar and At Home



muse**travels**

PORT AND PEARL

Discovering Penang on Foot and Four Wheels

page 72





A CHANG
會館

順發酒莊

順發酒莊

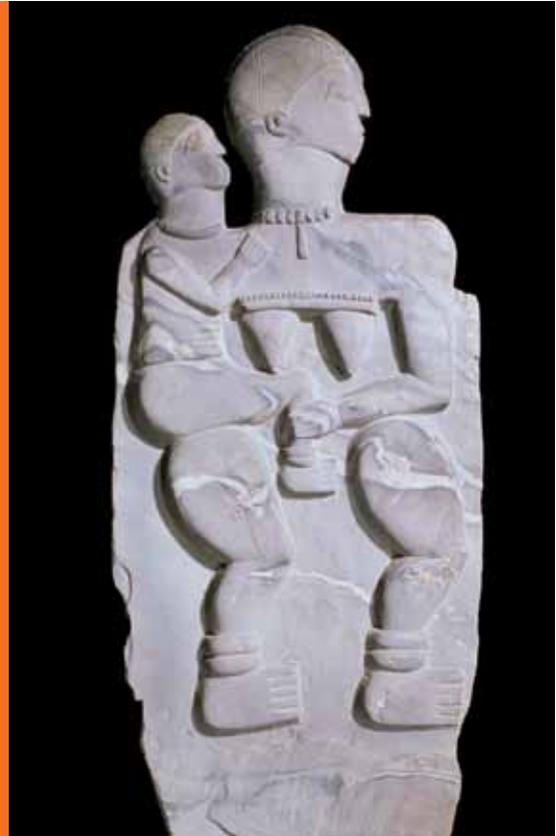
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PERDIN

JANUARY - MARCH 2011

be **MUSE**

contents



musings

12. BEAUTY IN BLACK

As the National Museum of Singapore readies a display of black dresses, Chung May Khuen reveals the history and evolution of this elegant garb from mourning attire to fashion icon.

18. CONGO RIVER: ARTS OF CENTRAL AFRICA

Clement Onn and Jenna Goh shed light on the diverse civilisations that populated the land around the Congo River and how they influenced modern artists, as the Asian Civilisations Museum unveils a new exhibition of artefacts that make no distinction between art and ritual.

28. OPEN HOUSE ON THE CITY: SINGAPORE BIENNALE 2011

Matthew Ngui provides a preview of the Singapore Biennale 2011, which will explore the theme of 'Open House' through large-scale art installations in various iconic locations in the city.

36. LAND OF DANCE AND DRAGON: THE DIVERSE BEAUTY OF INDONESIA

The Singapore Philatelic Museum celebrates the cultures of Indonesia with a dazzling display of stamps, masks and other artefacts that reveal the diversity of dances and beliefs found across this vast archipelago.

44. SILENT COERCION: SUMATRA'S EAST COAST THROUGH A COLONIAL LENS

Sung Yun-Wen of the National Museum of Singapore unravels the cultural context of a collection of colonial photographs of Sumatra in the early 20th century.

48. TO A HARE-RAISING GOOD YEAR: THE RABBIT IN MYTH AND CULTURE

Hop into the Year of the Rabbit with this exploration of the significance and symbolism of rabbits and hares in various cultures, from the origin of the Chinese zodiac to how people in America, Africa and ancient Europe viewed this furry creature.

56. CARVED IN GRANITE: THE NATURAL HISTORY OF PULAU UBIN

Marcus Chua digs into the history and natural history of Pulau Ubin, tracing the island's development as a thriving landscape of granite quarries to its present status as a haven for both wildlife and weekend warriors from the city.

64. SIGNS OF HOPE: AN UPDATE ON THE BANDED LEAF MONKEYS OF SINGAPORE

Providing a hopeful note on these endangered primates, Andie Ang shares new findings on the monkey's population and fascinating facts on their infants.



66. **CREATING THE HERITAGE ENTREPRENEUR: MILESTONES IN THE HERITAGE OF BUSINESS CONFERENCE**

Jason Chan provides a timely account of the Business Heritage Conference, which began in 2008 and has since grown into a milestone event that celebrates the marriage of heritage and creative entrepreneurship.

72. **muse travels**

PORT AND PEARL: DISCOVERING PENANG ON FOOT AND FOUR WHEELS

Newly minted as an UNESCO World Heritage Site, Penang offers a journey back in time and tasty treats in the colourful streets of Georgetown and the island's rustic coasts.

80. **musedesign**

POWERHOUSE BY THE PORT

From generating electricity to lighting up the harbourfront with parties and pomp, St James Power Station has received a makeover that serves new functions and yet stays true to its industrial heritage.

86. **musetalk**

DRAWING UPON HISTORY

In this special double bill to mark the publication of a new catalogue featuring the natural history drawings of William Farquhar, Mr G.K. Goh offers a recollection of how he acquired the drawings, which he later donated to the National Museum of Singapore, while Mr Kwa Chong Guan recounts the making and makers of the original catalogue.

06. **muselife**

News from the world of museums in Singapore.

08. **musegallery**

Learn about recent artefacts and art works acquired by our museums.

10. **museviews**

This issue, we introduce two books on Singapore artist Cheong Soo Pieng and a landmark volume featuring William Farquhar's 477 natural history drawings in colour.

92. **musecalendar**

A handy round-up of current and upcoming exhibitions and other events at the museums.

94. **museshop**

A retail showcase of merchandise inspired by heritage.

96. **museends**

AT HOME ABROAD: THOUGHTS ON TRAVELLING

Kevin Khoo shares his thoughts on the rewards of seeing the world through unfettered eyes and an open mind.

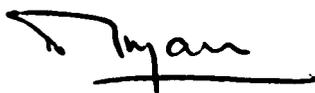
editor's musing...

It's the start of another decade of the 21st century. Over the past 10 years, we have witnessed many catastrophes and natural disasters from the fear of the Y2K bug to 9/11, the Asian Tsunami and various terrorist attacks. But despite these bad tidings, the first 10 years of the new millennium have also brought hope to the world in the form of new medical and technological discoveries that now have helped to improve lives and reduce mortality rates. We have also witnessed the power of new media which has changed the way we live, work and travel. We are now literally living in a global village where we have access to anything and anywhere at any time thanks to the Internet and new media, which is why we now have coined the term of being available 24/7.

But despite all these advances, our demand and fascination for certain things never change. For example, reading a book and feeling and flipping its pages (literally) is still very much appreciated despite the proliferation of e-Books, iPads and Kindles. Newspapers are still read in their traditional form despite the availability of online versions. And visiting museums and seeing the real thing is far more exciting and enriching than viewing 3-D renditions online! Participating in cultural events and getting hands-on experiences by walking a real heritage trail and taking in the real sights, sounds, smells and tastes of a culture is far much more enriching than taking a virtual tour of say, Chinatown! One can provide you with a teaser, but only by getting out there and experiencing a place for yourself in the real and living world will you really enjoy the benefits of what life has to offer.

So, as we welcome 2011, I hope all our readers will make a simple resolution to switch off their Facebook accounts, MSN Chats, Friendsters, mobile phones and iPhones (for just a few hours) and get up from that chair and desk, go out into the fresh air and make frequent trips to the many historic districts, monuments and museums that exist in Singapore and learn more about your and your neighbour's heritage. Get the real thing and don't settle for anything less! We have such rich heritage right in our backyard and it is a pity to want to travel the world literally and virtually to discover new cultures when we have a mini-United Nations right here in Singapore through the many exciting blockbusters brought in by the museums and the living multicultural heritage we enjoy.

On behalf of my colleagues at BeMuse, here's wishing and promising all our readers a culturally exciting year ahead and may 2011 be a rewarding, peaceful and happy year for everyone.



Ms Thangamma Karthigesu

be **MUSE**

Volume 4, Issue 1



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COVER

Stool
Luba, Democratic Republic of Congo
Collection of the Royal
Museum for Central Africa (Belgium)
Photo: H. Schneebeli
© RMCA Tervuren

BACK COVER

Greater Malay Chestnut
William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings
Collection of the National Museum of Singapore

PRINTER

alsoDominie Press

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Javanese female coolie gathering coffee.
From *Silent Coercion: Sumatra's East Coast Through A Colonial Lens*. Page 44.

Unveiling of Deng Xiaoping Commemorative Marker

“Learn from Singapore and do better than them,” declared Deng Xiaoping during his renowned tour of China’s southern provinces in November 1992.

While to the average Singaporean the late Chinese statesman may be just another world-famous political figure, few know that his connections to Singapore actually span many decades and had far-reaching effects even to this day. Deng first visited Singapore in 1920 when he was a student en route to France. The next time he came was during his official visit as the leader of China in 1978 when he was deeply impressed by how Singapore had transformed into a modern garden city, a stark contrast with his poor first impressions in 1920. His 1978 visit also laid the foundation for the strong ties between the two countries that continued until today.



As part of the celebrations for the 20th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Singapore and the People’s Republic of China, the National Heritage Board (NHB) collaborated with the Chinese Embassy to erect the Deng Xiaoping Commemorative Marker. Over 100 invited guests congregated at the Asian Civilisations Museum Green on Sunday, 14 November 2010 for the official unveiling ceremony of the marker. Two guests-of-honour from the respective countries, Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew and Vice-President Xi Jinping of the People’s Republic of China, graced the event and jointly unveiled the marker.

The unveiling ceremony garnered much media attention as it was one of the momentous events attended by Vice President Xi Jinping during his 3-day official visit to Singapore. It is noteworthy that this visit marked his first official visit to Singapore in his capacity as the Chinese Vice-President; thus the unveiling ceremony was extensively reported by both the international and local media.



The Deng Xiaoping Commemorative Marker is part of an existing NHB programme to honour eminent overseas personalities with connections to Singapore. Titled “Friends to Our Shores”, the programme erects markers for individuals who had visited Singapore, had contributed significantly to their countries and are revered by their people. Started in 2003, the programme has marked three other personalities: Joseph Conrad, the Polish-British writer, Ho Chi Minh, the first President of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam and Jose Rizal, the national hero of the Philippines. All four markers are located in the vicinity of the Singapore River. While featuring the contribution and achievements of these luminaries, these markers also highlight the significant role that Singapore has played in the regional as well as world history.

The key feature of the Deng Xiaoping marker is a bronze bust of Deng commissioned by the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China. The bust is sculpted by Mr Li Xiang Qun (李象群), a leading Chinese sculptor who has won numerous national and international awards. Deng’s signature is engraved below the bust. The marker text, in English and Chinese, documents Deng’s early life, his political career, the “Reform and Opening Up” policy he launched, his 1978 official visit to Singapore and how Singapore inspired him as a development model for China. At the back of the marker, his famous quote is inscribed: “Development is of overriding importance” (发展才是硬道理). Deng Xiaoping will always be remembered as the chief architect who transformed China into an economic giant as well as a friend to Singapore who helped establish strong ties between Singapore and China.

Two Nations, Two Decades of Ties

Singapore and China commemorated 20 years of diplomatic relations with an art and cultural showcase from 20-31 October 2010. This showcase comprised two exhibitions: a photo exhibition on the countries' early interaction entitled *Milestones of the Singapore-China Connection*; and a visual feast of China's finest contemporary oil paintings in *Spirit and Character*.

Through the photo exhibition jointly presented by the National Archives of Singapore and State Archives Administration of China, visitors traced key events and the forging of friendship between the two countries, starting from the early days of Singapore's independence to the establishment of diplomatic ties. This photo exhibition had previously travelled to two locations in China: Shanghai in May 2010, where it was viewed by Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew and PRC Politburo Member and Central Organisation Department Minister Li Yuanchao; and Beijing in August 2010, where it was viewed by Singapore's President S R Nathan.

Over at *Spirit and Character*, an extensive display of 50 Chinese contemporary oil paintings presented the scope and depth of China's art and cultural scene. The exhibition featured works by many of China's renowned artists such as Wang Yidong, Yang Feiyun and He Duoling, and also offered insights into the current trend of the new generation artists.

This commemorative event was made possible by the mutual efforts of the Ministry of Information, Communications and

the Arts (MICA), Singapore, and the Chinese Ministry of Culture. With such meaningful engagements between the two countries, the stage looks set for us to pursue more opportunities in achieving stronger bilateral ties and greater mutual understanding of our history, art and culture.



From left: Guest-of-Honour Mr Lui Tuck Yew (Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts) and H.E. Mr Wei Wei (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China) on a tour of the exhibition.



From left to right: Ms Tresnawati Pihadi (General Manager, SPM), His Excellency Mr Wardana, Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia, Her Excellency Ms Minda Calaguian-Cruz, Ambassador of the Philippines, Mr Daniel Teo (Chairman, SPM), Ms Elaine Ng (Deputy CEO, NHB), Mr Hanung Nugraha, Third Secretary, Information, Social & Cultural Affairs, Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia.

On 8 October 2010, the exhibition *Indonesia – Land of Dance and Dragon* opened at the Singapore Philatelic Museum (SPM). The Guest-of-Honour, His Excellency Mr Wardana, Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia, and other guests enjoyed and participated in an evening of music. The Singapore Indonesian School music ensemble kicked off the event with a selection of feet tapping jazzy music such as *Sway* and the traditional classic *Bengawan Solo*. The exhibition highlights the importance of dance in Indonesian culture and its presence in practically all rites of passage. In addition to stamps, covers and postcards, there is a selection of *Topeng* and *Wayang Wong* masks, *Wayang Golek* and *Wayang Kulit* puppets on loan from Setia Darma House of Masks and Puppets, Bali. The exhibition runs till March 2011.

Launch of SPM Exhibition 'Indonesia – Land of Dance and Dragon'

ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

Yellow brocade dragon robe

Kangxi period (1662-1722),

Qing dynasty

China

Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum



This brocade robe features nine dragons amid stylised clouds in shades of blue, red, green and ochre, reserved on a rich yellow ground. The political and social importance of dress is seen through the rich symbolism of this robe. The nine dragons are five-clawed, a type reserved for the emperor and his immediate family. In Chinese culture, dragons were associated with the power of creation as they would emerge from hibernation in spring and bring rain to renew life on earth. They were often depicted soaring among the clouds, mountains and waves—a reference to the universe, of which the emperor was central. Nine was a favoured number as it signified longevity.

This type of robe, known as *jifu* or ‘auspicious attire’, was worn on semi-formal occasions. The tailoring reflects the influence of Manchu nomadic garments. The Manchus, who conquered China and established the Qing dynasty in 1644, took pride in their horse-riding and archery skills. Some characteristics of Qing dragon robes that were probably derived from earlier Manchu attire are the tapered close-fitting sleeves, ‘horse-hoof’ cuffs, and vertical slits at the front, back and sides of the garment. The Chinese-inspired patterning integrated with Manchu dress elements of the robes is an illustration of the Manchu style of governance. The Qing leadership sought a balance between assimilation and the enforcement of cultural differences between the conquerors and the conquered.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE

Auricon Pro 600 16 mm sound camera

1960s

Donated by Willie Phua Tin Tua

Collection of the National Museum of Singapore



The recent update of the National Museum of Singapore’s Photography Gallery includes a feature on veteran Singaporean news cameraman Willie Phua (b. 1928). Phua’s film coverage for Radio Television Singapore, Visnews (now Reuters Television) and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation led him to capture most of the major events in Asia from the 1960s to the early 1990s. In particular,

his footage of the ‘Tank Man’ protestor at Tiananmen Square in 1989 remains deeply iconic.

A highlight of the gallery’s showcase of film cameras used in the course of Phua’s career is the Auricon Pro 600 camera. The large and heavy 16 mm camera was well known in the 1960s for its capability of recording sound on film without the need for a separate audio recorder. Notably, Phua used this camera in his coverage of the war in Vietnam in 1972 together with German correspondent Hanns Friedrichs. The two were filming on board a patrol boat along the Saigon River when they came under fire by the Viet Cong. This was also the camera of choice in Phua’s footage of the coronation of Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei in 1968.



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE

Singer sewing machine

1960s-1970s

Donated by Eng Tow

Collection of the National Museum of Singapore

This is a Singer portable electric sewing machine with a carrying case and various attachments which belonged to Eng Tow, a renowned local mixed media artist. The sewing machine is a Singer 226U1 226U3 model which was manufactured sometime in the 1960s in Japan. It was used by Eng Tow at one point in her career.

Born in Singapore in 1947, Eng Tow is said to be one of the most outstanding local female artists to emerge in the 1980s. She began her art education at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts in Singapore, after which she furthered her studies in the U.K., obtaining a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) from the Winchester School of Art at Hampshire in 1972 and a Master of Arts from the Royal College of Art, London in 1974. Her early works revolved around textile art, which involves the manipulation of fabrics and textiles, either by sewing and/or applying colour. Her venture into printmaking and papermaking in the mid-1980s resulted in a cross-disciplinary approach to her later works. Eng Tow’s works, which are her impressions of memories and experiences, have been showcased in numerous solo and group exhibitions all over the world.

SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

Suzann Victor

Expense of Spirit in a Waste of Shame

1994

Installation: light bulbs, cables, control unit, broken glass, motors, aluminium rods, mirrors,
Dimensions variable (5 sets)



A compelling, 'performative' installation, *Expense of Spirit in a Waste of Shame* entralls the viewer with its mesmerising sounds and moving elements. The installation consists of 4 to 6 long sets of light bulbs; each set has 12 lights paired with 12 elliptical mirrors. Controlled by baby rocker motors, the bulbs descend towards the mirrors, producing a chorus of rhythmic, 'clanging' sounds, every time the bulbs hit the mirrors. Like doomed lovers, the bulbs and mirrors appear locked in a never-ending cycle of arrival and departure, and each narcissistic light dives to catch its reflection, only to break off after a fleeting moment's contact.

Suzann Victor is regarded one of Singapore's foremost contemporary artists, and has garnered significant international attention, having exhibited on a number of high-profile platforms, such as the 49th Venice Biennale. The former Artistic Director of 5th Passage Ltd., Victor started her practice as an award-winning painter but is now best known for her visually striking, sophisticated installations. Her works often investigate the post-colonial condition, as well as the notion of the abject, the absent body and 'body-machine', as well as the dynamics of female sexuality within patriarchal society.



THE NATIONAL ART GALLERY, SINGAPORE

Koeh Sia Yong

The Orchestra (Kang Le)

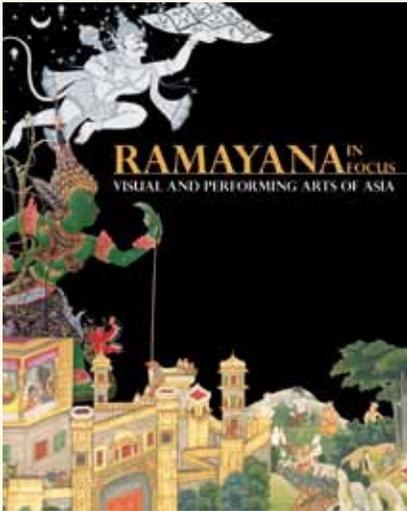
1968

Oil on canvas, 110 x 83 cm

Collection of the National Heritage Board

Koeh Sia Yong (b. 1938) was a member of the Equator Art Society, one of the largest art collectives in Singapore in the 1960s and 1970s. This society consisted of individuals who were influenced by the prevailing social and political thinking in Singapore's Chinese community during the period.

The Equator Art Society was actively involved in the promotion of various forms of art, such as the visual arts, literature and music. *The Orchestra (Kang Le)* shows a group of Equator Art Society members in a Chinese orchestra assembly practice session. In line with the strong sentiments of social equality within the Chinese community during the period, the artist expressed his strong feelings of revolution through the inclusion of socialist slogans in this painting. The red text visible in the upper right background on the wall writes 'The People' (人民) and 'Revolution' (革命). The small painting on the background wall also depicts revolutionary fighters with a red flag, and is likely based on the typical propaganda paintings produced in China during the Cultural Revolution period. The painting was never completed, and a figure on the left edge of the painting remains unpainted.

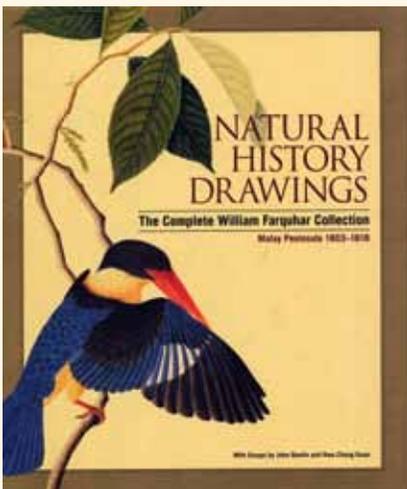


RAMAYANA IN FOCUS: Visual and Performing Arts of Asia

Edited by Dr Gauri Parimoo Krishnan
Published by the Asian Civilisations Museums
S\$70 (excl. GST) Available in major bookstores and ACM Museum Shop
Soft cover. 232 pp. 251 illustrations

Ramayana in Focus: Visual and Performing Arts of Asia provides insight into the *Ramayana* traditions in Asia at a glance. It will appeal to those interested in *Ramayana* studies, Asian literature, art and cultural history and contemporary culture in Asia.

This richly illustrated volume of twenty essays from reputed international scholars on *Ramayana* covers a wide range of topics on literary, visual, performing and contemporary arts: *Ramayana* in Sanskrit Hindu culture, in Chinese and Japanese literature and arts; the royal murals of Phnom Penh and Bangkok; the delicate carvings on Javanese and Khmer temples; embroidered shawls from Bengal; traditional Indian paintings from Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh; the performing traditions of *Wayang Kulit Siam* in Malaysia, Sundanese *Wayang Golek* and Balinese *Wayang Wong* and *Cak* dance; interpretation of the *Ramayana* in Javanese and Indian dances in the early to mid 20th century; *Ramayana* in contemporary Indian advertisements, films and television serials and contemporary Indonesian films and politics.



NATURAL HISTORY DRAWINGS The Complete William Farquhar Collection, Malay Peninsula 1803-1818

With Essays by John Bastin and
Kwa Chong Guan
Captions by Hassan Ibrahim and
Morten Strange
Published by Editions Didier Millet /
National Museum of Singapore
Hardcover: 335 pages.

Reviewed by Iskander Mydin.

While William Farquhar, first British Resident and Commandant of Singapore, lost his struggle with the English East India Company's Directors to be acknowledged in the end as a founder of the Singapore entrepôt, his collection of 477 natural history drawings from the Malay Peninsula was preserved and is an enduring legacy of his career in the East. This is the first time that his collection has been published in a single, compact volume. Each drawing has been depicted in colour based on the original and with an accompanying caption. With reference to the latter, of particular interest is the amount of contextual information provided on the drawings. They range, for example, from the uses of a depicted plant or tree species to whether a particular bird or animal species has become extinct; and also indication of some species which were actually discovered by Farquhar but which were attributed to Raffles.

In addition, the publication contains essays and summary notes by specialists who approach the collection from various angles. These include a historical overview of Farquhar's career and his interests in natural history and in collecting; an analysis of

the documentation of natural history in the East Indies and the creative process by which the Chinese artists who were commissioned by Farquhar undertook their task of presentation or representation; and summaries which serve as chapter openings to the categories of species in the collection. As a result, a more nuanced perspective of Farquhar and his collection emerges than would otherwise be the case if the publication contained only a reproduction of the drawings and nothing else.

With this publication and with the layers of presentation, we are in a sense brought back to the multi-dimensional aspect of natural history as it was practised in the past. The publication can thus be read and appreciated at various levels: as a visual album on its own; as a reference work featuring the complete collection with essays, notes, bibliography and index; and as a contemporary reminder that just over two hundred years ago, such drawings were well-sought after products in the hybrid port cultures of colonial Southeast Asia.

CHEONG SOO PIENG: VISIONS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

Edited by Yeo Wei Wei

Contributors: Grace Tng, Seng Yu Jin, Yeo Wei Wei

S\$42.31 (before GST)

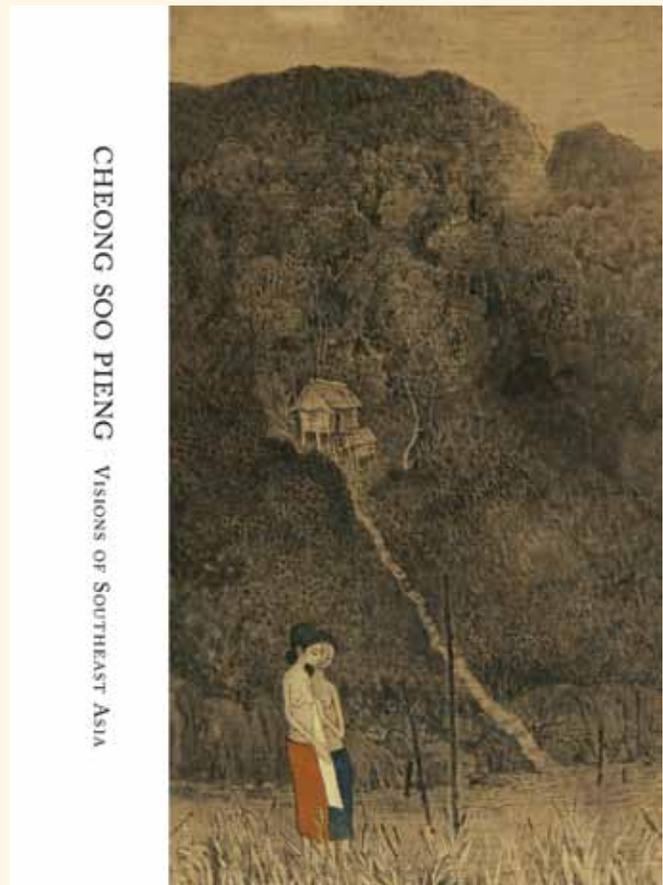
Available in major bookstores and SAM Museum Shop

Softcover. 280 pp. 94 colour plates.

Cheong Soo Pieng was a pioneer artist who created visually fresh pictures of Southeast Asia's landscapes and people. By marrying the artistic traditions of the East and the West, Soo Pieng broke new ground in the way the tropics were portrayed.

Common Southeast Asian subjects — a fisherman's *kelong*, two *sarong*-clad women on the way to the market, a group of people busy drying fish, the graceful figure of a Balinese dancer — take on new stylised forms through Soo Pieng's deft use of pictorial devices and techniques from different cultures and traditions such as Chinese ink painting, Western oil painting, Cubism, geometric abstraction and *wayang kulit*.

Part of an Asian Artists Series planned by the National Art Gallery, Singapore, this book is the first of its kind on Soo Pieng. The 94 colour plates present the reader with the breadth and complexity of this Nanyang artist's extensive oeuvre. The chapters include a wealth of personal photographs as well as the latest research on the artist. Pictures of recently unearthed drawings, sketches, watercolours and woodcut prints shed further light on Soo Pieng's personal philosophy and artistic ambitions.



SALTED FISH

Written by Yeo Wei Wei

Illustrated by Ye Shufang

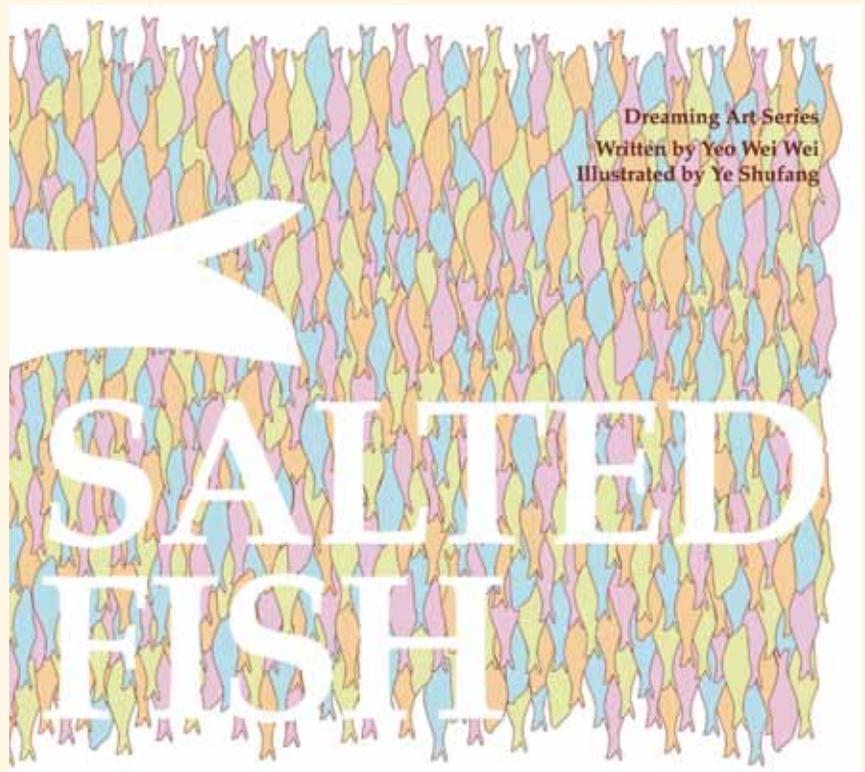
S\$16.10 (incl. GST)

Available in Major Bookstores

48 pp.

Lynn is visiting the National Art Gallery for the first time with her favourite toy Cotton Bunny. Both of them notice a funny smell in one of the galleries. The smell seems to be coming from one of the paintings! Lynn and Cotton Bunny are about to embark on a journey that they will never forget, a journey where art, memory, and the present meet.

Salted Fish is the first title in the Dreaming Art Series where iconic works by Singaporean artists feature in original stories with accompanying illustrations.



BEAUTY IN BLACK

“BLACK – THE MOST POPULAR AND THE MOST CONVENIENT AND THE MOST ELEGANT OF ALL COLOUR. YOU CAN WEAR BLACK AT ANY TIME. YOU CAN WEAR IT AT ANY AGE. YOU MAY WEAR IT ON ANY OCCASION. A ‘LITTLE BLACK FROCK’ IS ESSENTIAL TO A WOMAN’S WARDROBE. I COULD WRITE A BOOK ABOUT BLACK.”

CHRISTIAN DIOR, 1954

French couturier Christian Dior best described the appeal of black in a modern woman’s wardrobe. Suitable for almost all occasions, black in fashion, in the guise of the “little” black dress, has been embraced by women all over the world since the early 20th century. Some of the most quoted reasons for wearing black are, it is versatile, “safe” and easy to wear, elegant, respectable and understated. Black is often seen at black tie events, funerals and at work. It is also the “uniform” for some graduates, certain religious figures, professionals like lawyers and judges, classical musicians and subculture groups like Punk and Goth.

Beauty in Black attempts to examine why women and fashion designers in general love black through a display of black dresses that date from the 1950s to the 2000s. The collection, on exhibit for the first time at the National Museum of Singapore, comprises acquisitions and donations made since 2004 and include creations by leading Western fashion designers like Cristóbal Balenciaga, Hubert de Givenchy, Pierre Cardin, Azzedine Alaïa, Karl Lagerfeld amongst others as well as Singaporean designers such as Benny Ong and Thomas Wee. It also consists of garments made locally for Singaporean women during the 1950s and 1960s before ready-to-wear became popular in the 1970s. The sheer variety of fabrics, styles and effects presented in these black dresses allow visitors to examine closely the creative works and skills of these selected designers.

THE MODERN BLACK DRESS

Prior to the 1900s, black was largely regarded in the West as the “garb of mourning and woe and the emblem of death and destruction.”¹ Similarly in Asia, including Singapore, it was taboo, inauspicious and closely associated to mourning. Black was only popularly accepted as a colour that symbolises fashion, modernity and productivity amongst women in the West in the 1920s.

Two major events – Britain’s ‘Black Ascot’ (1910) and the First World War (1914–1918) were credited for changing the cultural status of black. The former referred to the royal racing event of 1910 which saw participants parading in black finery even as the nation mourned the death of King Edward II, hence raising the status of the colour black with luxury and *haute couture*. When war broke out in 1914, women adopted the wearing of

Black acts as a canvas for the tailor as he applied his embroidery skills on this 1960s cheongsam. Donated by Irene Hoe. Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.





Designer Benny Ong manipulates two extreme colours, black (absorption of all light) and white (reflection of all light) to enhance the bow detailing and the symmetrical silhouette of this 1987 bustier cocktail dress. Donated by Benny Ong. Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.



The black dress comes in various forms. It can be severe, fun or glamorous, hence allowing women the option to choose the appropriate look they want to project at various occasions. Left: Back view of the Guitar Dress by Karl Lagerfeld for Chloe, 1983.; Centre: Hardy Amies's taffeta silk dress, 1950s; Right: Hubert de Givenchy's green and black ensemble with gold embroidery, 1952. Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.



Coco Chanel in a black dress she designed herself, 1935. Copyright of Getty Images.

the simple black mourning attire as a result of economic constraints and the need to be mobile and productive at work. This change was documented in both elite and the working class fashion publications by the 1920s which frequently portrayed models in black dresses and referred to these as fashionable, elegant and distinct.²

One of the most famous style icons associated with the black dress is the French designer, Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel (1883-1971). In 1926, she declared black to be the only appropriate colour for a standardised, economically perfect attire.³ Although the “little” black dress was already widely adopted by women from the working and middle classes as both a working garment and a party wear before 1926, the image of Chanel in a simple “little black dress” and a bobbed hairdo made her synonymous with the garment. Her look was interpreted as stylish and liberating and it soon became copied by women of all classes. By the late 1920s, the black dress had become a staple in the modern woman’s wardrobe.

Over the years, there are some notable fashion designers who are indissolubly associated with black. One of them is Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895-1972), who according to Jacqueline Dermornex (the author of *Balenciaga*, 1989), observed that ‘every collection featured the discreet appearance of a little black dress made entirely by Balenciaga.’⁴ Not one who was interested in following fashion trends, Balenciaga saw black as most appropriate in his quest to create dramatic and timeless classics using different types of fabrics and details. For example, he liked to layer black lace over satin so as to give the dress texture and emphasise the pattern of the lace. The designer’s Spanish roots also provided him with much inspiration for black in fashion. Featured in *Beauty in Black* is a 1960s satin sleeveless tunic dress overlaid in black lace completely embroidered with sequins and jet-like beads highlighted with silver lurex threads. It comes with a matching matador cape, which reminds one of the traditional costume worn by bullfighters in Spain.

Until the late 1980s, Japanese fashion designer Rei Kawakubo (b.1942) had never worked with other colours except black since the launch of her label, Comme des Garçons (1975). For the designer, black helps to conceal the shape of the female body, which is of absolute contrast to the taste and aesthetics of western European fashion. In 1983, her fashion collection shocked Paris and the fashion world. According to Suzy Menkes, fashion writer and Editor for International Herald Tribune since 1988, she sent “down the catwalk, marching to a rhythmic beat like a race of warrior women, came models wearing ink-black coat dresses.”⁵ Although most fashion journalists then found her black collection depressing, Kawakubo commented that she felt most comfortable in black. “I don’t understand the term ‘body conscious’ very well. I enter the process from the clothing and from the feeling of volume you get from the clothing, which is



In the 1960s, the youth revolution took the world by storm and black dresses were no longer restricted to older woman. This tailored black mini dress with a bolero laced jacket is embellished with sequins at the bodice, making it extremely young and trendy. Donated by Chin May Nah. Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.

CATCH BEAUTY IN BLACK AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE, BALCONY, FROM 16 MARCH TO 13 JUNE 2011.

probably different from the pleasure Western women take in showing the shapes of their bodies.”⁶ The preference for black as a non colour which does not interfere with the form and identity of the wearer prevailed in Kawabuko’s designs even when she started to experiment with other colours after 1988.

The iconic status of black, as seen in fashion, is reflected through its various forms in *Beauty in Black*. The first group of austere and unadorned black dresses permits the visitors to admire the pieces as they are, characterised only by their cut, drape, pleats and seams. This concept of the plain black dress is probably similar to the one advocated by Chanel in the 1920s.

Placed next to this group is a set of embellished black dresses made in various fabrics. Very often, designers take advantage of light descending on monochrome black designs with embroidery and needlework to create eye-catching pieces that allow the wearer to stand out in the crowd. For example, the dull black cheongsam can be transformed into a glamorous evening wear using gold sequins embroidered on the dress. Fabrics such as lace and velvet also have the ability to translate the otherwise austere black dress into a luxury wear appropriate for formal black tie events.

Sometimes, colours are employed to break the severity of black (which absorbs all light). Not only do colours help to liven up the dress but they also assist the designer to emphasise the graphic character of the outfit. For example, Singaporean fashion designer Benny Ong used two contrasting colours, black and white in his 1987 taffeta silk cocktail bustier dress to highlight its silhouette.

Corresponding to these various groups of dresses is an ensemble of cheongsam worn by Singaporean women from the 1950s to 1980s. Singapore’s rapid development as a modern and industrialised nation at the end of Second World War resulted in the growth of an increasingly westernised society. As more and more Singaporean women became educated and stepped out of their homes to work, they became exposed to western influences. A major indication of this phenomenon is the clothes they wore. While some women began to prefer western frocks to traditional garments, others adapted the figure-revealing silhouette popular in the West into their previously loose fitting traditional garments.

In 1961, the simple, sleeveless sheath dress worn by socialite Holly Golightly (played by Audrey Hepburn) in the movie *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* became the most famous little black dress in the history of cinema. Black made its way into youth fashion by the 1960s and was constantly featured in Optical Art and geometric dresses. *Beauty in Black* demonstrates that women’s affections for the black dress did not waver over the years, despite constant changes in fashion trends and the numerous transformations it underwent. Black, in fashion, had remained and will continue to be a modern Singaporean woman’s “best friend”, like everywhere else.

ENDNOTES:

- 1 Steele, Valerie. *The Black Dress*. New York: Collins Design: 2007, p. 10
- 2 *The Times*, March 26, 1923
- 3 Buxbaum, Gerda. (ed) *Icons of Fashion The 20th Century*. New York: Prestel Verlag, 2005, p. 27
- 4 Mendes, Valerie. *Dressed in Black*. London: V&A Publications, 1999, p. 71
- 5 Steele, Valerie. *The Black Dress*. New York: Collins Design: 2007, p. 20
- 6 Kawamura, Yuniya. *The Japanese Revolution in Paris Fashion*, Oxford: Berg Publisher, 2004, p. 137

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CONGO RIVER

arts of central africa

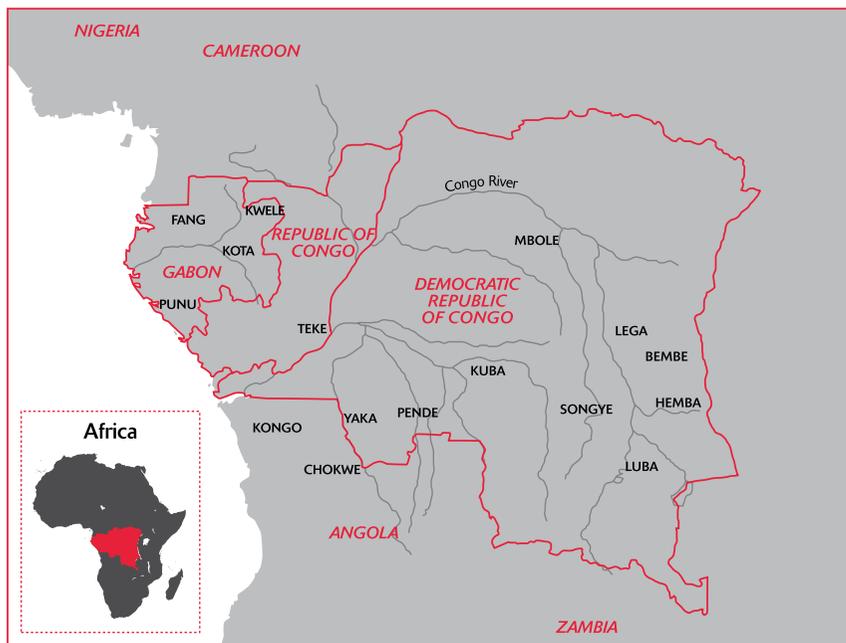
Experience the Cultures of the Congo at the Asian Civilisations Museum

Africa, the second-largest continent on Earth, covers an area the combined land mass of Europe, North America and China. It is an enormous land mass rich in geographic and cultural diversity, populated by peoples whose histories date to ancient times. Interactions between its innumerable ethnic groups have created remarkably rich traditions as well as an artistic heritage filled with history and symbolism. Yet whether in terms of size, population or cultural diversity, Africa remains an emotionally foreign location to most Singaporeans.

Jointly organised by the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) and the musée du quai Branly (MQB), Paris, Congo River: Arts of Central Africa marks the first showcase of MQB's African collections in Singapore – the result of a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2009 to intensify cultural cooperation and exchanges between France and Singapore. This jointly organised exhibition runs for four months from 10 December 2010 to 10 April 2011. Featuring over 100 sculptures, masks and other beautifully crafted objects from well known institutions such as musée du quai Branly, Paris; Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren; the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden and musée national Picasso, Paris, the exhibition is a once-in-a-lifetime visual feast for our visitors and an opportunity to experience the rich artistic traditions behind these masterpieces.

Mask
Songye, Democratic Republic of Congo
20th century
Collection of musée du quai Branly
Gift of Webster Plass
© musée du quai Branly, photo Sandrine Expilly





The continent of Africa is dominated by two immense rivers, the Nile and the Congo. Winding for 4,700 kilometres through central Africa, the Congo River passes through many different landscapes, from lush equatorial forests in the north to broad savannahs in the south. For thousands of years, the Congo River has also connected people; as the river carried goods and trade, it also linked culture and art. The majority of the people living around the Congo River and the nearby Ogooué River speak the Bantu family of languages.

Dating back to more than 3000 years ago, the Bantu-speaking people migrated southward into central Africa from Nigeria. There were two large waves which resulted in one of the most significant mass migrations and cultural transmissions in human history. The geographical environments where these people settled down often shaped their perception of the world, expressed through their politics, traditions and belief systems. Powerful kingdoms ruled the open savannahs, such as the celebrated Kongo kingdom; whilst independent groups such as the Fang and Kota lived in dense equatorial forests, governed by lineage groups or communal organisations. In spite of localised differences, these peoples remained tied together not only by the Bantu language, but also in certain commonalities in their art.

The exhibition *Congo River: Arts of Central Africa* explores the common

artistic heritage of the Bantu-speaking peoples in three broad themes: face masks shaped generally like hearts; statues of ancestors; and the representations of females. The exhibition also includes a section on African art's impact on the larger world. In the late 19th century, European collectors and artist were struck by the visual power of African sculpture. The stylised human forms found in Congo sculptures inspired leading artists to venture beyond naturalism. One such artist was Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), who avidly collected African art. A selection of his works is presented in the exhibition to allow visitors to witness Africa's influence in the development of Picasso's Modernist style.

MASKS IN THE FORM OF HEARTS

Masks in the general shape of a heart can be found all along the Congo River and the Ogooué River to the west. Such masks, mainly of wood or ivory, are usually made by communities living in equatorial rainforests. The forehead and cheeks frame a heart-shaped space that is usually painted white, a colour associated with the realm of ancestors. The white pigment, called *mpemba*, is made from powdered kaolin, a white clay collected from riverbanks.

A mask would usually be worn at rituals and performances, together with a costume made of leaves, vegetable fibres or textiles. Performances would be accompanied by chants and music. Masked dances were not just

entertainment but also served to teach moral values, unify a community, drive away evil spirits, cure sickness, or carry out justice. The wearer of a mask could be transformed into another being associated with supernatural spirits, such as ancestors, heroes or nature. Masked performances were usually carried out during rites of passage (when children become adults, or elders become ancestors) or during ceremonies marking the passage of time or the agricultural cycle.

One highlight in this section is a Kwele mask framed by a pair of long animal horns, representative of benign forest spirits known as *ekuk*. The horns may be those of the antelope – an important game animal for the Kwele. A skilled sculptor used empty spaces and faceted surfaces to give depth and complexity to the mask. The Kwele associated the forest with the world of spirits or *ekuk*, who acted as intermediaries between the village and spiritual world. The white paint on the masks was associated with light and clarity, forces that symbolised the *ekuk*'s ethereal nature and ability to combat evil spirits. As supernatural beings, *ekuk* were above mortal concerns and could settle disputes amongst villagers.

These *ekuk* masks were used during village ceremonies known as *beete* that were held in times of need to unify the village against a crisis, like poor hunting or an epidemic. A variety of dances were held during the *beete* ceremony. In some, the audience participated to foster a sense of unity. Before the ceremonies, young men would hunt, another activity promoting camaraderie. At the end of the ritual, antelope meat and intestines contributed to a ritual stew that was consumed by the whole village.

As such, African masks and other artworks had a utilitarian purpose in daily life. They were not art made for art's sake, but played a vital role in the fate of the individual and the community. An effective object could secure a successful crop, appear at funerals to comfort the grieving, avert evil forces, or serve as entertainment. Such functionality differentiated African art from a Western understanding of art, which prioritised form and visual aesthetic. African art, by and large, was intricately connected to and



Mask with Encircling Horns
 Kwele, Gabon
 Early 20th century
 Collection of musée du quai Branly
 Gift of Dr Pautchenko
 © musée du quai Branly, photo Sandrine Expilly

widely used in all aspects of daily life. In their original context, these objects were replaced by new ones when they became worn. Sadly, many of the traditions recorded by historians and anthropologists may have faded today. No one can be sure if these activities and rituals are still practised in those parts of Africa. Many of them would be meaningless in present-day Africa whilst some have found new purpose in recent times.

The disc mask from the Teke-Tsaayi community, a model of the versatility and extreme abstraction of a human face, is an example of a mask that has

lost its original context of use and taken on a new mantle in its rebirth. In its original context, this mask was worn for *kidumu* dances that were performed to ceremonially assert and maintain the group's social and political structures. The mask is divided into two parts at eye level. The upper part protrudes slightly outwards, with narrow slits for the eyes on either side of the small nose to allow the dancer to see. The masked dancers also wore a ring of feathers and a collar of raffia fibre. Often the dancers were young men who performed strenuous acrobatic dances that included cartwheels.

Kidumu dance declined when French colonial powers began moving into the upper Ogooué region at the beginning of the 20th century and people converted to Christianity. Yet in 1963, the dance was re-created with newly made masks to celebrate the inauguration of a railway line. Since then, the *kidumu* dance has been held for entertainment, and new masks have been made using traditional as well as new designs.

ANCESTOR VENERATION

Ancestor veneration is an important element of central African culture. Vested with mystical powers and authority, ancestors could be called



Reliquary Figure
Fang, Gabon
20th century
Collection of musée du quai Branly
© musée du quai Branly,
photo Michel Urtado, Thierry Ollivier

upon to look after their living descendants. Various communities preserved the remains of prominent ancestors – chiefs, warriors, mothers and formidable women – which were stored in bark boxes, woven baskets, or in the cavities of wooden figures. The Fang peoples of Gabon produced among the best-known and highly-regarded examples of this genre. Both northern and southern Fang styles are evident in the exhibition: the northern Fang only carved full standing figures, while southern Fang styles have an imposing head with ornate coiffure.

In rituals to honour ancestors, Fang reliquary figures were placed on top of bark cylindrical boxes containing the skulls and bones of revered ancestors. The bones were thought to provide power, wealth and protection to the clan by retaining the deceased's spiritual essence and serving as a tangible medium for communicating with their spirits. The number of skulls showed the quality of the clan's lineage; a greater number of skulls signalled an older lineage and more power wielded. The reliquary tradition is a testament to the Fang's migratory history, as their itinerant existence made permanent ancestral gravesites impossible and necessitated a portable version of ancestral shrines. The variety in form, detail and surface treatment of Fang reliquaries indicate the cultural assimilation that occurred as a result of their contact and conflict with neighbouring peoples.

Ancestor figures were also carved by some communities to emphasise family continuity, community bonds, and the claims of chiefs to power. Of special note were the Kota reliquary figures used in ancestral veneration: the reliquaries were placed on baskets that held the bones of deceased relatives, serving as their guardians. The Fang *Byeri* and Kota *Bwete* associations were responsible for honouring the family or clan's most important ancestors, who were often leaders, courageous warriors, superior craftsmen, village founders, fertile women, and individuals with special talents. However, Kota reliquaries were personalised in terms of being owned by a particular family, named, and identified with certain powers. They were also considerably more abstracted than Fang reliquaries, representing the human figure on a

flat, planar surface and enveloping it in costly copper or brass sheeting that reflected the importance of the ancestor being honoured. The shine on the metal plating reflected or “threw back” evil. Brass was a precious material in central Africa because it was mainly acquired through trade with Europeans, and served as a form of currency. Kota reliquary figures were among the earliest African artefacts exhibited in France in the late 19th century. Their radically stylised depictions of the human form had a tremendous influence on the development of Western art.

Compared to the representation of ancestors, the representation of rulers in sculpture was rarer, occurring primarily in the royal arts of sub-Saharan African courts, such as the Kuba kingdom in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Remarkable Kuba king figures, known as *ndop*, were believed to house the counterpart to the king’s soul and served as his surrogate in his absence. Once thought to be literal portraits of specific Kuba rulers, the *ndop* were actually conventionalised representations, some of which were sculpted posthumously. Their identities were depicted through distinguishing attributes. A key identifying insignia was carved in front of the dais of each statue, such as an anvil or gameboard, which represented a particular characteristic of the ruler’s reign. The exhibition presents the *ndop* of Miko mi-Mbul of Mushenge, the 110th Kuba king, who lived in the early 19th century. His royal insignia is a human figure. The principal feature of this king’s reign was a change in social customs, when he legalised marriage with slave women. Kuba *ndop*, like other royal arts, served as a locus of authority, identifying the elite and conveying messages of power to their subjects. Viewers recognised the *ndop* as a royal personage through its iconography, such as Miko mi-Mbul’s cross-legged pose, the cowrie-ornamented belt, or brass armbands worn only by royalty. Believed to be the embodiment of the king’s and his ancestors’ spirits, *ndop* were carefully conserved and venerated by following generations. The practice of carving *ndop* may have been introduced by a Kuba ruler in the 18th century to replace the worship of nature spirits, therefore uniting his subjects by concentrating their loyalty in the person of the king. Thus, although the Kuba did not have



Reliquary Figure (*ngulu*);
Kota, Gabon
20th century
Collection of musée du quai Branly
Gift of Léon Guiral
© musée du quai Branly,
photo Thierry Ollivier, Michel Urtado



Mask
Punu, Gabon
19th to 20th century
Collection of musée du quai Branly
Gift of Mme Bluysen
© musée du quai Branly

a cult of the ancestor in the same vein as the Fang or Kota, certain similarities between the two practices are evident.

FEMALE REPRESENTATION

In terms of representation, whether in royal arts or other genres in African art, the image of the female was widespread in certain cultural groups. In the cultures of the savannah, women play important roles as rulers, priestesses, honoured mothers and powerful ancestors. The high status of women among the Bantu-speaking peoples is also shown in the principle of matrilineal descent, or the inheritance of leadership through the female line.

The Luba people – whose economic and political power spread their culture to neighbouring groups, such as the Hemba – were renowned for extensively depicting women in their art. This

reflected the high status of women in Luba society and government. In Luba caryatid stools, female figures commonly made up the supporting structure, balancing the sitter on her head and palms. Only the king owned a caryatid stool and had the right to sit during ceremonies. The stool was otherwise hidden in another village when not in use, wrapped in white cloth and guarded to avoid theft or tampering. It was a highly spiritual and symbolic object, not for everyday use, but only brought out for special occasions. The female caryatid represented the female founder, symbolically connecting the current ruler to his ancestors.

As the line of ancestral continuity occurred through the woman, females were also associated with fertility and the cycle of life. By virtue of being child-bearers, they were the only ones

deemed strong enough to contain great spirits and secret knowledge in their bodies. The caryatid stool symbolised this belief. Upon the king's death, his royal stool became a receptacle of his spirit, which only a female spirit medium, a *Mwadi*, had the strength to incarnate. As the living incarnation of the deceased ruler, a *Mwadi* inherited the king's royal titles, emblems, and residence, receiving gifts regularly from the new king. Upon her death, she was succeeded by another *Mwadi* to ensure the continuance of the royal spirit.

The female figure in Luba culture stood for different aspects of women simultaneously: their supporting role in society, ancestral continuity through the female line, important women in government, and their sacred association with the spiritual. Female figures also portrayed idealised physical perfection, expressed in very detailed scarification patterns and coiffures on the sculpted figures. It was not unheard of for Luba women to travel all the way to the capital to view a caryatid's keloids or hairstyle to learn what was in vogue. Beauty was profoundly important to the Luba, who believed that beautiful coiffure and scarification indicated a civilised, elegant individual and provided a measure of the person's worth. In most African cultures, beauty and goodness were equivalent. Not only was it a sign of beauty, but elaborate scarification was also an indication of a woman's strength to bear children. Scarification and coiffures were also forms of identification, signalling to others the person's profession, rank, and personal history. Patterns and coiffures were meticulously reproduced in otherwise generic ancestral statues to indicate their identity. Patterns could be combined in myriad ways to create different meanings, and were added throughout a person's lifetime to reflect their new experience and identity.

Punu masks, also known as *okuyi* dance masks, combined idealised feminine beauty and female association with spirits. Like other masking traditions in Gabon, such as the Kwele and Fang, *okuyi* masks were painted with kaolin, which was associated with healing, the spiritual, and the dead. The white base and appearance were long thought to be related to Japanese *Noh* theatre, but the style was indigenous to the Punu and



Funerary figure
Kongo, Republic of Congo or Democratic Republic of Congo
Late 19th century
National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden.

its surrounding neighbours. Yet unlike other Gabon masks, the *okuyi* were less abstracted and tended towards greater naturalism. Punu carvers based them on the most beautiful woman in the community. The *okuyi* represents the spirit of a beautiful girl, indicated by the red lozenge scarification on her forehead, returning from the dead to the living world in times of mourning. Although a female mask, it was worn by a male performer in full body costume, who executed astonishing acrobatic moves on stilts in a dance known as *mukudj*. Once restricted to initiates, the *okuyi* dance is presently performed in public as a reassertion of the community's cultural identity. By combining the symbolism of white kaolin and feminine beauty, the woman is intricately linked to the spiritual world.

PICASSO AND AFRICAN ART

Since the Portuguese arrived in central Africa in the 1500s, travellers have brought African objects to Europe. Collecting increased significantly with the colonisation of the Congo region in the mid-19th century. One of the first displays of African objects took place in Paris in 1887 when some Kota objects from Gabon were exhibited.

The art of Africa was startling to European eyes, especially in the way certain features of the human form were abstracted and exaggerated. In the early 20th century, Henri Matisse, André Derain, Amedeo Modigliani and Pablo Picasso were inspired by African sculpture to move beyond traditional ideas of realism. Matisse was so intrigued that he used them as his inspiration for a portrait of his wife. African objects – with their refined form, gentle concave faces and abstract yet expressive features – attracted the admiration of Western art scholars and collectors. The concave surface was distinct from the prevalence of convex surfaces in Western art, appearing only with Cubism.

Yet despite genuine admiration of stylisation in African art, Western understanding was limited to the visual and emotional. Artworks were analysed without regard for the original culture that produced them, much less the cosmological context that imbued African art with spiritual and symbolic

meaning. Paul Guillaume (1891-1934), a French art dealer wrote that learning the meaning of African art may "obscure one's vision of the objects as sculpture".

Picasso's first encounter with African sculpture may have been when his friend Matisse showed him a Kongo figure in 1906. The next year, Picasso saw African art at the ethnographic museum in the Palais du Trocadéro, Paris. He claimed that this encounter led him to understand what it meant to be an artist. Beginning in 1907, Picasso collected African masks and sculptures, with a taste for startling pieces and objects showing both human and animal characteristics. Picasso initially refused to acknowledge the role of African art on his works, candidly declaring, "African art? Never heard of it!" Only in his later years did he finally agree that they had a great influence.

Picasso was profoundly inspired by his encounter with African art and its influence is evident throughout most of his artworks in his career. It was one of several factors that shattered the inherited concept that art should imitate nature. Instead, Picasso realised that artists should instead interpret what they see, think and feel. He once said, "Who sees the human face correctly: the photographer, the mirror, or the painter?" The painting, *Dimanche* (Sunday) is almost unrecognisable as a human portrait. The artist deconstructed and abstracted certain forms – that is, emphasised certain shapes and qualities – inviting the viewer to reflect on the artist's emotions and imagination. In the exhibition, there are four artworks from the musée national Picasso, Paris that reflect strong influences from African sculpture, ranging from the early years (often referred to as Picasso's African period, i.e. 1907-1909) right up to 1971, two years before his death.

CONCLUSION

Recent studies of African art have frequently taken the approach of conducting stylistic analysis according to cultural groups. However, present studies take pains to avoid stringently limiting particular groups with certain styles, and for good reason – not only formal styles, but underlying beliefs are demonstrably shared by various

peoples and cannot be limited by group boundaries. Transmitted via trade, travel and warfare, cultures have been absorbed, assimilated and adapted to fit into each community's particular preferences.

Societies differ in their respective details, whether they were ruled by kings or clans, or in the precise adornment of their statuary. Yet unifying themes abound in stylistic formalities, the shared principle of ancestor veneration, the indistinct borders between the sacred and profane worlds, the special place of women in African society, and the importance of masquerades and ceremonies in uniting a community. A survey of African art across as broad a spectrum as central Africa would no doubt reveal innumerable differences and unique aspects, but threads remain that tie them together over centuries of eventful history and change.

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Male power figure (*nkisi*)
Songye, Democratic Republic of Congo
20th century
Collection of Royal Museum for Central Africa (Belgium)
Donated by Sidney Edkins
Collection RMCA Tervuren
Photo R. Asselberghs; © RMCA Tervuren



musings

BY MATTHEW NGUI
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
SINGAPORE BIENNALE 2011
OPEN HOUSE

IMAGES: NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD

SINGAPORE BIENNALE 2011

OPEN HOUSE IN THE CITY

The Singapore Biennale premiered in 2006 with *Belief* and in 2008 was themed *Wonder*. 2011 will see the third edition of the Singapore Biennale focus on the artistic process and its engagement with people and place, rather than on a strict curatorial theme. My colleagues, curators Trevor Smith from the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, USA, and Russell Storer from the Queensland Art Gallery, Australia, and I have entitled Singapore Biennale 2011 “Open House”. Our aspiration is to create an open house around artists’ thinking and work methods and what these often hidden processes reveal about where we live.





Tatzu Nishi, *The Merlion Hotel*, (artist's rendering), 2011, construction-installation, © the artist

Sopheap Pich, *Compound* (work in progress), 2011,
bamboo, rattan, plywood, metal wire, 400 x 250 x 250 cm
(installed dimensions, approx.), © the artist



Through this close consideration of how artists work, Singapore Biennale 2011 Open House reflects upon the ways in which these processes culminate in forms that illuminate the way we see and relate to objects and materials; and how these relationships shape our sense of self and interaction with people and the world around us.

The Singapore Biennale has always used, as its main exhibition venues, mainly public spaces and buildings that are vacated and in transition. This tradition continues for Singapore Biennale 2011 Open House with the Old Kallang Airport site. The other exhibition venues include the National Museum of Singapore and Singapore Art Museum, and the public space of Marina Bay. Each of these venues will have its own particular character, built on the emblematic places of exchange/transaction in Singapore in which our relationships with objects, materials and spaces are formed: the private home or flat (Singapore Art Museum and SAM at 8Q), city markets and malls (the National Museum of Singapore) and international ports (Old Kallang Airport). Two major public artworks are planned for the Marina Bay area that bring individual expression into the public realm. By encouraging artists to make and present work that resonates with the typical spaces of Singapore, this biennale is also an open house on the city of Singapore.

Amongst other things, 'open house' in Singapore also refers to the cultural practice of opening one's home to one another on festive occasions such as Chinese New Year, Hari Raya Puasa and Deepavali. It is not simply a festive act of hospitality, friendship and goodwill, but also a time of critical reflection and planning.

Hence, Singapore Biennale 2011 Open House offers opportunities not only for speculating on our current state

but also imagining alternative futures. An 'open house' is a time for exploring different possibilities for living and working, where the boundaries between private and public, inside and outside are blurred. Open House invites and collaborates with the visitor to peer behind the scenes – revealing spaces, knowledge and experiences normally closed or hidden from view.

This year, we will present over 150 works by 63 artists from 30 countries, with a significant representation of Singaporean and Southeast Asian artists. In the spirit of Open House, no less than half of the works will be new site- or community-specific commissions spread over the four venues.

The group of artists announced for Singapore Biennale 2011 include Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset (respectively born in Denmark and Norway; live and work in London and Berlin), Ceal Floyer (born in Pakistan, lives and works in Berlin), Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (born in Mexico, based in Montreal), Tatzu Nishi (born in Japan, based in Berlin), Arin Rungjang (born in Thailand, lives and works in Bangkok), Charles Sandison (born in Scotland, lives and works in Tampere, Finland), Shooshie Sulaiman (born in Malaysia, lives and works in Kuala Lumpur), Tan Pin Pin (born in Singapore, lives and works in Singapore), Ming Wong (born in Singapore, lives and works in Berlin) and New York-based Goto Design Studio.

The Singapore Biennale reflects Singapore's growing reputation as a significant centre of contemporary art regionally and internationally. It is an important platform for collaboration and dialogue about contemporary art today as it brings together a diverse range of artists and art workers living and working across the world and in Singapore.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matthew Ngui (born 1962 in Singapore) is a visual artist, trained in sculpture and working in the areas of installation, video, performance, site-specific works and public art. He lives and works in Australia and Singapore, exhibiting locally and internationally in contemporary art museums and spaces in cities such as Berlin, Bordeaux, Copenhagen, Graz, Hong Kong, London, Manila and Vienna. He participated in the São Paulo (1996), Venice (2001) and Gwangju Biennales (2002) and the tenth Documenta in 1997. The focus of Ngui's work has been to make site-specific installations and performances that engage the locality and people of the city/space in which the work is exhibited. To this end, he has been working on two long term community-related art proposals for the Singapore Skyline and an alpine town in Switzerland.

Running from 13 March to 15 May 2011, Singapore Biennale 2011 is organised by the Singapore Art Museum, an institution of the National Heritage Board, and is supported by the National Arts Council of Singapore. Visit www.singaporebiennale.org from February 2011 onwards for more details about the detailed programmes.



Candice Breitz, *Factum*, 2009, six dual channel and one three channel video and sound installation, various times, © the artist

OPEN HOUSE AT SAM AND SAM AT 8Q

Offering four floors of discrete exhibition space that mirror Housing Development Board public apartment blocks, SAM at 8Q will invite Biennale visitors to enter another person's world, opening the door onto private obsessions, secret knowledge, personal histories and intimate experiences.

In a world premiere, Malaysian artist Ise (Roslisham Ismail) looks at Singapore through the ways six families eat and buy food for the home – universal yet highly specific activities that offer insights into how we live and form communities. Also for the first time, South African-born, Berlin-based artist Candice Breitz presents the entire series of her *Factum* video portraits, in which seven sets of identical twins (and one set of identical

triplets) talk candidly about their lives, hopes and relationships with each other.

Meanwhile, Gülsün Karamustafa's video work peers into an Istanbul apartment to reveal a secret society of women with a shared passion for panther prints, living out a fantasy life of "endless freedom with wearing what they want". Koh Nguang How, who since the 1980s has carefully researched and collected materials relating to the history of Singaporean art, opens up his private archive to the public. With a focus on how art has been written about in the local media, Koh's new installation *Artists in the News* reflects upon how art is documented and described, and what is ultimately left behind for posterity.



Mu Chen and Shao Yinong, *Spring and Autumn*, 2004-2010, © the artist

OPEN HOUSE AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE

The National Museum of Singapore is the city's museum of its history, and with its contrasting architecture of dramatic, light-filled atriums and dark, cavernous galleries, becomes an urban landscape of shopping malls and night markets. SB2011 works here will consider the transactions and transformations that take place within the city, from urban development and its ecological impacts, to the pleasure and pain of window-shopping.

Greeting visitors at the rotunda entrance of the Museum will be *Compound*, a newly commissioned sculpture by Cambodian artist Sopheap Pich. Renowned for his innovative work with rattan and bamboo, Pich here uses modular cube and torpedo forms to create a towering structure that is monumental as well as delicate and permeable. Another new commission is a series of startling images of Singapore by Swiss photographer Beat Streuli, who for two decades has photographed people in cities around the world. Capturing private moments within public space, Streuli offers a fresh perspective on Singapore and its people.

A wickedly funny cycle of video animations by Charlie White meditate on the consumer culture of his home

town of Los Angeles, where the mall can be "a massive crystal palace of total happiness" as well as the hell of endless choice. At the centre of the gallery space will be the premiere presentation of Beijing-based artist couple Shao Yinong and Mu Chen's stunning *Spring and Autumn*, a series of large embroideries of obsolete banknotes from around the world. Produced using the exquisite technique of

Suzhou embroidery, the work suggests fragility and transience, with the notes depicted eliminated from circulation through changing political and economic fortunes.



Charlie White, *OMG BFF LOL* (still), 2008, animation, 6 minute endless loop, © the artist

OPEN HOUSE AT OLD KALLANG AIRPORT

Singapore's first civil airport, which later served as the headquarters of the People's Association, holds fond memories for several generations of Singaporeans, and the Biennale offers a rare opportunity to again enter this space. Taking the site's former function as a cue, the works at Kallang Airport respond to ideas of movement from one place or state to another – across borders or thresholds, or between cultures, with such exchanges offering new perspectives and understandings.

Positioned in the airport's former hangar, Elmgreen and Dragset's gigantic new installation will delight and challenge visitors. Transplanting a traditional German barn into the tropical urban environment of Singapore, the Scandinavian duo conjure the fantasy of being somewhere (or someone) else, where we can begin to imagine new possibilities and horizons. Singaporean artist Ming Wong's new video installation *Devo Partire. Domani* transforms Pier Paolo Pasolini's classic 1968 film *Teorema* into a compelling self-portrait, with Wong playing each of the film's male and female characters. Using the city of Naples as a setting, Wong appears and reappears in different guises, weaving in and out of the Italian city's past and present, as only an outsider can do.

Bangkok-based artist Arin Rungjang also explores the position of the outsider, in this case Thai migrants who have come to Singapore to find work. Rungjang's installation creates an intimate space inside the airport, where Biennale visitors can rest and encounter stories and objects from the Thai workers, who have played their own part in furnishing the space. Taryn Simon's photographic series *Contraband* explores the limits placed upon movement across borders. Spending five days at New York's JFK Airport, Simon took over 1000 pictures of items detained from passengers or from mail entering the United States, a selection of which will be presented at the Biennale. The images offer an astounding archive of illicit objects, reflecting a shadow trade of prohibited goods.

The Biennale's key outreach project, Self-Portrait, Our Landscape (SPOL)



Ming Wong, *Devo partire. Domani / I must go. Tomorrow* (still), 2010, 5 channel video installation, 12:58 minutes, colour, sound, © the artist



Students drawing their self-portraits in one of the Self-Portrait, Our Landscape (SPOL) workshops.

will also be shown at Kallang Airport. Over 3000 students from over 40 primary and secondary schools in Singapore are participating in this project, which encourages them to draw their self-portrait but without drawing out their own faces. The children have to shift their perspective to aspects that shape their identity, by looking at their environment. Each student then uses basic animation techniques and sound to gradually morph their self-portrait into the next student's, creating a landscape of collective identities. The complete animation, as well as the initial drawings, will be displayed in a specially designed exhibition and education space.

The Airport also plays host to the Singapore Biennale 2011 Open House Party at 5.30 pm on 12 March as well as the Singapore Biennale 2011 Family Day Out from 10 am till 7 pm on 13 March 2011.



Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Open Air: Relational Architecture 18* (artist's rendering), 2011, robotic searchlights, radio transmitter, smart phones, © the artist

OPEN HOUSE AT MARINA BAY

In the heart of the city, two major new commissions offer spectacular public encounters which at the same time amplify individual experience. Tatzu Nishi's *The Merlion Hotel* continues the Japanese artist's series of private structures built around public sculpture and urban architecture. Nishi's work shifts our relationship to public space, offering new and intimate perspectives on familiar yet often inaccessible urban icons. For the Biennale, Nishi, with the support of the Singapore Tourism Board, will build an operational luxurious hotel room enveloping Singapore's beloved national monument, the Merlion. One of the key global images of Singapore, the Merlion will now be viewed anew by visitors entering the hotel room during the day, or for those who book early, spending the night.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, who is well known for his large scale public interactive works, will create a new large scale installation for Marina Bay. Using smart phone technology, visitors to the installation will be able to modulate a series of robotic searchlights that form a canopy of lightbeams over the bay by using only the power of their own voice.





LAND OF DANCE & DRAGON

The Diverse Beauty of Indonesia

museings

BY CHUA MEI LIN
CURATOR
SINGAPORE PHILATELIC MUSEUM

IMAGES COURTESY OF THE EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC
OF INDONESIA
ARTEFACTS COURTESY OF SETIA DARMA HOUSE OF MASKS
AND PUPPETS, BALI
STAMP COLLECTION, SINGAPORE PHILATELIC MUSEUM

In a land where the mystical and natural meet, nothing seems extraordinary. Masks take on supernatural powers and lizards grow big enough to swallow a goat without much effort. This is Indonesia or “Islands of the Indies”, a vast archipelago located at the crossroads of the traditional spice route between the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Land of Dance and Dragon is a discovery of Indonesia through its dances. This exhibition at the Singapore Philatelic Museum explores one of the greatest demonstrations of skill, art devotion and culture – the living tradition of dance. To portray characters and animals, performers don masks and elaborate costumes to narrate anecdotes of history, epic tales as well as current affairs. What started as a ritual performed for the gods to ask for protection against calamity still survives today. The dances, masks and costumes are diverse and varied but the quest for a peaceful life is common throughout the length of the archipelago.



Main image: Beach in Flores, East Nusa Tenggara, Photo by Kiat. Stamps: Borobudur Ship Expedition

“ISLANDS OF THE INDIES”

With a total land area of 1,919,317 square kilometres, Indonesia spans the equator between continental Asia and Australia and consists of over 13,000 islands, of which only 6,000 are inhabited. There are five main islands – Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, Sulawesi and Irian Jaya – and two smaller archipelagos: Nusa Tenggara and the Maluku Islands.

The country has over 240 million people speaking many regional languages and dialects and practising many of the world’s major religions. Trade thrived in this region as early as the seventh century. During the rule of the Srivijayan (CE 700 – 1300) and later Majapahit (CE 1293 – 1500) empires, Indonesia traded with China and India. Through the same channels, Hinduism and Buddhism were introduced. Around 13th century, Islam arrived with Arab traders. European countries fought among themselves for control of the spice islands of Maluku. Dutch colonial powers (CE 1602 – 1942) then ruled Indonesia for three and a half centuries till after World War II.

Indonesia displays an amazing array of cultural forms. It has been said that in Indonesia – art and life are intertwined. To observe the formal study of dance is to understand the history and culture of the country: its music, religion, literature, sculpture and architecture. Indonesian culture is a rich blend of heritage, living tradition and modern art. Monuments provide the built heritage. Traditional theatres of shadow puppets or human actors form the living tradition, and contemporary

painting, sculpture, drama and dance inject modernism.

DANCE – A LIVING TRADITION

Dance in Indonesia serves as more than entertainment and recreation. Many dances have a religious significance. They are performed to honour ancestors, in traditional ceremonies like weddings, births and deaths as well as yearly activities like harvesting. There are as many dances as there are provinces in the country. Within each province, there are many types and variations of dances. Although the dances mentioned here are but a small selection, their importance to the fabric of society cannot be denied.

Traditional ceremonial dances are still practised in Bali especially during the *Galungan* and *Kuningan* festivals. *Galungan* is a Balinese holiday that occurs every 210 days and lasts for 10 days, whereas *Kuningan* is the last day of the holiday. During this time, the Balinese gods are believed to visit the Earth. In Kalimantan, the Dayak people perform the *tari mandau* (sabre dance) which mimics the trailblazing action of clearing the forest. This dance which symbolises the fighting spirit of the people are performed during special ceremonial days. The *Sanghyang* trance dance is presented in Bali to ward off evil spirits. Java has a similar trance dance called *Kuda Kepang*.

ORIGIN OF DANCE IN INDONESIA

It has been said that before the introduction of formal religion, the gods had powerful influence over the land

and people of Indonesia. To induce the gods to answer their prayers, sovereigns proffered fresh flowers and fragrant incense. But the most refined offering is the gift of dance. Indonesian dances can be divided into three broad types: traditional religious dances, dramatised dances, folk and modern dances. Traditional religious dances are based on the belief that the dance would help people make contact with the gods, provide meaning to life or instil a force into things such as crops, fertility or war.

Gambuh is considered the oldest form of dance drama and the source for other dramatic dances. It was performed in the Javanese courts of the Majapahit kingdom and belongs to the semi-sacred or ceremonial group. The stories are usually drawn from the lives of the kings of East Java, very often from the *Panji* stories. *Panji* was a prince famed for his search for his beloved Princess *Candra Kirana*.

For about 100 years during Dutch colonial rule, dance lost its importance. After the country gained independence, a desire to express a sense of freedom and democracy prompted the revival of folk and regional dances. Society dances such as the *ronggeng* of West Java, the handkerchief dance and umbrella dance of the Bugis are primarily for entertainment and have no religious significance. On the other hand, the mask dance is one of the oldest traditions in Indonesian art and exists in almost every region. Many evolved from religious customs and rituals while others are purely for artistic pursuit.

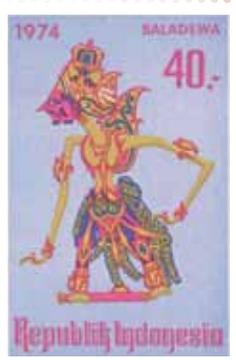
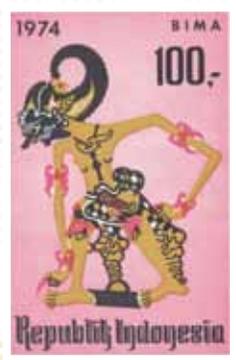
DANCES OF JAVA

Yogyakarta and Surakarta, where the *kraton* (palaces) are located, are famous for the refined and graceful Javanese dances. There are several groups of dances from this region: the *Wayang* dances originally intended for ritual ceremonies; the sacred *Bedoyo* and *Srimpi* court dances; the *Beksan* or War dance; and the dances of the villages.

The word 'wayang' means shadow. Originally *wayang* was performed by the head of the family to ask the spirits for guidance for important events like marriage and birth. With family members as witnesses, spirits were said to appear as shadows. Nowadays, current events, rules of behaviour and education form the basis of *wayang* stories. The different types of *wayang* include *Wayang Kulit* (leather puppet), *Wayang Klitik* (flat wooden puppet), *Wayang Golek* (wooden puppets) and the non-puppet ones of *Wayang Beber* (which use paper parchment as a backdrop) and *Wayang Wong* (human masked dances). The *wayang* stories are usually based on the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics.

Wayang kulit is a shadow puppet performance and is an integral part of temple festivals. The puppets are made of flat dried buffalo hide. The performance area has a screen and a light (an oil lamp in older days) and in front of the screen sits the *Dalang* or puppeteer, who conducts and plays the entire *wayang*. In front of him lie banana tree stems where the puppets are stuck when not in use; bad characters on the left and good ones on the right. At the start and end of the performance, the *dalang* will place the *gunungan* in front of the screen. The stage represents life on earth. The *dalang* symbolises God, the screen is the universe and the banana trunk where the puppets rest is earth. Hinduism first arrived in Indonesia followed closely by Buddhism in the early centuries. The Hindu influence is evident in the shadow puppet stories with themes from the Mahabharata and Ramayana.

The *Gunungan* or *Kayon* is used to start and end the play, as well as change one scene to another. It represents the Tree of Life and the unity of the cosmic





Main image: The *Reog* dance; Stamps (from left): Saucer dance, *Kuda Lumping*, Fan dance, *Reog*.

order. Two gatekeepers stand on both sides of the door to the spiritual temple. There are many versions of the *gunungan* depending on the local culture and social situation. Javanese *gunungan* have more symbols compared to those from Bali.

Bedojo, began within the walls of the courts of Jogjakarta to mark ceremonies like the sultan's birthday and special anniversaries. It is performed by girls from the aristocracy. The *Bedojo* is a slow and deliberate dance performed by nine girls with faces made up like a traditional Javanese bride. On their heads they wear a diadem with a white bird feather. The *Srimpi* is similar to the *Bedojo* but less grand and performed by four women. *Beksan* or War dances are performed by pairs of men and women

who retell the stories from some segments of Javanese literature. Away from the courts in the villages, people perform dances such as *Ronggeng*, *Djoged*, *Handkerchief Dance*, *Reog* and *Kuda Lumping*, some as courtship dances and others as celebratory dances.

DANCES OF BALI

Music and dance are integral to religious ceremonies and social activity of Balinese life. This island has one of the most intriguing selections of dances. In areas where people practise Buddhism and the Bali-Hindu faith, spirits are often summoned to enter living humans and puppets. This is especially evident in the *Sanghyang* and *Barong* dances. The *Sanghyang* is a trance dance ritual where pre-adolescent girls perform

under a hypnotic influence. This dance is performed to ward off disasters or epidemics.

Kecak is probably the most recognisable Balinese dance. With an all-male chorus chanting "cak, cak, cak" in overlapping sequence, the effect is both hypnotic and mystifying. The *Kecak* is a vocal chant originating from the *Sanghyang* dance. The *Rejang* is a sacred dance performed in the inner court of the temple during offerings and celebrations. It is a group dance by pre-adolescent girls, unmarried or older women. They are said to be heavenly maidens who have come to earth.¹ The male equivalent is the *Baris Gede* or warrior dance.

Balinese mask dances have existed for over a century. Like the older types of dances, mask dances were used to drive out evil spirits that could cause havoc to crops. Prayers are said at every step of the mask preparation, from the selection of the tree to the performance. Bali's *Topeng* dance-drama often portrays stories based on the lives of the Balinese kings. Early masks have mouthpieces which the actor bites to hold the mask in place. Today, the masks are tied to the face.

Topeng Pajegan is a monodrama as all the roles are portrayed by one dancer. The stories are usually derived from the chronicles of the kings. Depending on the occasion: wedding, tooth-filing ceremony² or birth, the performer will choose the story most appropriate for the occasion. The characters appear in a fairly typical sequence. The *Patih*, a minister of strong character with a red face indicating bravery is first to appear. He is usually followed by a coarse brown face *Patih* and then a wise old man (*Topeng Tua*).

The last character to appear is *Sidhakarya*³. After he gives offerings and prayers to the gods he immediately gives chase to the children in the audience. When he catches a child, he carries him to the shrine and holds him up to the gods. The child is then

¹ As dances were said to have originated as offerings to the gods, only the most beautiful girls were selected to train in the royal courts.

² In Bali, the tooth-filing ceremony rids a person of evils; anger, greed, lust for example. This rite of passage act is performed when a person becomes an adult.

³ *Sidhakarya* means "to finish the task". It has been said that during the reign of King Dalem Waturenggong of Gelgel (1551-1651) Brahmin Walasakia was supposed to remove a pestilence that was raging through the island. But his unkempt appearance deterred the king who promptly had him removed. The angry Brahmin then placed a curse on the island. Seeing his island in turmoil, the king regretted his action and asked the Brahmin for forgiveness. The curse was removed and peace returned to the kingdom. A mask was then commissioned to the likeness of Walasakia who was conferred the title Dalem Sidhakarya.



Main image: *Tari payung* dancers, courtesy of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia;
Stamps (clockwise from top left): *Wayang Wong*, *Arsa Wijaya*, *Kecak*, *Tambulilingan* (bumblebee) dancers, *Baris Gede* dancer, *Cirebon*



Hudoq, Kalimantan, c1990

released and rewarded with a small gift of Chinese coins, as a symbol of prosperity. In current times, the *Sidhakarya* segment does not happen very often.

The *Topeng Panca* is performed by five dancers during temple festivals. The full mask characters such as the king and ministers do not speak but deliver their ideas through elegant and graceful movements. Half-masked characters like the clown servants tell the stories.

The *Barong* is a mythological creature that performs stories that are entwined with black magic and some form of trance. With its big eyes, clacking mouth and furry body, it patrols the village streets clearing away dark forces that bring harm to the land and people. *Rangda* with her fearful mask is the witch-widow and Queen of Black Magic. She is portrayed with a long hanging tongue, fangs and long hair. In the magical *Calonarang* dance, the *Barong* and *Rangda* characters are pitched against each other in a classic battle between the good and evil.

The creation of *wayang wong* was initiated by *Dalem Gede Kusamba*, ruler of Klungkung from 1772-1825. He commissioned a new dance based on the *Ramayana* epic using a collection of royal masks. Following the *wayang*

kulit style, *wayang wong* was created with human performers instead of puppets. *Wayang wong* is performed during the holy days of *Galungan* and *Kuningan*. As the masks are sacred, they are kept in the temple and are blessed before and after use.

DANCES OF SUMATRA AND OTHER ISLANDS

In Sumatra, the influence and presence of ancient dances are less evident because the faster paced and social dances are favoured. There are fewer *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* themed dances except around the areas of Batak and South Sumatra. Dances which originated from the worship of the various gods are still performed although the region's prevailing customary law (*adat*) and religion now cast an overriding influence.

DANCE AND THE DRAGON

The huge Komodo dragon (*Varanus komodoensis*) lives in a hostile environment with little food and water. It overcame all these challenges and remained fairly untouched by evolution and the Ice Age. The existence of the Komodo dragon is proof of its tenacity.

The prehistoric-looking reptile serves as a perfect foil to the refined dance. The reptile's appearance is beastly, it walks with an awkward gait and displays an amazing instinctive

power when it attacks. The dance on the other hand has graceful and refined movements and the technique is acquired through many years of strict training. The Komodo dragon commands respect in its environment and the dance pays reverence to the gods. Although the elegant dance and the awkward Komodo dragon seem worlds apart, there is an interesting link between them. Note the posture of the dancers – the limbs, body, neck and head – with many movements involving raised elbows, and angled torso. Observe the Komodo dragon's swagger, every step taken with limbs at an angle. Is it pure coincidence or a case of art imitating nature?

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Various dances of Sumatra on stamps.



A 'FIRE-BREATHING' DRAGON

The fire-breathing dragons as told by ancient mariners who visited the Spice Islands are in reality Komodo Dragons. They are the largest living species of lizard. These venomous lizards can grow to a length of two to three metres weighing about 150 kilograms. Komodo National Park is located at the Lesser Sunda Islands which covers the larger islands of Komodo, Rinca and Pada. Founded in 1980, the national park is also a popular location for scuba diving as the marine biodiversity includes whale sharks, manta rays, pygmy seahorses, sponges and corals.

museings

BY SUNG YUN-WEN
CURATOR
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE

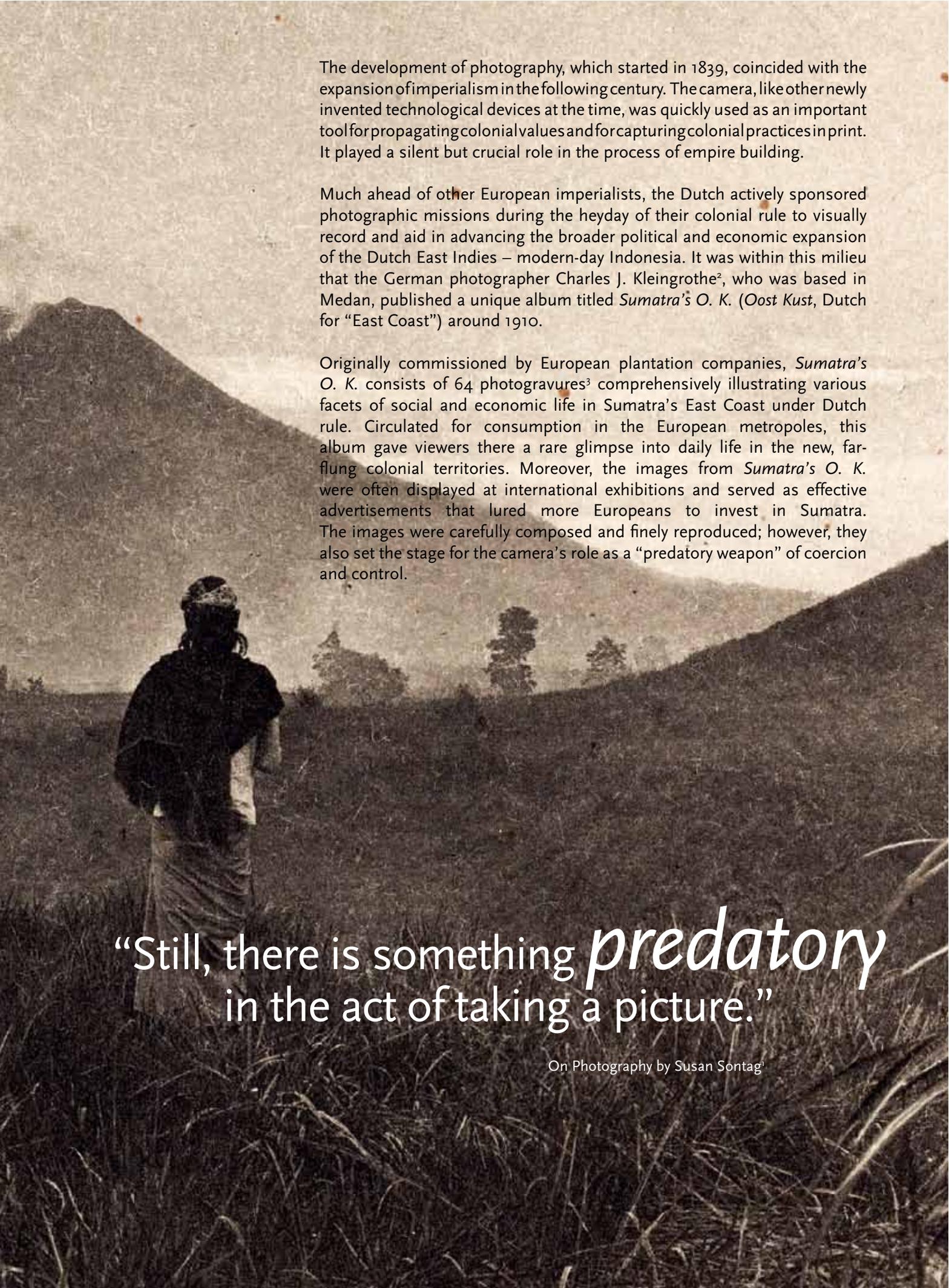
IMAGES: NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE

SILENT COERCION

SUMATRA'S EAST COAST
THROUGH A COLONIAL LENS

A Batak man looking at Mount Sinabung

The Sinabung volcano is located in the heart of the Karoland. In August of 2010, it awoke from centuries of sleep and erupted again. During the colonial times, the cool climate and the rich soil of the Karo plateau were favoured by the Europeans. In recent times, mountain climbing and hiking in the surrounding forest areas are popular with the tourists.

A sepia-toned photograph of a person standing in a field, looking towards a mountain range in the distance. The person is wearing a dark jacket and a light-colored skirt. The landscape is hazy, with a large mountain peak on the left and smaller hills on the right. The foreground is filled with tall grasses.

The development of photography, which started in 1839, coincided with the expansion of imperialism in the following century. The camera, like other newly invented technological devices at the time, was quickly used as an important tool for propagating colonial values and for capturing colonial practices in print. It played a silent but crucial role in the process of empire building.

Much ahead of other European imperialists, the Dutch actively sponsored photographic missions during the heyday of their colonial rule to visually record and aid in advancing the broader political and economic expansion of the Dutch East Indies – modern-day Indonesia. It was within this milieu that the German photographer Charles J. Kleingrothe², who was based in Medan, published a unique album titled *Sumatra's O. K.* (*Oost Kust*, Dutch for “East Coast”) around 1910.

Originally commissioned by European plantation companies, *Sumatra's O. K.* consists of 64 photogravures³ comprehensively illustrating various facets of social and economic life in Sumatra's East Coast under Dutch rule. Circulated for consumption in the European metropolises, this album gave viewers there a rare glimpse into daily life in the new, far-flung colonial territories. Moreover, the images from *Sumatra's O. K.* were often displayed at international exhibitions and served as effective advertisements that lured more Europeans to invest in Sumatra. The images were carefully composed and finely reproduced; however, they also set the stage for the camera's role as a “predatory weapon” of coercion and control.

“Still, there is something *predatory* in the act of taking a picture.”

On Photography by Susan Sontag⁴

DOCUMENTING UNETHICAL PLANTATIONS

Beginning in the 1860s, a great expansion of Dutch and private entrepreneurship started to take place in eastern Sumatra. Kleingrothe was a savvy commercial photographer who astutely took advantage of the business potential in eastern Sumatra's expanding market. During the first two decades of the 20th century, he was commissioned by several large European plantation companies to produce pictures documenting various forms of tropical agricultural production, such as tobacco, coffee and rubber plantations. His camera recorded every stage in the production process: from jungle and land clearing to planting and processing. These pictures mainly illustrate the organisational advances and progress of the plantations on Sumatra's East Coast.

Upon more careful examination, however, it is not difficult to observe a darker side to these images – the cruel reordering of nature, the grim circumstances of indentured labourers, the building of an oppressive social hierarchy within plantation society, and so on. Ironically, these pictures were taken during the time when the Dutch attempted to adopt the “Ethical Policy”⁴, a set of initiatives that sought to downplay the exploitative nature of the colonial economy. Nevertheless, the plantation industry on Sumatra's East Coast portrayed in Kleingrothe's work inadvertently reveals itself to be a rather unethical business after all.

MAPPING THE KARO HIGHLANDS

The collection of Karo Batak images included in *Sumatra's O. K.* shows that Kleingrothe travelled extensively across the Karo highlands to capture the landscape of this area and to document the life of the Karonese. *Tanah Karo*, or the Karoland—the homeland of the Karo Batak—refers to the mountain plateau south of Medan and north of Lake Toba in northern Sumatra. As the Dutch territorial and capitalistic expansion in the Dutch East Indies taking place during the 1900s started to accelerate, this region adjacent to the plantation belt became a contested ground between various parties including the local chiefs, the colonial government, the missionaries, and the planters. Following the destruction of the property of planters, several attacks on the mission, and the chronic conflicts between different Karo Batak villages, the Dutch finally decided to end the chaotic situation and annexed the Karoland between 1904 and 1905, so as to better secure their investments in eastern Sumatra.⁵

It is noteworthy that many of the Karo villages that Kleingrothe visited were either previous missionary posts or were those areas linked to local skirmishes. The main purpose of producing these views of the Karoland would have been to provide the European planters with a useful source of information on the Karo Batak. Although Kleingrothe's visual representation of the Karo Highlands is hardly holistic, these



Tobacco fields on terraced slopes

The picture shows the cruel reordering of nature that was carried out to cultivate tobacco commercially. Tobacco plants not only took up space but also quickly exhausted the nutrients in the soil. In the upland estates, this caused tremendous erosion of the top fertile layer that was filled with volcanic substances.

“exotic” pictures from his photographic surveys and excursions to the Karoland still create a strong visual impact today, and the quality of these images also demonstrates his considerable ability as a professional photographer.

WITNESSING THE RISE OF MEDAN

Soon after the Dutch planter J. T. Cremer built the head office of Deli Company in Medan around 1871, this planters' town was rapidly developed as one of the most modern and wealthiest places in the Dutch East Indies. In 1886, Medan, the “Tobacco City”, became the capital of Sumatra's East Coast. Owing to the booming plantation industry, Medan arose as a major metropolis in the region during the early 20th century. Moreover, it was often viewed as the Dutch imitation of Singapore or as the “Paris of Southeast Asia”.

Kleingrothe's images of Medan faithfully present an overview of the street scenes and architecture of this colonial frontier town. The fusion of European, Malay, Chinese and Islamic buildings illustrated in these photogravures indeed celebrates Medan's cosmopolitan character and reflects its role as a “contact zone” where various colonial encounters took place. These pictures of Medan embraced the achievement of plantation capitalism as well, namely, the establishment of Medan as a flourishing European-dominated plantation city. In addition to the pictures showcasing the prosperity of Medan and its neighbouring areas, the images recording this region's impressive infrastructures — its harbours, railways and roads — also foster a sense of rapid progress and modernisation.

However, there still exist many untold stories behind the colonising camera: the unruly behaviour of European plantation employees at hotels and clubs on their days off, the dramatic gap between the rich and the poor, the stark social hierarchy demarcated along race, class and gender lines within the plantation society, the Dutch invasion of Aceh, and so on. All these indicate that colonial photography was far from a neutral and untroubled form of visual representation.

BEHIND THE LANDSCAPE AND THE LENS

If one were to view the scenes of Sumatra's East Coast as pictured by



Medan

Kesawan Street from the South, Medan

Kesawan Street was one of the busiest streets in Medan. Most of the Chinese lived and worked in Kesawan district, where the Chinese quarter was located. The photographer Charles J. Kleingrothe had his studio on this street sometime around 1902, and the sign is visible on the right.

Kleingrothe without reading any in-depth captions, these landscape images appear to simply exhibit a sense of serenity and tranquillity. However, if we examine *Sumatra's O. K.* from a more holistic perspective and delve into the contradictions behind its visual representations, we can come closer to grasping the deeper interplay of economic and political factors in the field of commercial photography on the island of Sumatra during the early 20th century.

In the case of the album, *Sumatra's O. K.*, Kleingrothe's intention was indeed to use the camera as a vehicle for delivering and packaging imperial and capitalist messages, and in so doing, these colonial images further promoted the expansion of the Dutch mercantilist empire. As such, the act of taking a picture turned out to function as an indirect form of predation and coercion. Ultimately, Kleingrothe's extensive collections of images recording the emerging mercantile culture in eastern Sumatra remain very important, for they show the critical role that the camera played in colonial economic expansion and demonstrate how photography functioned as an integral part of colonial discourse.

The idiosyncrasy of photographs has been aptly captured by Roland Barthes in his articulation of photography: "Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see."⁶ To explore the manifold nature of photography in the manner suggested by Barthes, it would perhaps be more appropriate to devote our attention to the cultural and historical contexts in which photographic works are produced, and to how they are eventually circulated across space and time. By doing so, we can more fully apprehend the absent "it" behind each of these seemingly neutral pictures and have a better understanding of the lived social reality that lies in the "unseen" background.

Silent Coercion: Sumatra's East Coast through a Colonial Lens is open at the National Museum of Singapore from 23 November 2010 to 6 February 2011. It aims to examine the interweaving of imperialism, capitalism and photography. By situating the thought-provoking images in their historical context, this exhibition showcases the role of photography in colonial discourse, and explores stories and ambiguities that had actually been "concealed" behind the camera, through which we may find a new way of seeing.

Endnotes:

- 1 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 14.
- 2 Charles J. Kleingrothe was a key figure in the commercial photography trade on the east coast of Sumatra at the turn of the 20th century. In 1888, he became the manager of the Lambert Company's branch studio based in Medan. He opened his own studio around 1902 and concentrated on work detailing the visual documentation of tropical agricultural business. See Peter Kors, "Kleingrothe's Images of Technology: The Reassuring View of the Indies," in *Toward Independence: A Century of Indonesia Photographed*, ed. Jane Levy Reed (San Francisco: The Friends of Photography), 53-54, and John Falconer, *Photographs of Java, Bali, Sumatra, 1860s-1920s* (Paris: Les Editions du Pacifique, 2000), 34-35.
- 3 In the printing process of photogravure, a copper plate was coated with light-sensitive gelatine tissue, and then exposed to a film positive and etched; this method produced a varied tonal range, in which the darks were etched deeper. Additionally, the photogravures created by Kleingrothe were produced in ink instead of silver which was prone to fading. Thus, Kleingrothe's photogravures were a better quality of original photographic prints.
- 4 The highly exploitative nature of the colonial economy developed in the Netherlands East Indies increasingly drew attention from Dutch journalists and politicians at the time. Therefore, around 1901, the Dutch government adopted the "Ethical Policy" aiming at furthering native welfare in the fields of health care, education, and irrigation programmes, among others. However, the Ethical Policy was also used for justifying Dutch military expansion across the Indies.
- 5 See in this regard Rita Smith Kipp, *The Early Years of a Dutch Colonial Mission: The Karo Field* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1990).
- 6 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 6.

TO A HARE-RAISING GOOD YEAR



THE **RABBIT** IN MYTH AND CULTURE

Smooth trickster, Easter herald, good luck charm and lunar companion. Far from being hare-brained, the rabbit in mythology enjoys a diversity of guises that mirrors the animals' colonisation of every continent on Earth save Antarctica. Come February 2011, adherents of the lunar calendar across East and Southeast Asia will celebrate a new year that should prove a welcome break from the drama and pugnacity of the preceding Year of the Tiger.





It is believed that the year of one's birth influences his or her personality and behaviour, which would reflect in part the traits of the corresponding animal.

Thus, an individual born in the Year of the Rabbit (1963, 1975, 1987, 1999, 2011) would tend to be gentle, gracious and intelligent though somewhat emotional.

The Spring Festival, as the Lunar New Year is called in regions that enjoy a cycle of different seasons, is a time of utmost festivity as families and communities look forward to the end of winter and usher in a new annum of hope and progress. The festival also marks the onset of a fresh astrological year. Unlike the Western zodiac which determines one's star sign based on the month of birth, the Chinese zodiac revolves around a twelve-year cycle in which an animal or *shuxiang* (属相) is assigned to each year. Traditionally, it is believed that the year of one's birth influences his or her personality and behaviour, which would reflect in part the traits of the corresponding animal. Thus, an individual born in the Year of the Rabbit (1963, 1975, 1987, 1999, 2011) would tend to be gentle, gracious and intelligent though somewhat emotional, whereas those born under the Dragon are likely to be passionate, bold and quick-tempered.

The twelve animals that govern the Chinese zodiac are: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Pig. Too ancient for its true origin to be traced, this sequence is sometimes attributed to Huang Di, the Yellow Emperor believed to have reigned more than

2,600 years before the common era (BCE) and said to be the father of the Chinese civilisation. Buddha (c. 563–483 BCE) and Lao Tse (c. 604–531 BCE), the founder of Taoism, have also been fingered, but what is known is that the Chinese zodiac has been in existence since the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 CE).

The most popular mythical account, however, credits the Jade Emperor of Heaven, who wanted to use animals to help people remember the years. He issued a decree that the first twelve creatures to report to him on the 30th day of the 12th month would be bestowed a year in their honour. The rabbit arrived after the tiger without incident, but what is often recounted is the drama between their earlier counterparts. The legend goes that the wily rat arrived first by riding on the ox while the latter forded a river. He then leapt off the ox's back to reach the Jade Emperor's palace before the weary bovine could do so. The easygoing ox was happy to forgive the rodent. But in his eagerness, the rat had forgotten to wake up his sleepy friend the cat, who thus missed the chance to have a year named after him. Thus, there is no Year of the Cat and a bitter enmity between the two species broke out as a result.

Given its nocturnal proclivities, the rabbit has become associated with the moon in other cultures as well. In ancient Egypt, hares (which are closely related to rabbits) were linked to the waxing and waning of the moon and the people of the city of Hermopolis worshipped a hare-headed goddess of fertility called Unut.

The rabbit returns later in the year when the Mid-Autumn Festival is celebrated. This festival, which falls on the 15th day of the eight lunar month, coincides with a period when the moon is at its brightest in the night sky, symbolising for many the joy of a whole family. Perhaps the best known story related to this festival is the tale of Chang Er, the wife of Hou Yi, an archer so keen-eyed he shot down nine suns that had threatened to scorch the earth with their heat. As a reward, the gods gave him an elixir of immortality. Unfortunately, Chang Er drank the brew by mistake while Hou Yi was out hunting and floated away until she reached the moon and became an immortal fairy. Keeping her company on the celestial body is a white rabbit who pounds herbs using a mortar and pestle. Meanwhile, Hou Yi remained devoted to his wife and laid out a table of offerings outside his house under the full moon to demonstrate his continual love.

The Mid-Autumn Festival is thought to have begun as people celebrated Hou Yi's devotion as well as gathered their families around them in anticipation of the harvest season. The tradition of making and eating mooncakes arose in the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE) and became popular as the shape of the confections symbolised the wholeness of the full moon (on which some claim to make out the shape of a hare) and the desire for a united family. During the late Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), the practice of worshipping Lord Rabbit or *Tu'er Ye* (兔儿爷) during the Mid-Autumn Festival emerged. From a simple animal pounding herbs, Lord Rabbit became a man-like figure with a rabbit's head and wearing imperial armour and a golden helmet. With this dignified bearing, Lord Rabbit is often depicted riding a lion, a tiger, a deer or sitting on a lotus throne.

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closely related to rabbits) were linked to the waxing and waning of the moon and the people of the city of Hermopolis worshipped a hare-headed goddess of fertility called Unut. According to a legend from India, Buddha, in the form of a hare, once travelled with an ape and a fox. The trio came across the god Indra in the guise of a hungry old man, who sought the animals' hospitality. The ape and fox returned with food. Coming back empty-handed, the hare built a fire and flung himself into it to feed Indra, who rewarded this sacrifice by turning the animal into the Hare in the Moon.

In Celtic and Teutonic circles, Ostara or Eostre is the goddess of the moon, a huntress with an entourage of hares who often assumed the guise of a

hare herself and is suspected to be the origin of the Easter Bunny tradition. Paying homage to the fortune and fecundity of rabbits, farmers or hunters during the Middle Ages uttered talismanic oaths to seek good luck in the fields and one such chant is thought to have evolved into an archaic nursery rhyme:

*“Run rabbit run, rabbit run run run,
Run rabbit run, rabbit run run run,
Bang bang bang bang goes the
farmer's gun,
Run rabbit run, Rabbit run run run.”*

*Run rabbit run, rabbit run run run,
Don't give the farmer his fun fun fun,
He'll get by without his rabbit pie,
So run rabbit run, rabbit run run run.”*



Blue and White Rabbit Dish
Front and reverse sides
Jingdezhen, China
Early to mid-17th century
Ceramic
3.5 x 17.8 x 9.3 cm
Image courtesy of Asian Civilisations Museum

HARES AND RABBITS: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?



Alice in Wonderland kicks off with a white rabbit who leads the heroine to a journey that ends up at a tea party presided by a Mad Hatter and a March Hare. Though usually regarded without distinction in most traditions, rabbits and hares are markedly different animals in the mammalian order Lagomorpha. The former are expert burrowers, preferring to hide from their predators, whereas hares, which have longer dark-tipped ears, never burrow, relying on their longer legs and ability to run up to 72 km/hour to flee from foes.

The European Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), which is native to Europe and has been introduced to Australia, where it is an agricultural pest, is the archetype of its group. But across the globe, there are more than 60 species of rabbits and hares. Most are found in temperate climates, but two endangered species, the Sumatran striped rabbit and Annamite striped rabbits, live in Sumatra's highlands and Vietnam respectively.

With typical chutzpah, the British later adapted this rhyme during the Second World War, replacing 'rabbit' with 'Adolf' to mock the Nazis' attempts to conquer the British Isles. One place where warrens were unwelcome, however, is the Isle of Portland off Dorset, England, where the word 'rabbit' is taboo to locals, who regard it as a harbinger of misfortune. This superstition is said to have arisen in the 1920s when local quarry workers spotted rabbits emerging from a hole shortly before a rock fall and the animals were blamed for causing landslides by their burrowing.

Still, bunnies enjoy favourable press in most other places. The somewhat macabre Western tradition of carrying a rabbit's foot in one's pocket has multiple origin stories. One theory goes that catching a rabbit by the foot in a trap is a sign of further hunting success and so the foot was kept as a good luck charm. Another explanation stems from a medieval practice where alleged victims of witchcraft wore a rabbit's foot around their necks at midnight under the full moon to ward off evil.

Curiously, witches were themselves often suspected to take on the form of a hare. English writer Walter de la Mare (1973–1956), on the other hand,

paints a more benign encounter with a creature that straddles the realms of myth and magic in his poem *The Hare*:

*In the black furrow of a field
I saw an old witch-hare this night;
And she cocked a lissome ear,
And she eyed the moon so bright,
And she nibbled of the green;
And I whispered "Whsst! witch-hare,"
Away like a ghostie o'er the field
She fled, and left the moonlight there.*

In Aesop's animal fables, the proud hare lost a race and won infamy for his complacency in taking a nap while the tortoise plodded on to snatch victory. Bunnies in other lores fare better, though. The *Panchatantra* is a collection of Sanskrit stories that convey moralistic lessons in a similar vein to the Greek storyteller. In one of the fables, a community of hares agree to sacrifice one member each day to a lion to prevent the beast from devouring them all at once. However, the chosen 'victim' manages to trick the lion into believing that his reflection in a well is another lion. Enraged by his 'rival', the lion leaps into the well to his death.

Tibetan and Burmese traditions also acknowledge the rabbit as a wily creature who pits brain against brawn. But lagomorphs (as rabbits and hares

are known to zoologists) earn top billing in Native American folklore, where the cottontail rabbit is a trickster *par excellence* who outwits vastly more powerful foes. Both joker and bungler, the rabbit often falls victim to his own schemes, only to hop back to life none the wiser. A number of Native American tribes also perform a ritual known as the rabbit dance, in which dancers circle a drum and pretend to put food in their mouths while chewing like a rabbit as a mark of respect and request to the animal they are about to hunt. The rabbit is also a primeval force: Nanabozho the creator and benefactor, or the Great Hare who stole the sun for the people and gave the gift of fire.

West African tribes also revere the hare as a comic mastermind who gets other animals to perform his tasks. In one instance, the hare was too lazy to till his fields and so tied a rope to the hippopotamus and the elephant. The attempts by the two behemoths to get loose ultimately clear the hare's fields and he was able to sow his crop. Converging on the North American continent as slaves from West Africa arrived with the colonists, these geographically disparate traditions of the rabbit as folk hero are thought to have given rise to the Brer Rabbit stories of America's Deep South.



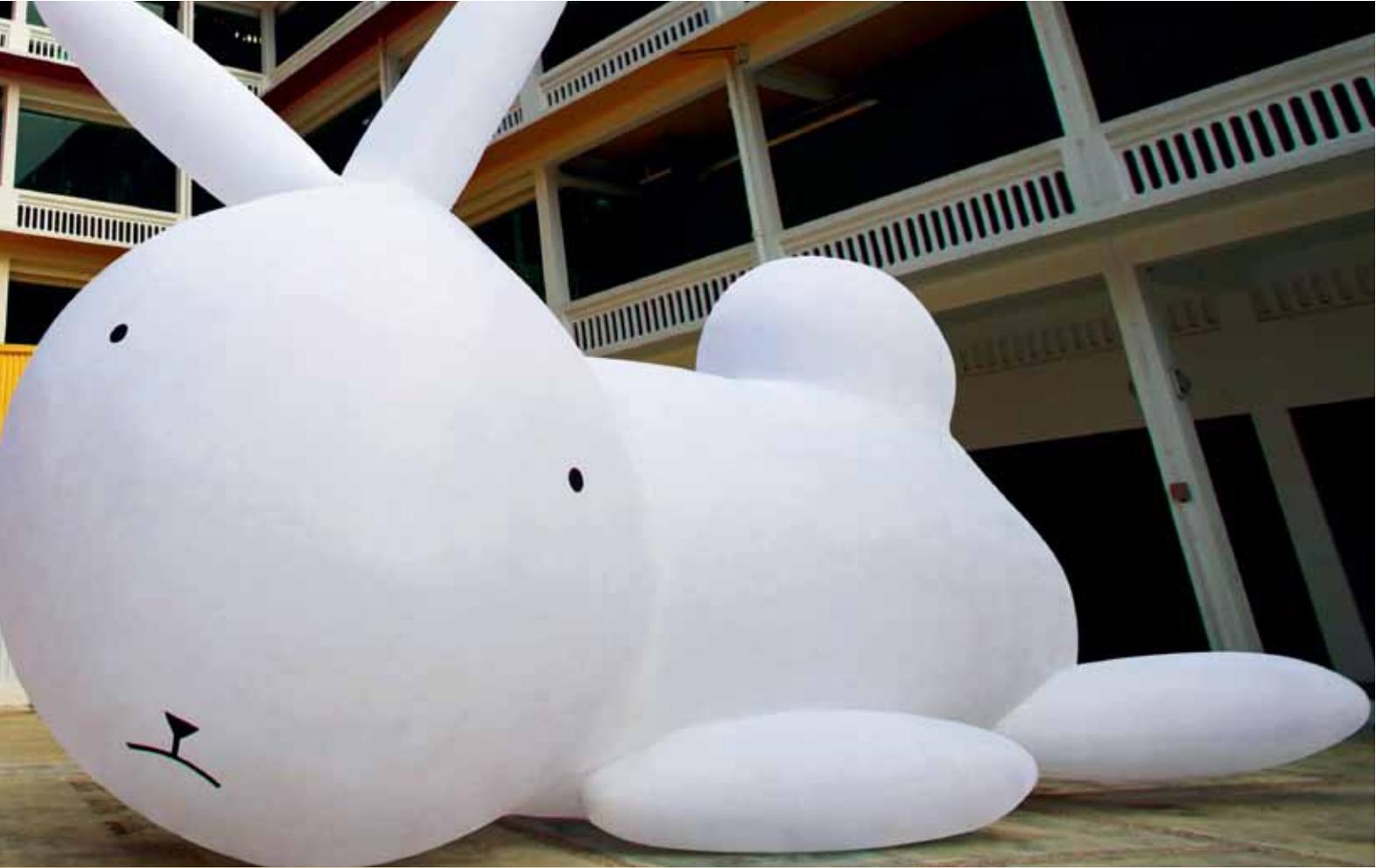
Stamp images courtesy of the Singapore Philatelic Museum.

In modern life, the rabbit pops up in rather more diverse iconography, from the streetwise Bugs Bunny to the risqué symbolism of the Playboy Mansion. Beatrix Potter forged an urbane landscape of tea-sipping bunnies with the Peter Rabbit books, while her compatriot Richard Adams turned a pastoral idyll into a *realpolitik* thriller in *Watership Down*, where warrens of rabbits are run along militaristic lines and wage bloody war. More innocent minds dream of Thumper, Bambi's playmate in the woods, or the Velveteen Rabbit who became alive thanks to his devotion to a sick boy. One generation grew up wondering *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, while their younger siblings laughed to the pest-control antics of Wallace and Gromit in *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit*. In culture and consciousness, the rabbit continues to lead men on a merry chase through fable and fantasy, and serve as a furry source for fascination and inspiration in ritual, religion and thumping good reads.

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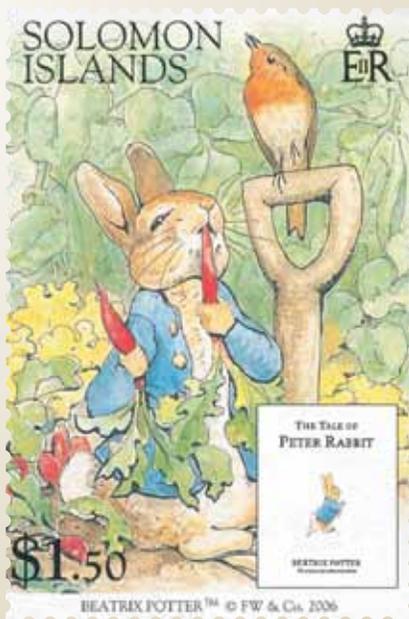
Dawn Ng, *Walter*, 2009, PVC helium float, 4 x 6 m, private collection. Image courtesy of artist.

ART AROUND SAM WALTER DOES CNY

Walter the rabbit returns to the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) this coming February to celebrate the Chinese New Year and Year of the Rabbit. First exhibited on the roof of SAM at 8Q as part of the inaugural *Art Garden: Children's Season* from May to July 2010, Walter hops back to the ground, this time housed in the Chapel at SAM.

Created out of the artist's desire to "enable others to discover the extraordinary in the everyday", Walter is also inspired by various iconic rabbits in contemporary cultures such as the White Rabbit and March Hare in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*; Fifi Lapin the French bunny voted as 'the world's most stylish fashion bunny' by Elle Magazine; the Moon Rabbit who makes delicious Mochi rice cakes on the moon as portrayed in Japanese folklore; and of course, the legendary Easter Bunny!

So take this opportunity to stand cheek-to-cheek to Walter, our local and very own iconic white blow-up rabbit designed by Singaporean artist Dawn Ng and make sure you take a picture with Walter for prosperity and good luck!



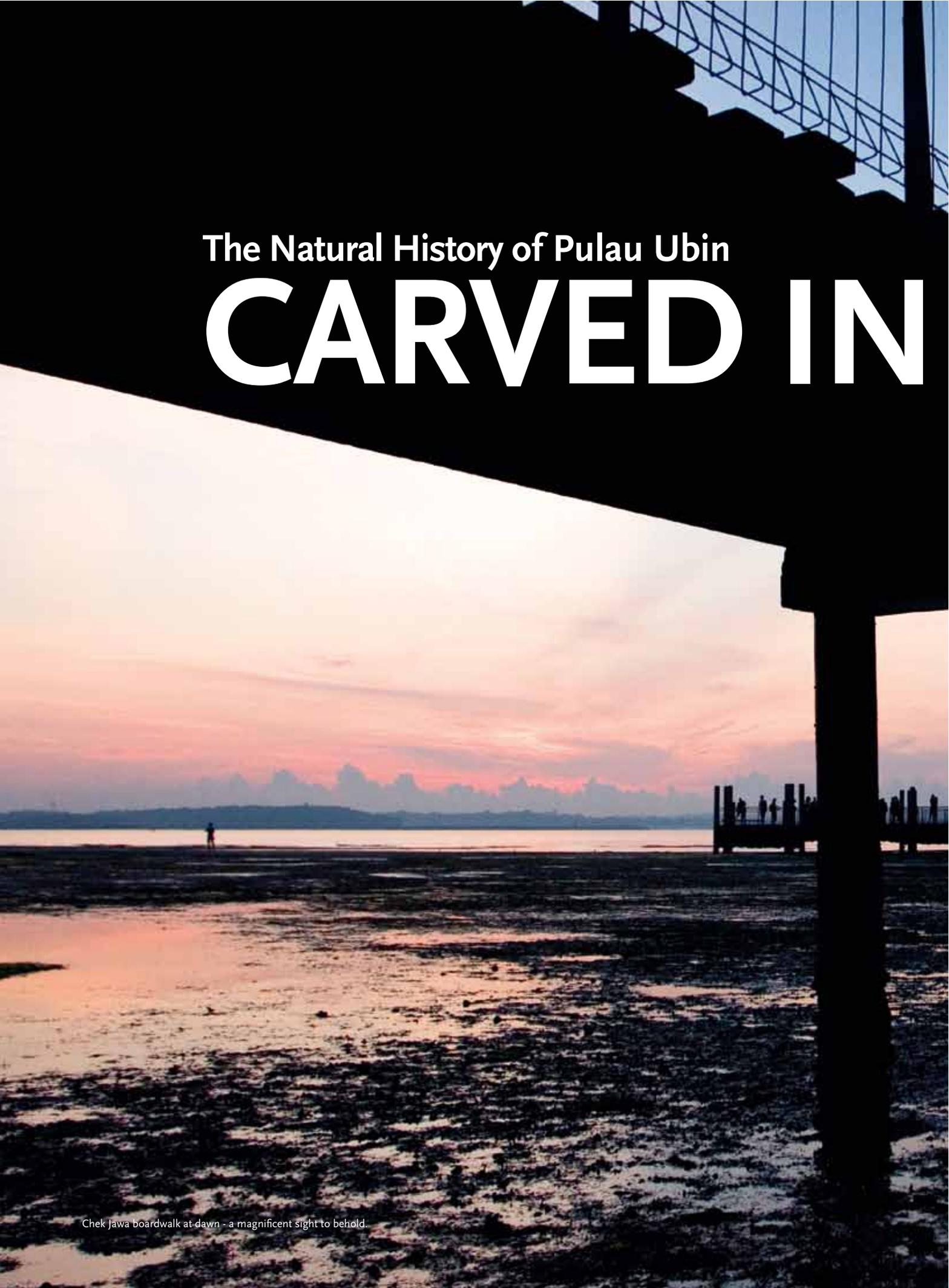
BUNNY WONDERLAND AT THE SINGAPORE PHILATELIC MUSEUM

1 Feb 2011 – June 2011

Remember when Alice was led into Wonderland by the White Rabbit? This time, the Singapore Philatelic Museum (SPM) would like to lead children and the young-at-heart into the wonderful world of bunnies using stamps and interactive displays. Did you know that a rabbit's nose has more than 100 million olfactory cells? This is more than eight times what we have. Their keen sense of smell and acute hearing enable them to escape from predators in time. Indeed, rabbits do not 'see' the world as we do. Now you can experience the world through the eyes, nose and ears of our furry friends.

While rabbits were domesticated more than 2,000 years ago by the Romans for meat and fur, these adorable creatures have recently taken on a more important role – to be our pets! Discover things you never knew about rabbits, learn how to tell apart the different bunny breeds and meet famous bunnies whose popularity has transcended time and cultures. In addition, admire colourful rabbit stamps and philatelic materials from all over the world. So wait no longer, come and celebrate the Year of the Rabbit at SPM!



A scenic view of a boardwalk at dawn on Pulau Ubin. The foreground shows a dark, silhouetted structure, likely part of the boardwalk, with a person walking in the distance. The sky is a mix of orange, pink, and blue, reflecting the low sun. The water is calm, and the overall atmosphere is serene and peaceful.

The Natural History of Pulau Ubin

CARVED IN

Chek Jawa boardwalk at dawn - a magnificent sight to behold.



GRANITE

museings

BY MARCUS CHUA

IMAGES: MARCUS NG AND MARCUS CHUA



Located at the eastern tip of Pulau Ubin, House No. 1 is believed to be the only remaining authentic Tudor-style house in Singapore. This building, built in the 1930s as a holiday retreat for the Chief Surveyor Langdon Williams, now functions as a visitor centre to Chek Jawa Wetlands. Inside, a honeycombed-shaped, terracotta-tiled living room serves as an exhibition gallery and houses the only working fireplace left in Singapore.



Pulau Ubin quarry. Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

Amid the undergrowth of a lush green forest, the diminutive mousedeer twitched its nose as it picked up a foreign scent. It sensed danger and bounded away in a series of elastic leaps. Nearly tripping over a sleeping python, it regained its composure but turned around to see the yellow eyes of a tiger towering over it. With a terrifying roar, the magnificent beast threatened to devour the mouse deer.

Thinking quickly under pressure, mousedeer said, "Oh tiger, before you are entitled to eat me, please let me finish my task. I was asked by the king to keep watch over his belt before he returned so that no one would wear it."

Puzzled at its demand, tiger demanded to see the belt of the king.

"There it is," said the mousedeer, pointing to the intricately patterned sleeping coil beside it. "But you must not touch or wear it."

Piqued by its beauty, the tiger was mesmerised and had the yearning to wear the belt for himself. Ridding all hostile intentions, the tiger requested, "Mousedeer, could you lend me the belt for a second, only a second?"

Mousedeer disagreed at first, but relented on the condition that no one must know that it lent tiger the king's belt or it would be in great trouble.

The tiger agreed and waited for the mousedeer to get away, then picked up part of the large snake and wrapped it eagerly around its waist. Rudely awoken and incensed, the python tightened and threw its coils around the tiger till it could hardly breathe. Safe in a distance, the mouse deer had its last laugh.

This old Malay folklore could well have taken place in Pulau Ubin where such wildlife once flourished. In the rolling virgin forests of the boomerang-shaped island northeast of mainland Singapore, once roamed the three animal characters of this story as well as numerous other land animals, birds, fish and invertebrates. Other notable resident fauna included the now possibly nationally extinct cream-coloured giant squirrel (*Ratufa affinis*) and sambar deer (*Rusa unicolor*).

These creatures co-existed and were probably hunted by stone-age people and ancient civilisations that settled on Pulau Ubin. Neolithic stone tools, quartz flakes, clay and stoneware artefacts unearthed from the island by archaeologists are testament to the rich and untold history of the island.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

The landscape of Pulau Ubin changed, however, following mass human settlement in Singapore. The granite hills of Pulau Ubin (in Malay: *Pulau* = island, *Ubin* = granite) were viewed as a valuable resource in building and construction and were extensively quarried from the mid 19th century. Nature made way for man and its machines and deafening blasts could be heard across the island as dynamite was used to blow up and extract granite deposits.

Plantations and aquaculture also changed the island's landscape. Much of the land was cleared for growing rubber, durian, coconut and other crops. Stretches of mangroves were also cleared for aquaculture. Charming mangrove swamps were replaced by unsustainable and pollutive prawn ponds.

TIGERS - FABLED ANTAGONIST, REAL LIFE VICTIM

The other protagonist of the Sang Kanchil story, the tiger (*Panthera tigris*) used to be "still over-plentiful in Singapore" in 1895, according to H. N. Ridley, the former director of the Botanic Gardens.

Tigers were said to have swum from Malaysia via Pulau Ubin and the neighbouring island of Tekong to breed on the main island and raise their cubs. It is therefore not surprising that stories of tigers on Pulau Ubin have become told as legends on the island even today.

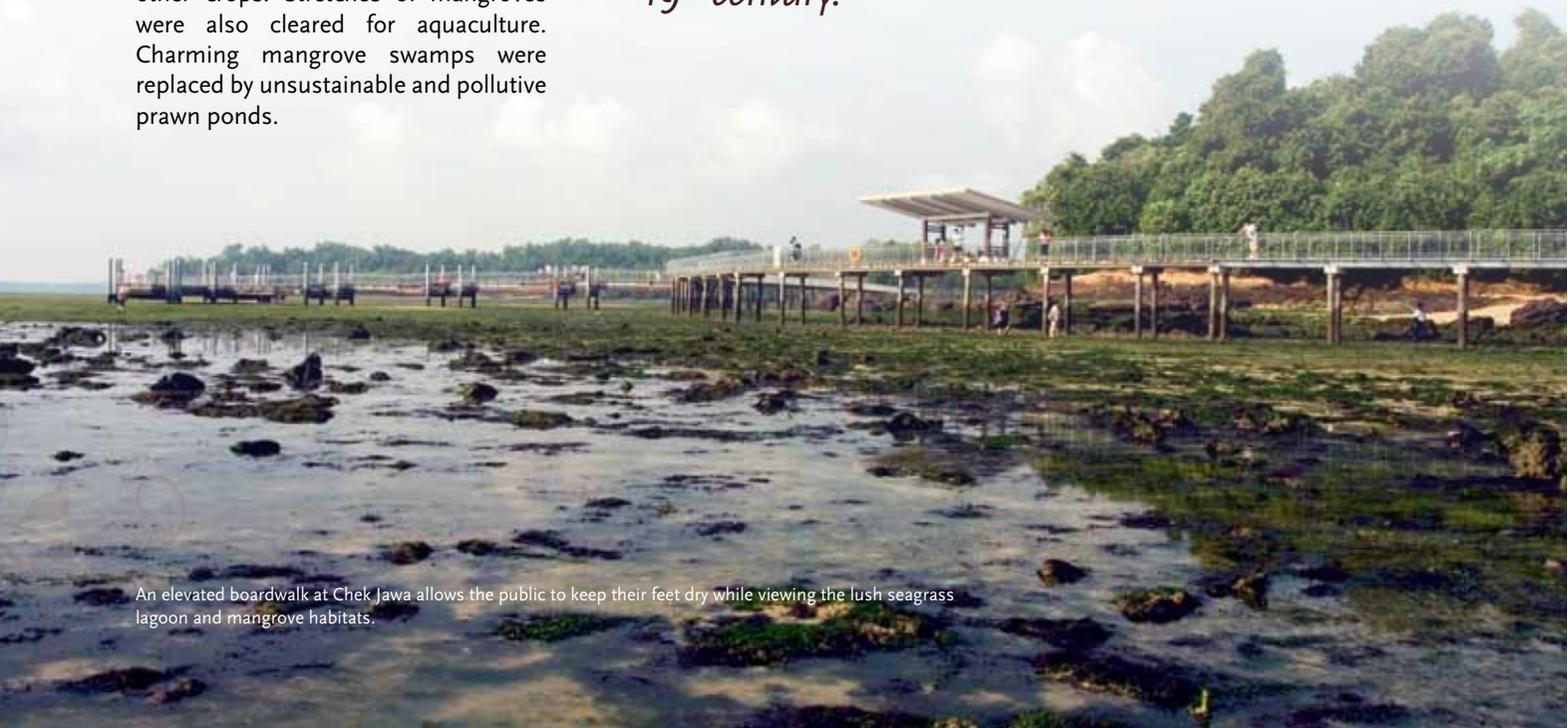
In one such story, a tiger entered a hut situated along a forest edge. It walked over ashes of a fire, left its mark and finding nothing of interest, broke through the flimsy wall of the hut and went away. The next night, four tigers entered another house nearby, probably looking for a meal of the owner or his dog. The house was left to the tigers as the occupants fled

by breaking through the back of the house.

Although feared for its strength and frequently portrayed as the bully in folklore, the king of the jungle did not enjoy its status for long in Singapore. Faced with the loss of habitat to plantations, they turned to humans as food and killed an average of one human being a day. The tiger became a victim of its own fearsome reputation and due to resultant human-tiger conflict the big cats were eventually hunted to national extinction around 1930.

However, tiger sightings were still reported up to the 1950s. In 1997, rumours of a tiger in Pulau Ubin led the police to issue a public advice to keep away from the island. The presence of the tiger was never confirmed and was thought by conspiracy theorists as a ruse by villagers to teach bumboat operators a lesson for raising boat fares!

"The granite hills of Pulau Ubin (in Malay: Pulau = island, Ubin = granite) were viewed as a valuable resource in building and construction and were extensively quarried from the mid 19th century."



THE GREATER MOUSEDEER: A TALE OF LOSS AND REDISCOVERY

The diminutive greater mousedeer (*Tragulus napu*) is a nocturnal forest-dwelling hoofed animal about the size of a large rabbit (shoulder height 30-35 cm; head body length 52-57 cm). It has features similar to both deer and pigs, and like the former, feeds on fallen fruits and vegetation and has a four-chambered stomach for digestion. However, like pigs, it lacks antlers and has elongated canines, especially in males and hence, is not a true deer. The greater mousedeer is native to Singapore and can also be found in Southeast Asia and Borneo.

Mousedeer used to be fairly common in Singapore before the 1920s but they faced threats such as the loss of their forest habitat and hunting. In Pulau Ubin, the greater mousedeer was recorded based on a single specimen (ZRC.4.4750) collected in 1921 and deposited in the Zoological Reference Collection of the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research. Other than two other specimens from the mainland collected in 1908 and 1923, no confirmed record of the species existed in the wild for the rest of the century and they were thought to be nationally extinct.

A re-introduction effort for the species on the mainland was made between 1998 and 1999, but released animals were not recorded again after 1999.

Compared to the lesser mousedeer (*Tragulus kanchil*), which are still present on Singapore island in small numbers and distinguished by their smaller size (shoulder height 20-23 cm; head body length 40-55 cm), throat and coat markings (see Low *et al*, 2009), the greater mousedeer appeared to be gone from the wild forever.

A twist of fate happened in 2008 when the greater mousedeer was rediscovered in Pulau Ubin during a faunal survey of the island. They appear to be fairly widespread across the island and could have come from a latent population that has recovered in numbers or swam from Malaysia. Both adults and young were seen, indicating that a breeding population exists.

Several possible reasons could have led to the return of the greater mousedeer. First, their reappearance in the forest in numbers is a sign that the regenerating forests of Pulau Ubin are once again able to support the existence of these forest dependent creatures. Second, the decrease in human activity on the island after quarries were closed and many villagers relocated probably provided a less disturbed landscape for the animals to thrive. Thirdly, the mousedeer could have swum from Johor, Malaysia, just as how wild pigs and elephants have made the Johor Strait crossing. Finally,

as large mammalian predators such as tigers and leopards are extinct on the island, there is reduced predator pressure on the island which could increase their chance of survival.

Although they have almost literally have come back from the dead, greater mousedeer and mammals on Pulau Ubin still face possible threats outlined in the main story.

However, there is potential for the greater mousedeer to continue to co-exist with man on the island due to the activity pattern of the two groups. Most mammals on the island, including the greater mousedeer, are nocturnal, while majority of human visitors to the island come in the day and do not stay overnight. Hence, it suggests that mammal use of the island is temporally separated from human activity. Additionally, visitorship to the island is higher during the weekends compared to the weekdays. Wildlife on the island may therefore be less disturbed during the relatively quiet periods at night and on weekdays. If well managed, this cyclical difference in activity between wildlife and humans may allow Pulau Ubin to function as both a recreational area for the public as well as a wildlife refuge in the long term and help to ensure the continued existence of the greater mousedeer and other nocturnal wildlife on Pulau Ubin.



As a result, much of Pulau Ubin's original natural heritage was destroyed or disappeared. The land was irreparably scarred and original habitats were lost. Naturalists who ventured onto the island found it to be depauperate of its flora and fauna. Lost and gone were the steep, rolling hills covered with primeval forest as well as many of its inhabitants, including the tiger. These are likely to be lost forever.

A NATURAL RENAISSANCE

In the late 1990s, when the last of Pulau Ubin's quarries ended their operation, many villagers relocated to the mainland. Slowly, nature recovered and started reclaiming the island like a lost child, spreading its seeds and allowing pioneer grasses and herbaceous plants to take over the fractured landscape. In the untended orchards and plantations, wild plants took root between what remained of commercial crops. This was the dance of natural succession.

As human disturbance reduced and habitats gradually reverted to the wild state, fauna returned. Among the first were birds, which also brought in and dispersed more seeds, aiding in the forest regeneration. Once extinct in Singapore, the oriental pied hornbill (*Anthracoceros albirostris*) made a comeback on Pulau Ubin and has successfully re-established a population on the island. Larger animals such as wild pigs (*Sus scrofa*), which were extinct on the mainland, also made their way by swimming across the narrow Johor Strait from Malaysia and re-colonised the island. Even an elephant once attempted the straits crossing, but was escorted back to Malaysia after a brief stay on the island. These visits highlighted the potential of Pulau Ubin as a wildlife refuge as habitats on the island became more hospitable to wildlife.

In 2001, plans were announced to develop parts of Pulau Ubin, which included the reclamation of the eastern coast of the island. Ironically, these plans led to the serendipitous discovery of Chek Jawa wetlands by the local naturalist and scientific community. Chek Jawa is a wonderful rich mosaic of ecosystems containing a vast seagrass lagoon, healthy mangrove swamps and a diverse shoreline of sandbars, coral rubble and rocky formations at the southeastern tip of the island.



Wild pigs are frequently sighted around Chek Jawa, where they feed on vegetation and fallen fruit on the forest floor.

Word spread and the place quickly made a name for itself as a must-see location among nature lovers and even the general public, which flocked to Chek Jawa in the thousands.

Some would say Chek Jawa was almost loved to death by the unregulated visitor traffic that trampled on many of the marine creatures such as sea anemones and sea stars. But this widespread exposure to the unspoiled beauty of Chek Jawa was also what helped save the wetlands. Struck by the natural wealth of the place and incredible biodiversity, both cityfolk new to their natural heritage as well as the nature community rallied together and appealed to the government for Chek Jawa to be saved for posterity.

A turning point for local nature conservation and community involvement came in December 2001, when the Singapore government announced that reclamation of the island would be deferred for a decade. The National Parks Board (NParks) then took over the management of the area and developed infrastructure such as an elevated boardwalk above the shore to regulate visitor impact to the fragile ecosystems.

“Slowly, nature recovered and started reclaiming the island like a lost child, spreading its seeds and allowing pioneer grasses and herbaceous plants to take over the fractured landscape. In the untended orchards and plantations, wild plants took root between what remained of commercial crops. This was the dance of natural succession.”



Bicycles are available for hire at the village and are the best way to enjoy Pulau Ubin's sights and history.

PULAU UBIN TODAY

Today, Pulau Ubin is one of Singapore's few remaining wild frontiers and among our last rural places. To reach the island, most members of the public take a 10-15 minute bumboat ride from Changi Village and get off at the island's village, where less than 100 families live in kampong houses without piped water and electricity. Instead, the villagers rely on noisy generators for electricity and wells for water. Life on the island is a throwback to Singapore in the 1960s.

Beyond the village, after years of recovery and natural succession, Pulau Ubin has become a veritable patchwork of viable habitats. Secondary forest (a term used to describe forests that regenerated on land previously used for agriculture or timber) occupies approximately half the island's land area, while a fifth of it is covered by some of the most extensive mangroves left in Singapore. Small areas of grassland and beach vegetation dot

the island, offering variety. The coast is likewise covered with a range of sandy, muddy and rocky beaches.

Endowed with a wide assortment of habitats, the island plays host to an amazing range of biodiversity. Over 600 species of plants are found on Pulau Ubin, including the Bakau Mata Buaya (*Bruguiera hainesii*), an internationally critically endangered mangrove tree. The island is also much loved for its impressive bird life with at least 177 species of native and migratory species recorded. It remains one of the strongholds of the straw-headed bulbul (*Pycnonotus zeylanicus*), a large songbird that is imperilled by its own rich and melodious singing due to demand by the cage bird trade, and red jungle fowl (*Gallus gallus*), the wild ancestor of the domestic chicken. Other than birds, Pulau Ubin's diversity of mammals, fish, herpetofauna (reptiles and amphibians) and invertebrates is equally stunning for a small island.



Oriental pied hornbills have returned to Pulau Ubin in recent years and can often be seen feeding on fruit trees at Chek Jawa.

“Endowed with a wide assortment of habitats, the island plays host to an amazing range of biodiversity.”



“With judicious land use planning and the government’s assurance that Pulau Ubin will be kept in its present state for as long as possible, there is hope that Pulau Ubin will remain Singapore’s urban eden for time to come.”

Still, no matter how grim and even faced with the odds, Pulau Ubin continues to surprise us with its little secrets. While it was thought that the clearing of forests would eradicate forest species, especially mammals sensitive to disturbances, the greater mousedeer (*Tragulus napu*) was rediscovered on the island in 2008 by the author and NParks during a study of medium-sized mammals of Pulau Ubin. It is an encouraging sign that nature is on the road to recovery as even the greater mousedeer, which had not been seen for more than 80 years and was presumed to be nationally extinct, returned. Other notable fauna recorded during the year-long study include the Sunda pangolin (*Manis javanica*), common palm civet (*Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*), long-tailed macaque (*Macaca fascicularis*), wild pig (*Sus scrofa*), barred eagle-owl (*Bubo sumatranus*) and large reticulated pythons (*Broghammerus reticulatus*). Coming full circle, it is comforting to know that at least the mousedeer and python of the Malay folklore still remain.



Displaying fiddler crabs emerge when the tide is low on Chek Jawa’s mudflats.

A FAIRYTALE ENDING?

In spite of the good news, possible threats to the island’s natural heritage are still present. Pulau Ubin receives relatively high visitorship, especially during weekends, and human disturbance of wildlife could be an issue. Other potential threats include poaching and feral dogs. A proposal to set up an energy grid on the island could bring about street lights, and their placement and usage will have to be properly planned and managed to avoid affecting the activity of nocturnal fauna on the island. Our growing population is also placing constraints on housing on the mainland and offshore islands such as Pulau Ubin may be seen as a land bank for future development which can threaten to erase the island’s natural and human heritage. The Urban Redevelopment Authority’s Concept Plan 2011, which charts land use and transportation plans for Singapore, is slated for review in 2011 and the results will determine the fate of Chek Jawa wetlands and Pulau Ubin.

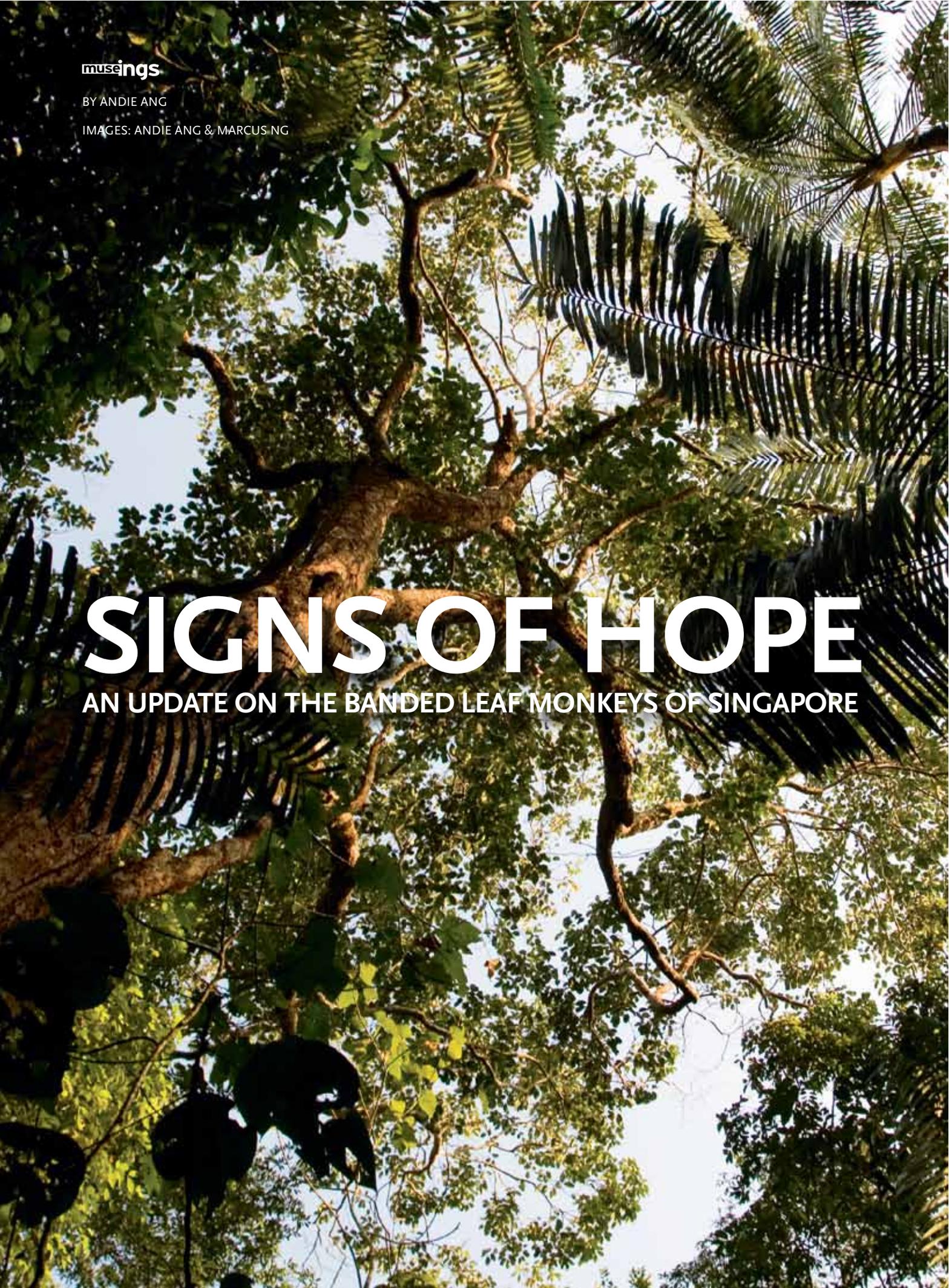
While we celebrate the miracles of life, there is a need to understand the practicalities of what can be achieved. It is unlikely that Pulau Ubin can ever be restored to its former natural glory. Nevertheless, there is a need to carefully manage and protect what is left. In order to retain our natural heritage on Pulau Ubin, it is necessary to ensure the co-existence of humans and nature. This will require the joint effort of the public as well as stakeholders who appreciate the importance of this shared treasure. Through research and conservation efforts on the island, scientists, NParks and the community can do their part to preserve its natural heritage. With judicious land use planning and the government’s assurance that Pulau Ubin will be kept in its present state for as long as possible, there is hope that Pulau Ubin will remain Singapore’s urban Eden for time to come.

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Marcus Chua is a graduate research student of the Systematics and Ecology Lab, Department of Biological Sciences, National University of Singapore. His current research looks at the ecology and conservation of leopard cats and other native mammals in Singapore and is supported by the Wildlife Reserves Singapore Conservation Fund.



musings

BY ANDIE ANG

IMAGES: ANDIE ANG & MARCUS NG

SIGNS OF HOPE

AN UPDATE ON THE BANDED LEAF MONKEYS OF SINGAPORE

“The distinctive colours or markings on young primates is thought to help distinguish infants from older, more independent individuals, and elicit care-giving and protection from older group members.”



The pelage colouration of infant banded leaf monkeys changes with age, with the white fur turning greyish black by the time the infants are about seven months old.

Unlike the long-tailed macaques that still occur in abundance in local parks and reserves, banded leaf monkeys are critically endangered in Singapore due to their low population size. Over the past decades, it was unclear whether the monkeys were still reproducing, given only unconfirmed sightings of infants. Hence, establishing the existence of new infants and when these elusive monkeys reproduce are important to help scientists assess their population status and study their reproductive biology.

In attempting to answer these questions, my research involved field observational data gathered in Singapore's Central Catchment Nature Reserve over a period of 22 months. Walking in the forest trails, teams of observers recorded all instances of infant sightings, birth seasons and the physical characteristics of the young monkeys throughout their growth, while minimising disturbance to the animals.

From these observations, I have some encouraging news that the banded leaf monkeys in Singapore are regularly reproducing. The neonatal (post-birth) colouration of the banded leaf monkeys is conspicuous and distinct from the black pelage (coat) of the adults. The infants are born white, with a black line from head (along the spine) to the tail that is intersected by a black line passing along the shoulders to the dorsum. This natal pelage pattern is consistent with that of banded leaf monkey infants found in Johor, Malaysia, which are thought to be the same subspecies

as those in Singapore. The distinctive colours or markings on young primates is thought to help distinguish infants from older, more independent individuals, and elicit care-giving and protection from older group members.

In 2009, five newborns belonging to four social groups were observed around July. More recently, one infant was born in June 2010. Back in 2008, one black infant was observed in November 2008, which based on its pelage coloration was likely born in July 2008. Therefore, there has been at least one birth period in June-July for three consecutive years. Furthermore, several infants survived beyond seven months, indicating low infant mortality.

Despite preliminary signs of population recovery, continuous monitoring of the population is vital in order to find out if the banded leaf monkeys also reproduce in other months, the genetic relatedness between the individuals (given the low population base) and what social, genetic or ecological constraints on reproduction exist. Such information would be invaluable to understand whether the population is viable and to develop a management plan for the species in the future.

A recent paper on the reproduction and infant pelage colouration of the banded leaf monkey in Singapore has been published in the Raffles Bulletin of Zoology, and is available online at: <http://rmbz.nus.edu.sg/rbz/biblio/58/58rbz411-415.pdf>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andie Ang, who recently completed her Master's thesis on the banded leaf monkeys of Singapore, is a recipient of the Wildlife Reserves Singapore Conservation Fund (WRSCF) grant. She spent two years following the monkeys through swamps, forest vines and dense undergrowth. Much of her results (including exclusive video clips of monkeys going through their daily routines) can be found on this website: <http://evolution.science.nus.edu.sg/monkey.htm>. The WRSCF grant will support her efforts to further investigate population changes and the feeding ecology of the local population of banded leaf monkeys for an additional year. This will yield important information on their reproduction and genetics and help in their conservation in Singapore.

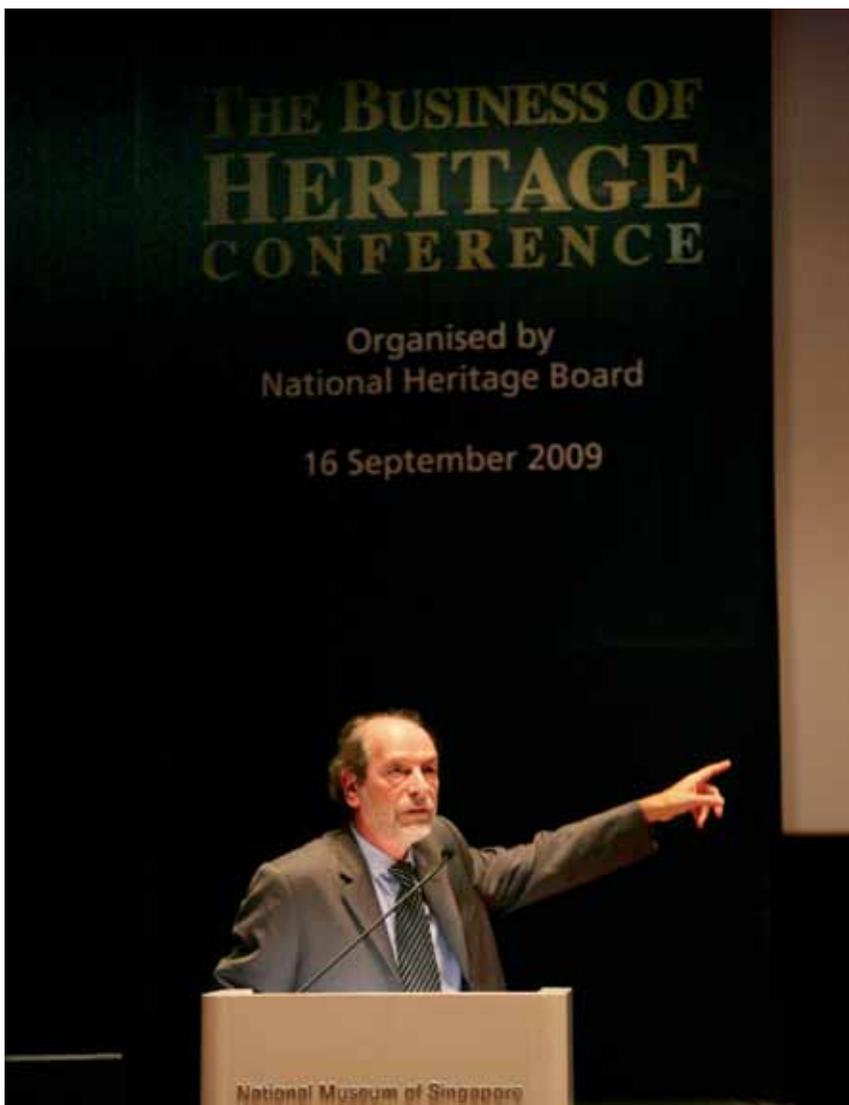


CREATING THE HERITAGE ENTREPRENEUR

Milestones in the Heritage of Business Conference

When the first Business of Heritage Conference took place in September 2008, the general perception was one of uncertainty. For one, people seemed to have difficulties wrapping their minds around the words “business” and “heritage” in the same sentence. One would often assume that the business of heritage meant either traditional heritage businesses or museums. Well, you are not entirely wrong but neither would you be entirely right. In fact, perceptions like these actually set the stage for curious participants to discover the exciting world of Singapore’s heritage and museums.

The Business of Heritage Conference was an initiative that sprouted in 2008 as a result of the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts' Renaissance City Plan III. The intent was to motivate the greater community of private and people sector stakeholders to do their part in the promotion of Singapore's heritage and museums. The National Heritage Board (NHB) is the main agency promoting Singapore's heritage and museums, but the conference marked a recognition on the NHB's part that our reach and messaging could reach further heights if we could engage more partners in our journey. In that sense, the NHB's take on the conference is that it is meant to be a platform to connect, educate and activate the various communities from the ground-up.



Speaker Dr Jacques Gies.

A LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL LINE-UP

The Business of Heritage Conference set out to achieve several outcomes. Firstly, we aimed to promote and create awareness that the heritage sector is a viable and sustainable industry. Secondly, the conference functioned as a platform to enhance and strengthen the capabilities of the industry with practical knowledge through the sharing of international best practices by professional speakers. Thirdly, the event sought to create a conducive environment for networking and idea generation for industry stakeholders.

The inaugural event was a fairly local affair, with the late Dr Seddon Bennington, Chief Executive, Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, helming the conference as keynote speaker. The other speakers and panellists were various Singaporean professionals in heritage businesses, including Mr Jeyathurai Ayadurai, Managing Director of Journeys Tours and Travel Services; owner of private museums – Mr Chang Yang Fa, CEO of the Mint Museum of Toys and Mr Teo Han Wue, Executive Director of Art Retreat; along with a group of trailblazing pioneers of the Hi²P scheme. The first conference was well-received and generated a lot of positive feedback, being the first of its kind in Singapore to offer expertise in museum developments and also insights by heritage entrepreneurs.



Clockwise from top left: Keynote speaker, Business of Heritage 2010, Mr Philip Nowlen; Mr Yoshi Miki sharing a light hearted moment with the audience in 2010; Keynote speaker, Business of Heritage 2009, Mr Thomas Grenon; Panel discussion at last year's Business of Heritage Conference.

Amidst a global economic slowdown in 2009, the conference's sophomore year took on a more ambitious agenda with two prominent French experts: Mr Thomas Grenon, Director, *Réunion des Musées Nationaux* (RMN) and Dr Jacques Gies, President, *Musée Guimet* heading the line-up of international speakers. Their inclusion was part of NHB's efforts to leverage on the Singapore-France Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2008 between the NHB and RMN that would see exchanges and developments in museum and other capabilities over the next 10-years. In total, Business of Heritage 2009 hosted three international speakers, two Singapore speakers and a discussion panel of four Hi²P recipients who shared and inspired the

audience with their varied experiences. On the whole, the conference was able to generate sufficient momentum and publicity to attract a strong turnout.

Amid the packed programme, we took time off to remember former keynote speaker, Dr Seddon Bennington, who passed away in July 2009. With his passing, the museum world had lost a great leader and inspirational figure to many. The conference team put together a fitting tribute video to Dr Bennington based on his time in Singapore a year earlier, set to the tune of Michael Jackson's *Man in the Mirror*. With the opening words, "I'm gonna make a change, for once in my life..." echoing through the Gallery Theatre, this was

a poignant and reflective moment that struck an emotive chord for many within the audience that left not a dry eye after the tribute video faded and ended the morning's proceedings.

The third instalment of the conference further reinforced the message that this is a growing and in-demand conference that many of our stakeholders anticipate and look-forward to. The theme of Business of Heritage 2010 was the "Sustainability of Museums and Heritage Business", and true to its promise, the conference once again delivered great insights, memorable anecdotes and a revitalising experience. The sterling line-up of speakers included Philip Nowlen, Executive Director



Exhibitors at the Heritage Mall



Ms Bebe Seet demonstrating the fine points of Peranakan beadwork



Storytelling session at the Reading Lab

of The Getty Leadership Institute and Simon Cronshaw, Founder of Culturelabel.com, one of UK's most exciting museum businesses; it was no wonder the Gallery Theatre at the National Museum of Singapore was literally bursting at the seams with a sell-out crowd all eager and ready to learn from these industry experts.

FROM INCUBATING IDEAS TO THE HERITAGE MALL

The inaugural conference in 2008 was timed to coincide with the launch of the Heritage Industry Incentive Programme (Hi²P). This was the first seed-funding development scheme managed by the NHB to encourage the private sector to develop innovative and unique products and services that would promote Singapore's rich heritage and lively museum landscape. Hi²P acts as a catalyst to enable our potential partners to realise the economic potential of Singapore's heritage and give their businesses a unique competitive edge.

The first two conferences featured an Ideas Lab where Hi²P recipients could showcase prototypes and creative concepts, network and develop new partnerships, and more importantly, to inspire others to create and innovate. Since 2008, Hi²P has supported over 50 projects and also encouraged about six new start-ups with core business focused on the promotion of Singapore's heritage. Some of these new start-ups include Singapore OH! Pte Ltd who created the Open House exhibitions; Waalkz Pte Ltd, developer of the Heritage Trials iPhone application; and The Good Earth Collection who created an exciting and colorful range of lifestyle merchandis inspired by the Peranakan Museum.

At Business of Heritage 2010, a number of these initial concepts had finally come to fruition and to do these projects full justice, the Ideas Lab was expanded into a Heritage Mall where we could showcase a smorgasbord of heritage and museum-inspired products ranging from apparel, homeware, iPhone applications, publications, boardgames and even tea boxes. The impressed faces on many who visited the Heritage Mall reinforced the fact that Hi²P was on the right track in supporting these projects. The Heritage Mall provided a fresh perspective for many aspiring

entrepreneurs seeking that big break to enhance their own competitiveness. Most of these projects would not have existed if not for the launch of Hi²P.

Through the Business of Heritage Conference and Hi²P, the NHB has helped to create a new breed of entrepreneurs – the heritage entrepreneur. The distinctive trait of these entrepreneurs is that they have taken the challenge of capitalising on Singapore's heritage and museums as a primary basis for content development. Some of these trailblazing entrepreneurs who have leapt into the heritage industry include Monsters Under The Bed who created the board game *Journal, Singapore*; newurbanmale.com with a series of heritage inspired apparels; Chuan Pictures, featuring acclaimed director Royston Tan's *Old Places* documentary; Ate Media Pte Ltd, creator of a series of heritage culinary publications focussing on Chinatown; and World of Fortune who started up a Chinese Wedding Heritage Gallery along North Bridge Road.

LOOKING AHEAD TO BUSINESS OF HERITAGE 2011

Although the past events have catered mainly to the local industry, the Business of Heritage Conference is fast establishing itself as an important conference within the region and there are plans to have the conference reach and serve a greater audience, especially those within the ASEAN network.

If one were to regard the first Business of Heritage Conference as a long term investment in developing Singapore's heritage ecosystem, then this investment seems to be maturing healthily and yielding steady returns in generating more awareness and interest in Singapore's museums, increased attendance at the conference year-on-year, and a steady increase in Hi²P applicants proposing new ideas and concepts. To date, the inception of Hi²P has spurred and encouraged over \$9 million in total business investments. And with the Business of Heritage Conference providing a meeting place for people, partners and ideas, one can expect an upward trend for potential growth and investments.

Like a fine wine, as the Business of Heritage Conference looks ahead to its fourth year, the conference can only get better with age.



Guest of Honour Mr Sam Tan, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Information, Communications and the Arts, viewing the wall of fame with Mr Michael Koh, CEO, National Heritage Board.

“Through the Business of Heritage Conference and Hi²P, the NHB has helped to create a new breed of entrepreneurs – the heritage entrepreneur. The distinctive trait of these entrepreneurs is that they have taken the challenge of capitalising on Singapore’s heritage and museums as a primary basis for content development.”

PORT & PEARL

Discovering Penang on Foot and Four Wheels

musetravels

BY MARCUS NG

For those familiar with Singapore's civic district, the names might ring a bell. Chulia Street (Lebuh Chulia), Armenian Street, Anson Road and Victoria Street are among the nomenclatural twins that recall the parallel yet peculiar paths taken by two islands on opposite ends of the Straits of Malacca. There's even a *grande dame* of a hotel, a sprawling neoclassical retreat on the eastern seaboard that emerged from the same minds who conceived the Raffles Hotel. But whereas Beach Road in Singapore is now far from the coast, the Eastern & Oriental Hotel still offers an unfettered maritime scene from its promenade where one can sip afternoon tea and nibble on scones in the footsteps of writers such as Rudyard Kipling and Somerset Maugham.

Telok Bahang on the northwest of Penang island.



“The uneven rows of once roaring retail outlets are at times broken by the broad grounds of crumbling mansions that once housed the island’s eminent families and now serve as budget hotels or dimly lit restaurants.”

Wander a little afield from the imposing colonial edifices, and the grand avenues quickly meld into the tiny lanes of Georgetown’s Little India. Here, stalls offering Indian snacks such as *Vadai* and *Thosai* vie with merchants of fabric and fashion who assault the senses with an aural retinue of Bollywood hits. Walk a little further and the five-foot way becomes a sleepy sequence of coffeeshops, moneychangers, jewellers and workshops of cruder trades which have withstood the boom and bust cycles of grander cities. The uneven rows of once roaring retail outlets are at times broken by the broad grounds of crumbling mansions that once housed the island’s eminent families and now serve as budget hotels or dimly lit restaurants.

Turn a corner and the scene shifts to one whose essence has changed little in over a century. Seeking heavenly protection and blessings for their families, earnest mothers and wives throng the Kuan Yin Temple at Pitt Street to offer incense and joss to the Goddess of Mercy. Rings of pigeons feast on grain scattered on the forecourt, which is hemmed by stalls filled with devotional paraphernalia and tools for divination.

Along the same road towers the Moghul-style domes and minarets of the Kapitan Kling Mosque, an elegant space of devotion borne from the efforts of Havildars, Jemadars and

Sepoys (Sepoys were Indians who served in the British Indian Army, while Havildar and Jemadar were respectively the ranking equivalents of Sergeant and Lieutenant) who arrived in Penang in the early 19th century under the employ of the East India Company. A stone’s throw away on Queen Street is the Sri Mariamman Temple, built by migrants from South India in 1833 and crowned by a 23-foot high Gopuram bearing the sculptures of four swans and 23 gods and goddesses. The temple, Penang’s oldest Hindu centre of worship, is famed for its annual Navarathri festival, a nine-day celebration culminating in a procession where the patron deity is paraded on a wooden chariot through the surrounding streets to mark her victory over an evil demon king.

Arriving in late December, we were a month or so too late for the festival. But after a day of random wanderings to suss out the neighbourhood for Georgetown’s famed street delicacies, the heat and humidity had driven my travelling companion and me to a watering hole along Lebu Chulia. The public house, dubbed The Hong Kong Bar, is itself a local institution. The unassuming façade hides a homely bar whose walls are bedecked with plaques, badges, lifebuoys, photographs and posters that testify to a long association with British and Australian air force personnel stationed at Butterworth in Province Wellesley (now Seberang



Hindu procession along Lebu Chulia, Georgetown.



Caretaker at the Kuan Yin Temple.

The making of Georgetown

Named for the pinang or betel nut palms that grew in abundance on the island, Pulau Penang became the first British settlement in Southeast Asia when Sultan Abdullah of Kedah allowed Captain Francis Light to establish a trading post in 1786. The new port was named Georgetown after King George III of England. In the 19th century, Penang prospered from trade in tin mined in nearby Perak and drew migrants from China, India and other countries who left indelible marks on Georgetown's culture and street names. In 1805, Thomas Stamford Raffles, who later founded modern Singapore, arrived in the region as Assistant Secretary to the Governor of Penang. Political and cultural ties between the two islands strengthened in 1832 when the Straits Settlements, comprising Singapore, Malacca and Penang, was formed to administer British territories in the Malay Peninsula.



Military memorabilia line the walls of the Hong Kong Bar, a popular gathering point for British and Australian servicemen based in Butterworth.



Mansion and Museum

A fascinating counterpoint to Singapore's Peranakan Museum, Penang's Peranakan legacy has its own showcase in the Pinang Peranakan Mansion. Located at Church Street in a neighbourhood of sleepy godowns, this elegant abode was the home of Kapitan Cina Chung Keng Kwee (1821–1901), the founder of the town of Taiping in Perak and a tycoon of whom it was said, "Others may equal him in wealth, but not in mansions." Though less Baba in blood than by self-association, the Kapitan's house (Kapitan Cina was a title given to eminent Chinese who represented their communities before the colonial authorities) exemplifies the eclectic pride of Peranakan architecture, with a Chinese courtyard and carved wood panels set amid English floor tiles and Scottish ironwork in Victorian style.

The Mansion, which adjoins a temple that served as both family altar and ancestral hall, has a collection of more than a thousand artefacts, which unlike its Singapore counterpart, are mostly displayed in situ in the rooms as if they were still awaiting the use or admiration of their original owners. The Kapitan was also the leader of the Hai San secret society during the clan's struggle against the Chee Hin clan for Perak's tin wealth in the 1860s and 1870s. Domestic grandeur thus sits uneasily with communal icons of eternal brotherhood and even a well in the rear courtyard where the bodies of foes were said to have been disposed of.

“In a more distant and turbulent past, the various clan associations or kongsi that carved up Georgetown according to ties of blood exerted an influence that reached well into the streets and beyond.”



The sprawling Khoo Kongsi complex.

Prai). Visiting former servicemen still drop by for a pint or two from Jenny, the lusty owner of the establishment, and browse the voluminous albums of photographs that have survived about forty years of vigorous thumbing.

The conversation that evening, however, was soon interrupted by the sound and radiant fury of another procession. This parade was an eclectic affair of glittering carriages featuring Hindu regalia and Taoist symbols. One cart with equine carvings bore a pale man in priestly robes. Marchers in white blew into pearly conches or drummed as the crowd grew in strength and gongs resounded against a cobalt sky. It was just a few days before Christmas, and a tropical Santa fittingly appeared at one point to hand out sweet treats to delighted children. Earthly grandeur and godly visions rode lightly into the sunset as the entourage shed bliss in its wake and melted into a maze of lanes in which we, pressed for time and a Tiger, chose not to tread.

CLAN AND COMMUNITY

The very first waves of Chinese migration to Penang gave rise to a thriving community of Peranakans or Straits Chinese when pioneering Chinese men married local womenfolk to produce a hybrid culture unique to Southeast Asia. Fluent in Malay and well-connected to local nodes of power, many Babas (the honorific given to male Peranakans) amassed wealth and status in Malayan society, straddling with ease the realms of Malay Sultans, Chinese communities as well as colonial intrigue. In order to strengthen their power base and influence, some Baba leaders later encouraged migration from their hometowns in China and set up clan associations to aid and organise newly arrived kinsmen.

In a more distant and turbulent past, the various clan associations or *kongsi* that carved up Georgetown according to ties of blood exerted an influence that reached well into the streets and

beyond. Originally founded as a way of providing socio-economic and cultural support to migrants sharing a village of origin, the *kongsi* grew to straddle a broad and fluid zone between villainy and respectability, notably in the 19th century when clashes between rival clans were not uncommon and clan leaders wore multiple hats as community leaders as well as heads of secret societies.

Clan houses that combine the functions of temple and social gathering places dot many corners of Georgetown. Some occupy the area of just a few shophouses. Others, like the fortress-like Khoo Kongsi complex at Cannon Square (named for the artillery used in 19th century clan wars), were self-contained enclaves the size of a city block and housing ancestral shrines, schools, living quarters and even an outdoor opera stage. Virtually invisible from the surrounding streets, the clan temple



at the core of the *kongsi* could be accessed only through a narrow alley fenced by 19th century terrace houses, which made the facility easy to defend during an era of prevalent inter-clan conflict. In the past, only members of the Khoo clan were permitted to enter, but today, a small fee (clan members enjoy free reign of the premises) is charged for visitors who get to savour a masterpiece of Straits Chinese architecture and artistry.

and silent mementos can be had for a song. And if heat and hunger batter your strength, the sizzle of busy woks and the tell-tale signs of an eager crowd beckon at many a nook and crossroad, as succulent roast duck, banana leaf rice and *nasi kandar* tempt travellers and locals alike from their plans and forgotten purposes. But few regret being waylaid by Georgetown's famed hawkers, who now and then get flown over to Singapore to share their culinary

“A slow stride through the city is also the best way to savour the sights of the streets which switch from modern bustle to the bubblewrapped stillness of an outdoor museum with the turn of a corner.”

Most parts of Georgetown between Swettenham Pier and Komtar Tower (the island's tallest building and an architectural eyesore that houses a bus terminal and a dim shopping mall) are best traversed on foot. A slow stride through the city is also the best way to savour the sights of the streets which switch from modern bustle to the bubblewrapped stillness of an outdoor museum with the turn of a corner. You don't have to know much about history to enjoy the place; the five-foot ways provide a shady stroll by countless shops where second-hand memories

handiwork with the citizens of another food-obsessed island. The astringent bite of Penang laksa (the tangy, sour flavour of assam or tamarind takes some getting used to), the savoury simplicity of *kway teow tng* (flat rice noodles in a broth of fish balls, pork and scallions), the chunky sweetness of Teochew chendol (look for the long queues at Lebu Keng Kwee off Penang Street) tempt travellers and locals alike from their labours and longings.

If the tradesmen, temples and tin-pan alleys of Lebu Chulia fail to hold you



up, another side of Penang can be sampled at the southern end of the street. The 13.5km-long Penang Bridge is already a quarter of a century old, but regular ferries still ply the straits bearing vehicles and commuters who prefer the economy (tickets cost just RM1.20) and ease with which they can alight and find themselves in the heart of Georgetown. Many passengers make a beeline for nearby Weld Quay to board a flotilla of buses (a detailed and user-friendly bus guide is available from the information counter) that crisscross the city before reaching the suburbs and outlying townships. It costs just a couple of ringgit to get to the foot of Bukit Bendera, where one can ascend to the peak of Penang Hill via a funicular railway, or the hillside settlement of Ayer Itam, the site of the largest Buddhist temple in Malaysia, *Kek Lok Si*. But this time, we had our sights set northward and joined the line for bus 101. From the interchange, the bus retraces Lebuhraya Chulia, passing the Nagore Shrine, Central Fire Station, the Yeoh Kongsi and the exquisitely restored Penang Teochew Association building.

At Jalan Penang, the bus swings into a thoroughfare of Indian cinemas and produce markets that threaten to spill over the sidewalk. The route weaves in and out of Jalan Burma (a road that recalls the historic presence of Burmese communities on the island) and brings one through Pulau Tikus (literally ‘Rat

Rice on a pole: nasi kandar

Nearly every street corner in Georgetown plays host to a stall or coffeeshop selling *nasi kandar*, a culinary treat with its origins in Indian Muslim migrants to Penang. Consisting of steamed rice served with a choice of curries and other side dishes, the dish was originally sold by hawkers who carried their wares in baskets balanced on poles or *kandar*, hence the name.

Island’), a district of palatial bungalows, suburban malls and legendary street food. At some point, the shophouses and broad, straight avenue vanish and the driver navigates a narrow path between lush slopes and the luxury resorts of Batu Ferringhi.

Near the end of its route, the bus passes an establishment with a signboard declaring it to be “The Restaurant at the End of the World”. We were told the original premises stood right by the shore until the tsunami of 2004 washed away the facility and wrecked

much of Teluk Bahang, a quiet fishing village at the northern end of the island. Today, the restaurant has been rebuilt on firmer ground, but the village remains where it was, on a sliver of soil between the Andaman Sea and an army of mangroves. Sampans painted in blue and red are parked in a stagnant creek. A gang of boys drenched by the sun chase after a deflated football on a strip of sand. Malay ladies in worn *kebayas* exchange gossip under the shade of zinc roofs in a lane of houses that offer homely beds and a breakfast of fresh seafood.

Where the village meets the water, rickety planks zigzag over a shoal of jellyfish towards an outpost where one can greet passing fishing vessels and watch the day fade to dusk. We tread lightly, keeping a close eye on gaps in the boards, while children on bicycles and bare feet zip by with veteran abandon. Eagles and wheeling kites return from their hunt to roost at the national park across the bay. We, too, retreat before the shadows to feast by the promenade of Gurney Drive. The pearl of the orient may dream of its past lustre, but the port founded by Light continues to bask in the charm of a heritage city (Georgetown, along with Malacca, joined the ranks of UNESCO’s World Heritage Sites in 2008) that has outlived the fall of empires and still seeks to resist the gnawing tide of time.

POWERHOUSE BY THE PORT

ST JAMES POWER STATION 3 SENTOSA GATEWAY

A Category A winner in the Urban Redevelopment Authority's (URA) Architectural Heritage Awards (AHA) 2010, St James Power Station represents a radical example of adaptive reuse, from a coal-fired power plant to one of Singapore's top entertainment centres by the harbourfront.

Located just off the Sentosa Gateway off Telok Blangah Road, St James Power Station was opened in 1927 to supply electricity to nearby shipyards, factories and residences. Until 1962, the facility powered much of Keppel Harbour. In 1982, the building was converted into Southeast Asia's first fully automated commercial warehouse. A new lease of life came in 1998 when the URA revealed a Master Plan to transform the HarbourFront Precinct into a commercial and lifestyle hub. For the former power station, this entailed its conversion into a multi-concept entertainment centre housing themed pubs, interactive museums, galleries and other retail or leisure outlets. The building was then refurbished in 2005 at a cost of \$40 million.







“DCA Architects, who were tasked to restore and adapt the facility, found a distinctive colonial building that was an engineering feat of its time.”

STEEL STANDING STRONG

DCA Architects, who were tasked to restore and adapt the facility, found a distinctive colonial building that was an engineering feat of its time. The main structure consists of two blocks with 18 metre high steel columns supporting 20-35 metre wide roof trusses. The perimeter steel columns are encased in the brick walls that form the building facades, giving the place a stately masonry appearance.

Architecturally, the power station reflects its colonial heritage with classical motifs adorning its facades. The sturdy appearance of the building is achieved with a solid fair-faced brick base that elevates the repetitive vertical fenestrations, which are proportionately divided by masonry lintels with arches at the top. The building is capped by a simplified masonry entablature which hides the pitched roof to give the structure a civic appearance.

All the masonry surfaces are painted in white to create contrast with the fair-faced brick walls and express the neoclassical architecture of its era. The prominent chimneys are strong reminders of its past as a power station while the light green and blue glass window panels add interest and subtle colour to the building facades.

The slab condition in the two main building blocks was generally satisfactory, requiring no hacking or reconstruction. The structural system from the second to the fourth storey consists of concrete slabs supported on encased steel beams, which required rectification of spalling concrete and rusted steel beams. The steel roof trusses were, however, in good condition.

There is also a 4-storey ancillary block where concrete had spalled and constant water seepage had corroded existing steel beams. To rectify this, new structural columns were constructed and positioned as closely as possible to where the original beams were to retain the spatial quality of the building's interior.



“Today, it is a good example of how adaptive reuse has successfully preserved the distinctive character of a bygone era and made a building relevant by allowing the public to explore its cavernous interior while viewing reminders of its robust past.”

DESIGNED TO CONNECT

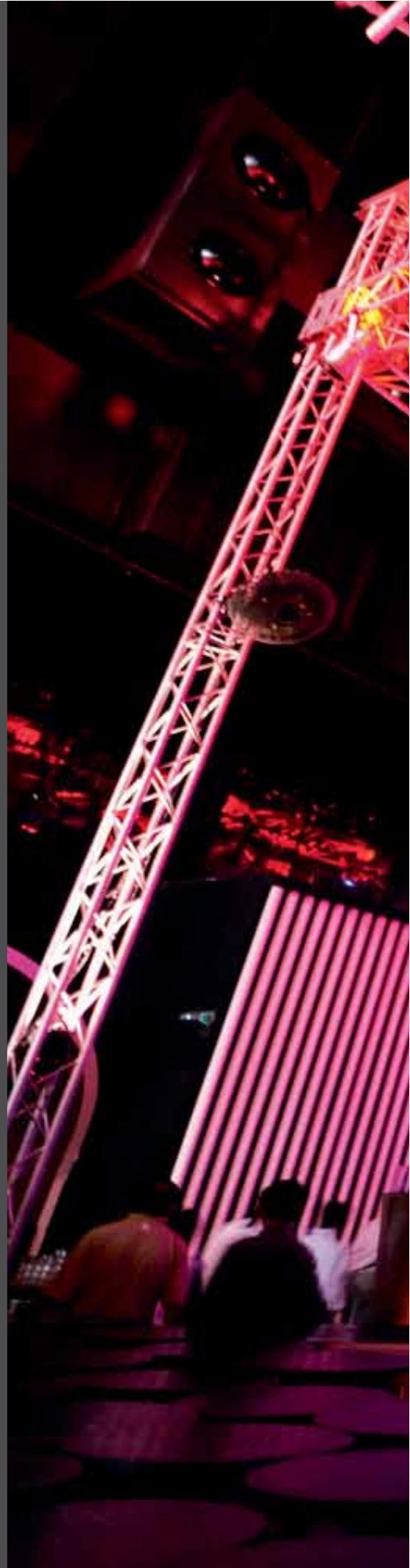
Spatially, the voluminous space within the two main building blocks provided an opportunity to evoke a theatrical quality through the use of elaborate props or displays, while the ancillary building was thought suitable for retail or administrative purposes. New mezzanine floors were introduced as viewing galleries for visitors to enjoy the spatial quality within the building. Additional staircases were also built to connect the building blocks internally and to comply with the necessary fire safety codes. To link all three building blocks, new covered walkways and entrance drop-off canopies were provided that also connect to an overhead bridge to the adjacent VivoCity complex.

A special cleaning paste was used to restore the existing fair-faced brick facades to their original state. Other restoration work included protective treatment to the disintegrated brickworks, re-pointing works to the mortar joints, and applying strengthening solution and water-repellent material onto the entire fair-faced brick facades.

The existing coloured-glass window panels had to be replaced as they could not be conserved except for one that was restored to serve as a record of the original construction. The replacement glass panels were sourced from Thailand and selected to match the original panels in colour intensity and texture.

A poignant reminder of the buildings' past function, the existing chimneys were restored and their imposing presence has now become a landmark in the HarbourFront Precinct. Special cleaning agents and protective treatments were also applied to the internal and external surfaces of both chimneys.

St James Power Station has been faithfully preserved according to the principles of maximum retention, sensitive restoration and careful repair to bring the building to its former glory. In its previous role as a power station, it was admired from afar but accessible only to authorised personnel. Today, it is a good example of how adaptive reuse has successfully preserved the distinctive character of a bygone era and made a building relevant by allowing the public to explore its cavernous interior while viewing reminders of its robust past.





Many might fondly recall an exhibition in 2007 at the National Museum of Singapore (NMS) where 477 natural history drawings commissioned by William Farquhar, the first Resident and Commandant of Singapore, were exhibited in their entirety for the first time. A fresh chance to view the drawings is now available thanks to NMS and Editions Didier Millet, who have published a new catalogue depicting all 477 drawings in full colour.

Originally put up for sale in London by Sotheby's in 1993, the William Farquhar drawings were acquired by Singapore philanthropist Goh Geok Khim, or G.K. Goh as he is commonly known, who then donated it to the former National Museum, today's NMS, in 1995. Presently chairman of the NMS Board, Mr Goh shares in this interview his recollections of the original auction, his interest in natural history, the story of the catalogues old and new, as well as his hopes for cultural philanthropy in Singapore's art and heritage scene.

Thereafter, in a special contribution, Mr Kwa Chong Guan, Chairman of the Board of the National Archives, pens his thoughts on the making of the original catalogue for the drawings, to which he contributed an essay on their art history.

DRAWING UPON HISTORY

An interview with G.K. Goh, Chairman, National Museum of Singapore

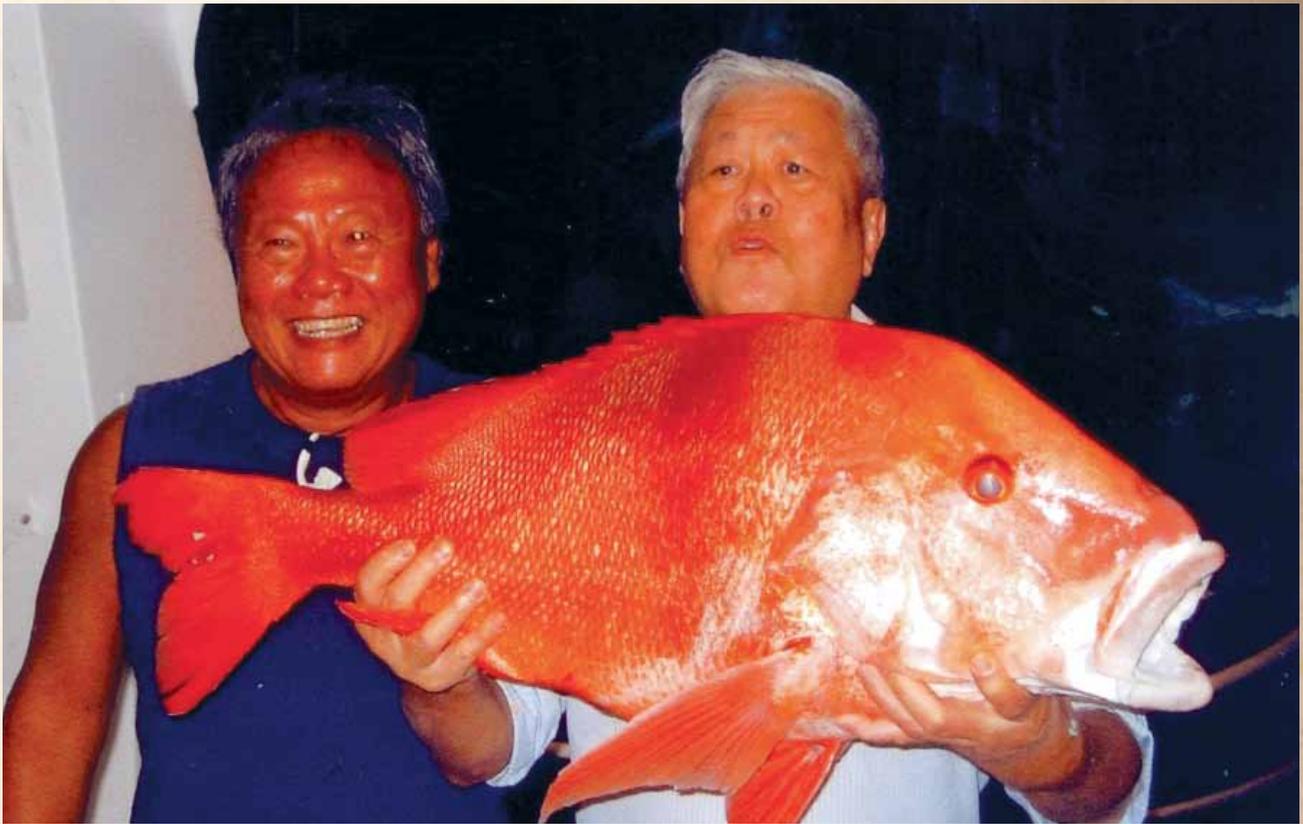


It began with a call from his son Goh Yew Lin, who said, "Dad, I have a proposition for you." Laughing, Mr Goh recalls that Yew Lin added the proviso: "Either you will make a lot of money or you are going to lose a lot of money." According to Mr Goh, what his son meant was that he could either bag a profit by buying the collection and selling it later, or incur a loss by giving it to a museum.

A successful bid was by no means assured yet, however. A friend of Mr Goh's from Malaysia was also keen on the collection, but eventually chose to back out. Meanwhile, another collector had made a winning bid, which revealed in the process an unexpected snag. "I think the auctioneers forgot that they needed clearance from the Royal Heritage Board UK for export from the UK," explains Mr Goh. A British university had also objected to the sale, and it was decided that the university could acquire the collection if it could come up with the money in six months, failing which the buyer could keep the drawings.

As fate would have it, the lady who won the bid did not want to wait and so passed up the collection. Sotheby's then approached Mr Goh to ask if he were still interested. "I said, I am not going to pay the price she paid," he recounts. "I am going to pay the price I bid for, which was about 50,000 pounds difference." The auctioneers agreed and Mr Goh took delivery of the drawings, although he left the collection with Sotheby's for about a year. "These are watercolours which have been kept in six huge folders and they weigh a lot," explains Mr Goh. "I don't have the facilities to keep them." Recalling his first look of the drawings, he states, "When I went to London and they showed me the entire collection, it amazed me that despite the fact that it's been 180 years, the colours were intact."

About a year later, Mr Goh discussed with his son what to do with the collection. "I said, why don't we donate it to the museum for everybody to see? There's no point keeping it, it would just deteriorate," he says, noting that he also did not have



Mr G.K. Goh (right) with close friend Alex Chee during a fishing expedition at Exmouth, near Perth, Australia, 2008.

enough room to display all 477 drawings. In return, he made just one request: that the National Museum name a gallery after his late father, Mr Goh Seng Choo. "The reason I did this was because my father had always been interested in plants," he explains, smiling as he recalls growing up amid farms near Kim Chuan Road at Upper Paya Lebar, where his father grew rambutans, mangosteens and other fruit trees. "Come harvest time, a lot of friends would come and pluck the fruit; my father always loved that."

The gallery was temporarily closed when the museum was renovated in 2006, but Mr Goh is pleased to reveal that arrangements have been made to restore the Goh Seng Choo Gallery at NMS in mid 2011.

Mr Goh also published in 1999 a catalogue entitled *The William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings* in a two-volume large format set. He engaged Dr Ivan Polunin (a British born physician and natural historian) to research and write about the flora and fauna depicted in the drawings, while Mr Kwa Chong Guan and Dr John Bastin respectively contributed essays on the art history of the drawings and Farquhar's role in their creation. Available from Antiques of the Orient for \$800, with gains from the sale given to charity, this imposing catalogue is not for the casual reader. Thus, NMS has recently produced a new book entitled *Natural History Drawings: The Complete William Farquhar Collection* containing colour reproductions of all 477 drawings along with the essays by Mr Kwa and Dr Bastin.

According to Mr Goh, the book stems from a desire to make the drawings more accessible. Recalling discussions with Ms Lee Chor Lin, Director of NMS, he says, "In the earlier volume, about 150 of the paintings were printed in colour and the rest in black and white. So we decided why don't we do one like this but in its entirety and make it affordable to everybody?" The new book is now available at major bookstores and Mr Goh adds that the museum conservators "have done a very good job" at restoring the drawings. He also offers a reminder of the collection's significance which prompted his purchase in the first place. "It's one of the most comprehensive documentation of the flora and fauna of this region," he explains. "This is the only intact collection that has survived. The other big collection was owned by Raffles but

"I said, why don't we donate it to the museum for everybody to see? There's no point keeping it, it would just deteriorate," he says, noting that he also did not have enough room to display all 477 drawings."

it was burnt on the way to England.” (when Raffles’ ship *Fame* was accidentally set alight and sank *en route* to London)

Shrugging off the mantle of ‘philanthropist’, Mr Goh expresses a whimsical surprise at his prolonged involvement with the museum. “When I gave this collection to the museum, I didn’t realise that 15 years later I would be Chairman,” he states, sharing that the role brings with it immense responsibility. “You would think you are taking on a non-executive role, but in actual fact, a lot of things come to your table.”

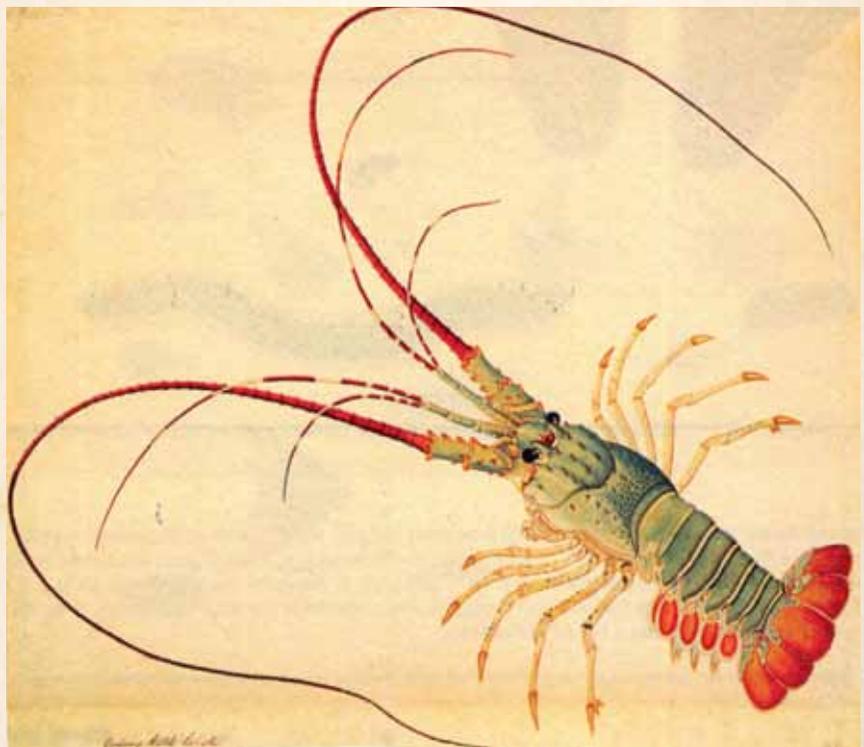
“Practically, I had no knowledge of what the museum was about. But the museum has a very good team. If you have got good people, your job is much easier. So I said ok, and I have stayed for three years.”

During Mr Goh’s watch, NMS has seen its annual visitorship rise from about 650,000 in 2007 to nearly 890,000 in 2009. “The museum has come a long way,” he affirms. “It’s not because I was there; it’s because the team who runs it is very good.” Mr Goh also expresses great satisfaction with a recent gala dinner in which NMS raised about \$900,000. “It was not easy, at \$20,000 a table,” he notes. “Some financial institutions were very supportive of the fundraising, but the surprising thing was that the people who gave are mostly SMEs, the smaller companies. And I would say 60% of those who donated and turned up had never been to the museum.”

“It was so well done that the people who went there said they had never attended such an event. They didn’t leave until midnight. After dinner they had drinks and some of them went to the Novus Restaurant for another round. I am very grateful to them and I hope that the corporate world could pay a little bit more attention to this sector.”

Supporting the arts and heritage scene is for Mr Goh a vital task to make Singapore an attractive and vibrant destination. “Singapore without art is like a jigsaw puzzle with one piece missing,” he states, “The arts scene is part of our entire social fabric – you cannot simply say that art is not money-making, so why are we bothered with it?” He recounts how in 1979, when the Singapore Symphony Orchestra was but a

"I think our children should know about the past and at the same time understand and love nature. Let them see what's in the museums and understand what our culture is about. To go forward you must sometimes also go backwards to look into our own history."



Found in the Straits of Malacca, a spiny lobster is among the colourful marine creatures reproduced in watercolour in William Farquhar’s natural history drawing collection.



Mr G. K. Goh (far left) with Mr George Yeo (in white-grey shirt), former Minister for Information and the Arts and current Minister for Foreign Affairs, at the National Museum of Singapore during the exhibition of the William Farquhar collection of natural history drawings from 7 September – 21 October 2007.

fledgling outfit, he hired two Londoners for his stockbroking business and learnt to his dismay their wives wanted to return home after six months, saying that there was nothing to do in the city.

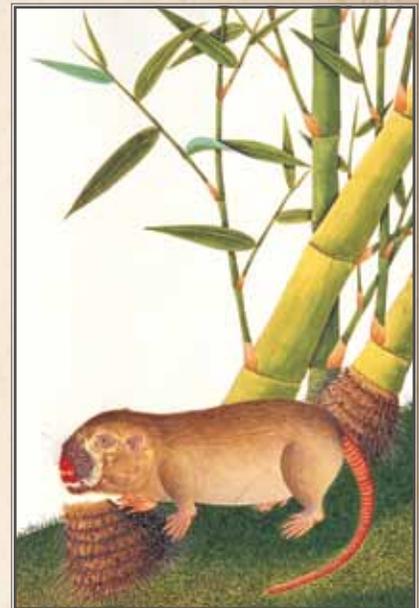
Expressing hope that the Farquhar drawings could be exhibited in their entirety for a second time in the future, Mr Goh mulls what he sees as a fading affinity with nature. “Singapore is urbanising so much that our children don’t even know what a mango or rambutan tree looks like. Even my own grandchildren don’t know! It’s a sad testament to our society that apart from all the material things we are doing, we have lost touch with nature.”

Revealing snippets of his younger days, Mr Goh recounts snorkelling amid lush corals off Raffles Lighthouse and collecting seawater off Bedok for lavish marine aquaria before the east coast was reclaimed. “I am interested in nature even till today,” he maintains. “I still look after my garden, which I designed.”

Pointing to a set of high quality prints of the Farquhar paintings hanging in his office, Mr Goh picks one depicting a spiny lobster as his favourite. “For six months, I grew a baby lobster in my tank,” he says of one memorable nugget from his marine aquaria days. “If you put in cockles or mussels, they will take it apart with their pincers. Try and open a cockle with your fingers and you can’t. I wish in those days I had a camcorder that could record that movement; it’s fascinating how nature is.”

Another drawing close to his heart is one of a cashew nut tree. “Unknown to the average person, it is a very versatile tree,” Mr Goh revealed. “You can eat the young shoots raw, the fruit is edible and sweet. Then you have the shell with the nut: the nut is what you eat, the shell is what you crush and get oil for very high precision instruments.”

While he bemoans the loss of such knowledge, Mr Goh harbours the hope that the drawings and the book could help people reconnect to Singapore’s history and nature. “I think our children should know about the past and at the same time understand and love nature,” he says in closing. “The good thing with the museum is that a lot of schoolchildren are going there now, and we are encouraging schools to bring children there during the holidays. It’s free for them anyway. Let them see what’s in the museums and understand what our culture is about. To go forward you must sometimes also go backwards to look into our own history.”



This strange looking creature is a bamboo rat, a rodent native to Southeast Asia that feeds on roots and shoots.

THE MAKING OF A CATALOGUE

BY KWA CHONG GUAN

Chairman, National Archives Board



A juvenile Malayan tapir, one of many Malayan animals depicted in the William Farquhar collection of natural history drawings.

As the then Director of the old National Museum in the early 1990's, I was aware of rumours on the museum network of the Royal Asiatic Society's intention to auction the collection of natural history drawings which Farquhar had bequeath to it. It was an intention not without controversy as Farquhar had in 1827 donated the collection in good faith that the Society would not at some future date dispose of it.

The then Director of the Royal Asiatic Society, the late Dr Dennis Duncanson, whom I first met as a graduate student in 1977 at the University of Kent in Canterbury's Southeast Asian Studies Programme, and later became a good friend, confirmed that he was the one who initiated the proposal to dispose of the Farquhar collection of nature drawings because it was the odd item in the Society's collections of Asian history and literary manuscripts. Moreover, parts of the collection had been on long term loan to other institutions. As anticipated, the impending auction of the collection drew the ire of members of various heritage groups in Britain, that it is a national treasure which should not be sold to leave the country. It is to Dr Duncanson's credit that he pushed through the sale largely on the grounds that the Society needed the funds from the sales to move from its old and very cramped premises to newer offices.

Some time in 1996, after Mr G. K. Goh was finally allowed to purchase the collection as he recounted in his interview, I received a call from another old friend, Gok Eck Kheng asking if I would join him to put together a proposal and help to do a catalogue of the collection to be published by his Landmark Books. It was an invitation difficult to turn down.

Who could we turn to for help? First and foremost we needed was a botanist to describe the plant drawings and then we will need a zoologist to describe the mammals, bird, reptile, invertebrate and fish drawings? Was there anyone who commanded all this natural history expertise (otherwise we would have to work with a team of botanists and zoologists, which we did not relish)?

The one name that came to mind was Dr Ivan Polunin, who sadly has just passed away as I am drafting these comments. Dr Polunin was a medical doctor by training, specialising in social and public medicine and was for generations of medical students an unforgettable lecturer. Dr Polunin was also a polymath with a deep interest in not only the natural history of the region, but also Singapore's history and heritage. He was a gifted photographer and his collection of 16mm films have become a valuable documentation of the Singapore landscape in the 1950's. Dr Polunin's photographs of the plants and animals he studied, such as mudskippers, are stunning and have been published in magazines including National Geographic.

Dr Polunin responded with alacrity to Eck Kheng's invitation and threw his soul and mind into documenting in detail each of the 477 drawings. Polunin documented not only the evolving European knowledge of these Malayan flora and fauna over the course of the 19th century, but also the Malay knowledge of the plants and animals of their world which he had learnt over decades of field work on public medicine among the Malay villages. He produced in many cases mini-essays on the drawings which Eck Kheng had great difficulty convincing him to edit into a caption.

The next expert we needed was someone to provide a historical background to Farquhar, his interest in natural history and its documentation in these 477 drawings. The name that came to mind was Dr John Bastin, a former Professor of History at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur in the late 1950's before becoming a Reader in Southeast Asian History at the School of Oriental & African Studies in London. Dr Bastin had written a doctoral dissertation on Stamford Raffles and gone on to become the acknowledged expert on Raffles and whose writings on Raffles are still must read to for history students today.

More important, Dr Bastin had over the years extended his research into Raffles' interest in the natural history of the region and the wider British colonial interest and documentation of the 18th and 19th century natural environment they found themselves in. We were delighted that Dr Bastin accepted our invitation to write about Farquhar and his interest and contribution to the study of Malaya's natural history. What is fascinating in Dr Bastin's story of Farquhar is how much he and Raffles had in common and how much Raffles appropriated Farquhar's findings and claimed them as his own.

Finally, we needed someone to describe these drawings as works of art. That task fell to me, as we unfortunately could not find another more qualified to undertake the assignment. I had studied art history as an undergraduate in the old University of Singapore under William Willets, the Curator of the University Art Museum. Willets came to the study of Chinese art late, after graduating in Zoology at Oxford. His early studies in Chinese art culminated in a two-volume publication that looked at Chinese art in terms of its form, function and fabrication, associating one art form with a major period or dynasty in Chinese history. For Willets, painting was very much an art form associated with the Song. The royalties from the sale of this book enabled Willets to travel first to India where he spent several years studying its art and then to Singapore where he was engaged to teach art history. The second edition of his study of Chinese art published in Singapore by Donald Moor is still a benchmark text.

It was within this framework of the form, function and fabrication of art that I looked at the Farquhar drawings, and in tribute to Willets, dedicated the essay to his memory as he died when I was drafting it. As an art form the Farquhar drawings were part of that category of natural history drawings which evolved after the Renaissance in Europe to empirically and scientifically record the natural world. As a category of art works, drawing nature is common to not only European art, but also Islamic art, especially its Indo-Mughal forms and in Chinese art as a distinct category of "*hua-chiao*" or "bird and flowers" paintings. However in Europe from the 18th century clearly defined standards evolved for this category of paintings in watercolour to ensure its accuracy to meet the demands of the emerging disciplines of zoology and botany.

Raffles and his peers in the East India Company were clearly aware of these exacting standards that their drawings of their discoveries of plants and animals must meet if it is to be acceptable

and useful to their institutions back in London and consequently imposed these standards on the artists they engaged. Who were these artists they engaged to produce these scientifically accurate drawings? We know from the autobiography of Raffles' Malay language scribe, Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, that Raffles engaged "a certain Chinese from Macao who was very expert at drawing life-like pictures of fruits and flowers." Farquhar must also have known of this talent-pool of Chinese artist in not only Macao, but more likely Guangdong (Canton then), who were working in artist studios producing huge numbers of landscapes of Chinese life and trade in European style which were known as China Trade Paintings and sold very well, and engaged them to produce his drawings.



Dr. Ivan Polunin (1920 – 2010).
Photo by Goh Eck Kheng. Courtesy of Olga Polunin.

How did these Chinese artist or artists that Farquhar produce these drawings to the requirements of European science? For their artistic tradition and training had taught them to print in a very different style. A microscopic study of the Farquhar drawings showed that the drawings were sketched in pencil before being painted. I also reconstructed that the Chinese artists had great difficulty producing three dimensional drawings which in European art developed around the concept of a vanishing point in the painting. Chinese painting on the other hand

is flat, two dimensional, to make possible the painting of the long scrolls of Chinese landscapes. Consequently many of the drawing of trees in the Farquhar collection look flat, like fans.

As Dr Polunin and I examined the drawings over several months, we detected several other features in them which made them a unique hybrid of Chinese art techniques being adapted to the demands of Western science, and suggested that Farquhar engaged more than one artist. Dr Polunin and I had a delightful debate over how many artists Farquhar engaged. Dr Polunin was convinced that there were two, but I was more open, arguing that there may have been more than two. Dr Polunin finally persuaded Eck Kheng to allow him to write a short essay arguing for two artists producing the drawings. Perhaps Dr Polunin was right.

With the help of the Museum conservator I was also able to identify the watermarks on the paper of the drawings and which English paper factories were producing the paper at what date, which provided some fairly definitive dates for when Farquhar's drawings were produced. I also looked at the orthography of the Malay names of the plants and animals in Jawi and confirmed that they were written by more than one hand and transcribed into the Latin alphabet according to evolving systems for the transliteration of the Malay language in the late 18th and early 19th century, again confirming the dates of the drawings.

Overall, it was a wonderful learning experience working with Eck Kheng and Dr Polunin in producing the first edition of limited facsimile reproductions of the Farquhar drawings. The new catalogue makes this wonderful collection so much more accessible.

January – March 2011

ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

Congo River: Arts of Central Africa

Till 10 April 2011

The Congo River winds its way for 4,700 kilometres through central Africa, passing through diverse landscapes from lush rainforests along the Equator to wide grassy savannahs. This exhibition of over 100 beautifully crafted sculptures and masks explores the artistic traditions linked by the mighty Congo. The visual power of African sculpture has long inspired artists, and the exhibition also presents a selection of works by Pablo Picasso, who was strongly influenced by African art as he developed his Modernist style. Drawing from the musée du quai Branly and other European collections of African art, *Congo River* is the first of its kind in Southeast Asia.

Congo River Weekend Festival

26 – 27 March 2011

The Congo experience continues at the ACM's Congo River Weekend Festival, with free admission to the exhibition and fun activities for the whole family. Groove to the infectious rhythms of Frititi, a renowned African dance troupe who has wowed audiences from America to Australia. Be enthralled by magical stories of ancient Africa told by acclaimed storyteller Gcina Mhlophe, while children can create colourful crafts to bring home.

SuperMighty! Heroes of Asia

Till 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.

PERANAKAN MUSEUM

Ramayana Revisited:

A Tale of Love & Adventure

Till 27 February 2011

One of the great epic poems of India, the *Ramayana* recounts the life and exploits of Rama, Prince of the kingdom of Ayodhya. For generations, the retellings of the *Ramayana* have appealed to the young and old of various communities and religions with its simple but powerful message to mankind of idealism and the triumph of good over evil. This epic tale is popular to this day in India as well as among the Indian Diaspora abroad.

This exhibition explores the story based on the theme of *Ramacharitmanas*, a 17th century text from India. The seven chapters of the epic are told through shadow puppets, paintings on paper and cloth, and photographs of ancient monuments representing the epic from South and Southeast Asia.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE

Open House Day – Chinese New Year

4 February 2011, 10 am – 5 pm

Celebrate the beginning of a joyous Chinese

New Year at the National Museum of Singapore and enjoy free entry to all galleries on our Open House days! Join the curator's tour to explore the culture of the Roman empire in *Pompeii: Life in a Roman Town 79CE* exhibition or discover a different perspective of the colonial discourse in Indonesia's history through a contextualised view of the images in *Silent Coercion: Sumatra's East Coast through a Colonial Lens* exhibition.

Pompeii: Life in a Roman Town 79CE

Till 23 January 2011

In 79 CE, the city of Pompeii and much of its surrounding area were buried under volcanic ash and pumice after the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in Southern Italy. It was not until the mid-18th century that this city was slowly revealed to the world through archaeological excavations. Pompeii was a bustling and prosperous Roman town with around 20,000 inhabitants at the time of its destruction. Its strategic location, mild climate and fertile soil supported a productive agricultural industry as well as the thriving fishing and shipping industries.

Over 270 objects from the Soprintendenza Speciale per i beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei (SANP), including jewels, frescoes, sculptures and household items, are on display to reconstruct Pompeii. Highlights include body casts of eight victims who were 'immortalised' during their last moments, gladiatorial gear, a mosaic fountain and frescoes from the *House of the Golden Bracelet*. This special exhibition is presented by the National Museum of Singapore, and organised by SANP and Melbourne Museum.

Lecture: The Power of Volcanoes

22 January 2011, 2 pm – 3 pm

As proven by the recent Mount Eyjafjallajökull and Mount Merapi eruptions, volcanic eruptions can be very disruptive, even deadly. Any eruption can potentially impact those living thousands of miles away from the affected geographical region.

Held in conjunction with the exhibition *Pompeii: Life in a Roman Town 79CE*, this lecture will be delivered by Dr Antonius Ratdomopurbo and Dr Chris Newhall, two volcanologists from the Earth Observatory of Singapore, an institute of Nanyang Technological University, will share their insights on the effects of volcanic eruptions based on their research and extensive field experience in surveying volcano activity, as well as their direct involvement in the mitigation efforts of the Plinian type eruption of Mount Pinatubo in 1991 and the recent Mount Merapi eruption. Admission is free but registration is required. To register, please email nhb_nm_lectures@nhb.gov.sg with your name, number of seats and contact number.

Silent Coercion: Sumatra's East Coast through a Colonial Lens

Till 6 February 2011

Much ahead of other European imperialists, the Dutch actively sponsored photographic missions during the heyday of their colonial rule to visually record the Netherlands East Indies (now Indonesia) for advancing a broader political and economic expansion. It was within this colonial milieu that the German photographer Charles J. Kleingrothe published a portfolio titled *Sumatra's O. K. (Oost Kust, Dutch for "East Coast")* 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. This exhibition highlights the role of photography in colonial discourse by situating these thought-provoking images in their historical context and exploring the stories behind the camera, so as to find a new way of seeing.

Beauty in Black

16 March – 13 June 2011

Beauty in Black is an exhibition of 16 dresses from the 1950s to 2000s by leading fashion designers from the West including Cristóbal Balenciaga, Pierre Cardin, Karl Lagerfeld and Azzedine Alaïa. There are also garments made and designed in Singapore including pieces by prominent local fashion designers, Benny Ong and Thomas Wee. Collected over the last few years through acquisitions and donations and on display at the Museum for the first time, these dresses explore the iconic status of the colour black in today's fashion and its appeal to both the wearer and fashion designers. The exhibition also offers a close up of the creative works and skills of the designers through a lively survey of the black dresses in a variety of fabrics, styles and effects.

National Museum Cinémathèque:

Edward Yang Retrospective

2 – 13 March 2010

One of Taiwan's greatest proponent of filmmaking, Edward Yang passed away at age 59 on a bright summer day in June 2007. Yang left behind eight masterpieces that have indelibly impacted world cinema. From his contribution to the omnibus film *In Our Time* (1982), which is often noted as the origin of the Taiwanese New Wave, to his final feature *Yi Yi* (2000), an epic film of intertwining life, times and urban landscape, Yang has time and again bestowed the cinema with startling revelations of the complexities of human existence.

Yang's films were a constant presence in the Singapore International Film Festival. He was also awarded the Silver Screen Awards best director prize for *A Brighter Summer Day* in 1992, as well as for *Mahjong* in 1996. This complete retrospective also features screenings of Yang's early television works and roundtable forums where former film collaborators and academics are invited to share Yang's singular vision and luminous legacy. For detailed screening schedules, please visit www.nationalmuseum.sg

SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

Trans-Cool TOKYO

Till 13 February 2011

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 SAM and the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo.

Natee Utarit: After Painting Till 20 February 2011

After Painting is 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.

Director's Tour: Looking Beyond the Surface 16 February 2011

Meet the director of SAM, Mr Tan Boon Hui, who will guide you through *Natee Utarit: After Painting* for an insight into the work of this renowned Thai artist.

Appreciating Art Lecture Series 22 January – 1 March 2011

Continuing on its mission to offer audiences new contexts and forums to encounter and understand art, the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) presents five lectures that will introduce essential genres of contemporary art. Every Tuesday between 22 January and 1 March, invited speakers will discuss critical topics in contemporary painting, photography, performance and new media art, focusing on the development of art practice in Southeast Asia. Participants will learn about the histories and characteristics of the different types of artwork encountered in the museums, on gallery walls, in the streets, and all around us. This series is co-organised by the NHB Academy.

It's Now or Never Part II: New Contemporary Art Acquisitions from Southeast Asia 8 March – 8 May 2011

This is the second instalment of a two-part showcase of the latest acquisitions of contemporary art by SAM. The first display showcased mainly two-dimensional works by Singapore and Singapore-based artists, whereas this display will focus on artists from the wider Southeast Asian region working with installation art. As the champion of living artists whose practice fall within the contemporary art ambit, SAM seeks to prod visitors to ponder what constitutes contemporary art and what makes these artworks contemporary in the eyes of modern society. *It's Now or Never II* presents contemporary installation works by artists such as Chun Kaifeng, Geraldine Javier, Ringo Bunoan, Chang Yoong Chia, Shahrul Jamili Miskon, Kamin Lertchaiprasert, Nge Lye, and Vandy Rattana.

Negotiating Home, History and Nation: Two Decades of Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia, 1991 - 2010 12 March – 26 June 2011

Negotiating Home, History and Nation presents the work of 55 seminal practitioners of contemporary art from six Southeast Asian countries (Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, The Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia) created over the last two decades. The exhibition showcases works spanning the early years of contemporary art-making in the region to the present, drawn mostly from the SAM collection. This extensive survey gives audiences the opportunity to form a cogent picture of the diverse realities and threads linking Southeast Asia and its art through

inquiries into topics such as nation building, urbanisation, religious and gender discourse from an Asian perspective. Amongst the artists featured are Dadang Christanto (Indonesia), Kamin Lertchaiprasert (Thailand), Suzann

Victor (Singapore), Wong Hoy Cheong (Malaysia), and Isabel and Alfredo Aquiluzan (The Philippines). This exhibition's exclusively Southeast Asian content is the first such large-scale Asian-made institutional presentation of contemporary Southeast Asian art. *Negotiating Home, History and Nation* is a collaboration between SAM director Tan Boon Hui, SAM curator Khairuddin Hori and guest curator Lola Lenzi. The exhibition is a parallel event of the Singapore Biennale 2011 Open House.

Singapore Biennale 2011: Open House 13 March – 15 May 2011

Featuring over 150 works by 63 artists from 30 countries, the 3rd Singapore Biennale, titled Open House, will be presented across four exhibition venues, each with their own particular character, that draw upon emblematic spaces in Singapore: HDB flats (Singapore Art Museum and SAM at 8Q), shopping centres and night markets (National Museum of Singapore), and international air and sea ports (Old Kallang Airport). Major art works at Marina Bay will amplify individual experiences in the city. Open House brings together artworks that offer multiple perspectives and myriad creative approaches to questions of how we move across borders, see other points of view, and form connections with others. Over half of the artists will present new commissions or premiering new works.

Negotiating Home, History and Nation Film Screenings

18 March – 2 April 2011

Selected for the exhibition *Negotiating Home, History and Nation*, six Southeast Asian films will be presented at the Moving Image Gallery of SAM. The films are rich with themes significant to the region: resistance amidst cyclical violence, submission and sublimation in the context of myth and tradition, and social irony (delivered with a dose of camp theatricality). Directors of three of the films will be present for post-screening discussions.

THE NATIONAL ART GALLERY, SINGAPORE

Notable Acquisitions exhibition

Runs through 27 March 2011

Exhibition held at Singapore Art Museum

New works are added to the permanent collection of The National Art Gallery, Singapore (TNAGS) through the generous donations of individuals and corporations. These significant gestures enable TNAGS to broaden the scope of its collection and to fulfill its mission of presenting the history of Singapore and Southeast Asian art. Held at the Singapore Art Museum, this is an on-going display of works from the museum's donation collection, showcasing works by artists Arthur Yap, Tay Chee Toh and Chia Wai Hon. The National Art Gallery, Singapore is grateful to all its benefactors, and wishes to acknowledge their contributions towards developing research and exhibition opportunities in art.

SINGAPORE PHILATELIC MUSEUM

Indonesia – Land of Dance and Dragon Till 4 March 2011

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

the origins of the traditional dances, their significance in daily lives and adaptation over time. To observe the formal study of dance is to understand the history and culture of the country; its music, religion, literature, sculpture and architecture. Among the dances featured are *Wayang* or shadow puppet displays from Java and Bali, *Topeng* or masked dances and *Wayang Wong* dance dramas.

National Stamp Collecting Competition – Community Curate! Project Till 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 2010.

Bunny Wonderland

1 February – June 2011

Remember when Alice was led into Wonderland by the White Rabbit? This time, the Singapore Philatelic Museum (SPM) would like to lead children and the young-at-heart into the wonderful world of bunnies using stamps and interactive displays. Discover things you never knew about rabbits, learn how to tell apart the different bunny breeds and meet famous bunnies whose popularity has transcended time and cultures. In addition, admire colourful rabbit stamps and philatelic materials from all over the world. So come and celebrate the Year of the Rabbit at SPM!

Singapore Takes Flight: A Hundred Years March 2011 – September 2011

The year 2011 marks the centenary of the first powered flight in Singapore, when Frenchman Joseph Christiaens piloted a Bristol Box-Kite biplane in March 1911. This exhibition celebrates the milestone event with a display of picture postcards, postage stamps, first day covers, and a private collection of model aircraft.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE

Historical Journey of the Indian National Army

**28 January 2011, 5pm to 7pm at the POD,
Level 16, National Library Building**

With its beginnings in Singapore during World War Two, the Indian National Army (INA) was formed to liberate India from British rule. Although the military campaigns did not lead directly to India's Independence, the postwar trials of INA officers served as a catalyst for India's Independence in 1947. This exhibition shows the historical journey of the INA and its role in India's struggle for freedom. The INA episode demonstrates the common cause that was forged in the 1940s between the nationalists in India and their compatriots in Southeast Asia.

Five Footway Traders

1 – 30 March 2011, Marine Parade Library

The term "five-footway" originated from the town planning scheme by Sir Stamford Raffles. Under this scheme, all buildings were to have a covered walkway or corridor of about five-foot width in the front. This exhibition looks at the trades and activities that are carried out along the five-footway.

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

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



打包 — THE TAKEAWAY \$32
FFURIOSI

The one thing on most Singaporeans' minds is food. We never fail to talk about food when friends and relatives meet up at the hawk centre, over a selection of food choices persuaded by the countless celebrity-endorsed food ratings. It is difficult to have just one best-loved local dish when there are just so many favourite ones. Since we gleefully carry our love for food wherever we go, we might as well have a befitting bag for it.



GRILLS ARE FOR SALE AND THE MOSAICS ARE REAL \$32
JEREMY SAN TZER NING, SZTERN STUDIO

With a background in Interior Design, the designer always has an appreciation for buildings and building materials, particularly old buildings. In Singapore, old buildings are constantly being upgraded and traditional building methods of laying mosaic tiles by hand are slowly being replaced by ready-made mosaic tiles. It is a constant effort to preserve these old buildings, and photographing them is the designer's way of preserving and celebrating them as part of our collective memory of Singapore.



OPINION BAG \$32
JING QUEK, SUPERHYPERREAL

Afraid of being ostracised for being too outspoken? Feeling the need to agree or disagree without standing out from the crowd? Say what you feel without having to embarrass yourself with the opinion bag.



MODERN GENERAL — 2010 \$32
JUSTIN LEE C K

We are all soldiers in Singapore but as a working adult, your status rises to the rank of a general. There is an underlying notion of "listening and obeying" that still stands in our society regardless of whether one is a student or a working adult.

It could be seen in our productivity at work, quality of our lifestyles, or our self-image in society; we listen and we conform.



PIGGYBACK \$160/SET
WONG MUN SUMM & RICHARD HASSELL, WOHA

The Piggyback is a desk organiser for pens, pencils and loose change. The designers were originally approached to do two separate projects — piggy bank and pencil case. Their idea came when they decided to combine the piggy bank and pencil case, and combining the two materials. The word play on piggy bank/ piggyback was a natural choice for the product name. The two pieces would fit together; the cool white ceramic and warm wood would contrast nicely.

*MADE TO ORDER



HUNGRY < PIG > HAPPY SOLD OUT
BASSAM JABRY, CHEMISTRY
NEW STOCK ARRIVING IN MARCH 2011.

The designer wanted a dynamic and interactive design, rather than simply an 'object d'art'. It was a conscious choice not to deviate from the "pig" form as it is a powerful and recognisable paradigm. When the piggy bank is empty, it sits on its hind legs and as it gets fed with coins, the weight will eventually make it roll forward, turning it from a hungry pig to a happy pig, a tongue-in-cheek reflection of the joys of eating in Asia.



TROPHY HUNTER \$30/SET OF 2
JUSTIN LONG & JERRY GOH, HJUGHER

The idea is to allow the person wearing the badge a satisfying control over their trophy of choice for the occasion and to mix unmatched pieces, allowing them further control to recreate a new animal, playing both god and scientist. The wearer would realize that every piece can be connected, thereby building a whole new abstract world of animals.



THE ITINERANT CHRYSANTHEMUM \$28
ASH Y.S. YEO

Ju-Xian names an ancient city in China and, now culturally esteemed as one of four noble values. In 1961, it crowns Chicago as the City's Official flower. In Japan, the "Supreme Order of the Chrysanthemum" is an Emperor awarded honor. Asians cradle those asleep in Grace with the flower. Australians revere their mums on Mother's Day in May.



PRECIOUS RUBS \$12/SET OF TWO
CASEY CHEN

To create an eraser from a brief that says "worthy of envy", what can be more straightforward than having a big carat of cut Diamond.

Erasers are only used when mistakes are made and careless mistakes can be very costly. This eraser reminds people that mistakes can be expensive and that sometimes the cost of an error is priceless. Who says that diamonds are forever?



SUPER SINCERE SENTIMENTS \$15/SET OF FIVE
H O K O

The whole gesture of sending a mass-produced store-bought greeting card is irrevocably insincere. Thousands of people all over the world receiving and sending the very same card containing graphics by some unknown illustrator, accompanied with text written by an equally anonymous copywriter is a strange but real phenomenon. The intention of this design is simply to unmask and articulate this insincerity. Therefore, one can say that these cards are extremely honest in being 'insincere'.



TAPE MUG (IT'S NOT BROKEN) \$18
DARYL HO & CHERYL TAN, MAKE

The design is a combination of two seemingly ordinary and familiar objects found at home. The humble duct tape is commonly used as a quick fix bandage on almost anything, yet it was never thought that it could take centre stage as a design element. It is an interesting and amusing idea to create a visual effect of a broken mug by 'sticking' the tape on the surface giving the humble duct tape a chance to shine.



PINCH \$9
LEE TZE MING, HALF & HALF

A pencil case for everyday use and abuse that carried just enough: one, at most two pens or pencils, without elaborate lids or closures so the writing tool would still be the hero. The innate properties of cork provide the flexibility to accommodate the friction to hold everything in place, the durability to age gracefully and the cushioning to protect both the contents as well as the pencil case carrier. Eventually, all that was necessary was the opening slit.



PIGGY BANK B.A.L.L.S SOLD OUT
NEW STOCK ARRIVING IN MARCH 2011.

Traditionally named after the Pyggs earthenware clay, the piggy bank is a product of error passed down from the middle ages morphed to its current form because of commercial needs. There is no genetic lineage to the offending creature except for the linguistic heterograph. For the designers, they were more focused on collocating the piggy bank in its most natural form rather than the cartoon-like depiction that people are used to seeing.



I AM SAM \$15/SET OF TWO
ZANN WAN & KELVIN LOK, COUPLE

Like a museum housing artwork from various art movements, this series of badges, named after the Singapore Art Museum, was designed with personality from different art movements. The designers felt that the product's relationship with the museum and its reason for being had to be apparent to appeal to the museum's visitors. Each one immediately recognisable, the badges lend a touch of art to the wearer.



71 SQUARE CENTIMETRE RULER \$22
HAN KIANG SIEW

Singapore occupies a land area of 710 square kilometre. This ruler measures 71 square centimetre, which is exactly 1/10000000000 the area of Singapore. The ruler becomes not just a tool to measure the dimensions of a place; it relates itself to the dimensions of a place. 71 square centimetres in area also resulted in a missing square on the ruler which perhaps may be filled up very soon, when Singapore continues to expand through land reclamation.



SOMETIMES, YOU CAN'T HELP BITING THE HAND THAT FEELS \$12
COLIN SEAH,
MINISTRY OF DESIGN

An eraser exists only because the pencil exists. It owes its being and sole purpose to the pencil. However, it is ironic that through its use, it challenges and diminishes the presence of its enabler.

Playing up this irony, this eraser design pays homage to the pencil by creating a case for it but also conversely eclipses the pencil by entombing it from sight.



变脸— THE FACE CHANGING \$18/SET
SEBASTIAN CHUN, SUPER BEAR

In the Sichuan operas, one of the most important acts is the Face Changing, or 变脸 "bian lian" in Chinese, where performers wave their arms and twist their heads, and their painted masks would change repeatedly. Inspired by this act, these adorable badges allows one to change the colour plates effectively creating many different faces.



THE PENCIL IS MIGHTIER THAN THE KEYBOARD \$70
CHRIS LEE & YONG, ASYLUM

The idea behind this pencil case is a simple wooden box that hopes to inspire great literary works from its user. Titles of great classic books have been inscribed on the case to remind the user that all it takes is a humble pencil to create great writing. The simple design celebrates the true hero.

Long live the art of writing!



ORIGAMI LEAF \$25/SET OF TWO
KWODRENT, GRACE TAN

The primary basis for the greeting card stems from the notion of 'making'. It is something rare at this present day due to the instant availability of many things, both physically and digitally.

The proliferation of mediums like SMS has reduced the process of conveying personal messages into mere seconds of semi-automated finger actions. For this project, the designer hopes to slow things down to bring back the joy [as well as pain] of creating something by hand.



ORBIT \$22
TIMO WONG & PRISCILLA LUI,
STUDIO JUJU

This ruler serves to draw both straight lines and circles. The tiny holes mark the radius of various circles. With holes scattered around like constellations, this ruler is aptly named Orbit to signify the orbital movements of drawing circles.



AWAKENING \$25/SET OF 5
DONNA ONG

Each card contains a hidden wish, hope or dream that is symbolically represented by a pair of delicate wings. Originally drawn painstakingly in technical pen on paper, every pair represents an unrealised plan or message; wings that have not yet flown. When a card is bought, written and given to another, the wings take flight and "come to life" — physically transported by air or sea as well as immaterially from the page into the mind and thoughts of the receiver.



A SKETCH OF A RULER \$28
JASON ONG, JIENSHU

The concept questions the basic assumption of a ruler as an accurate measuring instrument for an object. In this case, it is a measurement of the designer's futile attempts at precision and perfection. He wishes to bring back a greater tolerance for imperfection and soul as technology is pulling the other way with measuring precision of near infinite decimal points. There were a total of fifteen attempts in sketching the ruler as accurately as possible.



PIGGYBACK \$160/SET
WONG MUN SUMM & RICHARD HASSELL, WOHA

The Piggyback is a desk organiser for pens, pencils and loose change. The designers were originally approached to do two separate projects — piggy bank and pencil case. Their idea came when they decided to combine the piggybank and pencil case, and combining the two materials. The word play on piggybank/piggyback was a natural choice for the product name. The two pieces would fit together; the cool white ceramic and warm wood would contrast nicely.

*MADE TO ORDER



MY DESTINY IN FEW DROPS OF DIRTY WATER \$18
LAURA MIOTTO, GSM/PRJCT

The coffee or tea break is often a quiet time, a contemplation that detaches people from the ordinary. The tradition of reading into coffee or tea grounds after drinking must have started like this, as a longing for some response to their daily anxiety. This form of fortune-telling is practiced in different ways in different countries but essentially involves the reading of shapes formed by coffee or tea residues at the bottom of a drinking cup.



SPIKE \$5
CHANG SHIAN WEI

The idea first came to mind when the designer was slicing off corners of a typical white eraser to make it "less functional". He was initially intrigued by the notion of an eraser that probably no longer served its purpose in this day and age of digital communication and wanted to see what it would look like. With breakable sections, fresh corners can be revealed once a section of the eraser has been worn out.



THE UNDERRATED UNDERSIDE OF MUGS \$18
EDWIN LOW,
THE DESIGN FACILITY

"The Underrated Underside of Mugs" serves to reposition the archetype of a mug not as a drinking vessel but as a decorative piece that is usually found resting upside down. The subtlety of the artwork on the underside of the mug provokes a second look on the usually taken for granted pose. The beauty of the underside becomes more obvious as the mug ages.



GUM \$9/SET OF 3
DAWN NG

Nowhere else in the world but Singapore is this chewy contraband of such controversially-capped desirability. While we may like to believe it is the Merlion or the Singapore Flyer that defines us, what sticks in the world's mind is that only in Singapore, gum, like crack, is banned. Nothing is worth more envy than something you can't have. This is the designer's life-size monument of a no-no substance, a sort of non-souvenir of Singapore people are so dying to ingest.



A BADGE IS A MEDAL \$15 EACH
TRIGGERHAPPY

Throughout history, badges were most commonly used to decorate and to bestow merit to accomplished individuals. Understanding that the brand logos on clothing create a status and/or personality in which the wearer associates himself with, A BADGE IS A MEDAL is a set of 3 badges, each an iconic wearable medal silhouette designed as a 'frame' in which the user can use to emphasise the brand logo and decorate his clothes, making it exquisitely exclusive.



PENCIL BOX \$35
OUTOFSTOCK

In today's technology-driven society, the use of traditional writing instruments has long been replaced by new electronic devices and social media systems. The design of this pencil case is aimed at bringing back the value of writing and to give importance to a simple writing tool — the pencil. The use of maple wood emphasises the tactile quality of vintage wooden pencil boxes which were very commonly used by children in school.



BOXFUL OF CARDS \$25
ELI MARC

The designers wished that people sent out more greeting cards, more often. To accomplish that, they felt a need to make the task easier for people to do so and to have at their disposal a library of literally thousands of greeting cards. For said extensive library, they turned to the Internet and tapped on user-generated photos as possible greeting cards and relied on Augmented Reality technology to drive their interface.



ADAPTER \$30
FELIX NG, SILNT

Adapter + Cup = Pencil holder. The 'Adapter' was designed to introduce a new way of using an object people already owned. The 'Adapter' is a flexible 'plug-in' that can be used on almost any cylindrical object—like a cup, an empty food can or a glass beaker, turning it into an organised pen holder.

The idea is to reuse an existing object and simplify the way stationary is being organised.



MIRRORS \$20/SET OF 5
KENNETH CHEE,
ANTFARM DESIGN

There are times when it's difficult to convey a message to someone who has just lost a loved one or to just simply say, "I'm sorry" or "I love you". These cards recreate the sender's intended feeling visually through design where a worded message cannot. Though the series of cards relies heavily on visual effect, humour and fancy design effects were carefully measured to avoid turning the card into a gimmick and bordering on insensitivity.



BEND THE RULE \$35
ONG KER-SHENG & JOSHUA COMAROFF, LIKKING DESIGN

The architect's ruler straddles the border between function and fetish—it is his blade of abstraction, his productive organ. For this ruler, the familiar straight edge is bent into a circle to become a bangle. The circular form lends it great compactness: although only 10 centimetres in diameter, it can measure lengths of up to 1.44 metres. It may also be used as a protractor. The rounding allows the ruler to pose as a kind of nerdy jewellery.



A BAG OF GOLD SOLD OUT
YONG JIEYU, J.YU STUDIO
NEW STOCK ARRIVING IN MARCH 2011.

Saving is a virtue, but to what do we accumulate wealth for? And for how much will we destroy for it? Made deliberately without a release plug and with the words "If I sold my soul for a bag of gold" from a song by the band Bright Eyes, it questions immediately if one should break an object of accumulated coins (and memory) for something to buy.



A VESSEL OF PLENTY \$18
LOW JUN JEK, YOLK

With user-interactivity in mind, the many different beverages and items that a mug can hold are blended into a fluid design. The users of the mug will discover the different objects in the design while they take their time to enjoy their favourite beverage. The intent of using the traditional Chinese porcelain design approach is to dignify the mug that has been commonly overlooked as just an everyday household item.



PIGXL SOLD OUT
RANDY CHAN, ZARCH COLLABORATIVES
NEW STOCK ARRIVING IN MARCH 2011.

By using animation tools to 'sculpt' the pig, one uses the parametric of scaling and resolution of geometry to put a numeric value to this form. The design for the piggy bank is conceived from the idea of using a computer software media as a tool to construct and manipulate.

The construction of the pig pushes the final boundary of production and methodology by revealing the value of representation which is analogous to its function as a coin-saving device.



JUST ANOTHER GOLDEN MUG \$18
LANZAVECCHIA + WAI

A seemingly nonchalant treatment of a precious golden vessel where a white viscous liquid overflows from within and drips all over. However, there lies the inversion of what is decoration and what is the canvas; the gold is the application while the white is of the original mug.



NOSEJOB \$15/SET OF 2
JACKSON TAN & TANNY WONG,
BLACK DESIGN

Rather than the usual scenario faced by an eraser changing into an unknown shape of its former self once used, the designers wanted to create a funny and irrelevant product capable of reshaping and renewing itself whilst undergoing the necessary usage. Hence the Nosejob was born! Allowing the ability to alter the appearance of your nose through the gesture and usage of rubbing and yet retaining its former glory; it is making it an instant standout on the work desk.



SEE MY HEART \$18
YUKI MITSUYASU

Almost instantaneously, a badge tells of a person's rank, status, authority or membership to a group. Upon seeing a badge, we also make certain judgments about the wearer. However, getting to know a person takes longer than just a glance at a badge. Spend a little time with the wearer and look at this badge from different angles and in different situations. Soon enough, you just might be able to see the wearer's heart.



SOME DREAMS ARE HEAVY AS ROCKS \$32
TAN ZI XI, MESSYMSXI

Everyone has dreams and personal ambitions but not every dream can come true. In many cases the odds are just too great to overcome. Dreams are beautiful but when they do not materialise, they become heavy and unsympathetic like rocks.

This tote bag talks about the lagging of all our unachieved and impossible dreams, the ones that weigh our hearts down, like a bag of rocks.

At Home Abroad: Thoughts On Travelling

"To my mind, the greatest reward and luxury of travel is to be able to experience everyday things as if for the first time, to be in a position in which almost nothing is so familiar it is taken for granted."

– Bill Bryson

One of the most basic human desires, beyond the drive for mere survival, is the desire to know. To see more, taste more, understand and experience more, for the sake of making sense of the world about us and our place in it. Travelling is an expression of this facet of human nature. It is about man as a seeker, desiring to expand his awareness by transplanting himself outside his own culture and familiar places, into someplace unknown.

The joy of travel lies in this exploration of the unfamiliar and sometimes discomfiting. This has the effect of imparting freshness and vigour to the mind by awakening, and sometimes shaking, into our consciousness new images, possibilities and perspectives. As the Italian writer, Cesare Pavese (1908 – 1950) put it, travel "forces you to trust strangers and to lose sight of all that familiar comfort of home and friends. You are constantly off balance".

Travelling thus provides opportunity for firsthand encounters, in which travellers experience a foreign land as it is, rather than as how it is imagined whether through movies, literature, or hearsay. This can be a disorienting experience, especially when there is a great divergence between expectation and reality. When the Macedonian soldiers of Alexander the Great entered Persia in 334 BCE, they did not encounter the mythical beings their poets had sung and written about, but war elephants which terrified them. And later, when they had reached India (more precisely Pakistan), they were amazed not to find the far side of the world in that country, as their learned men had predicted. After ten years of unceasing travel and fighting, Alexander was forced to turn back after his army threatened mutiny.

"A traveller without observation is a bird without wings."

– Moslih Eddin Saadi

While travel has a powerful capacity to alter and expand worldviews, this growth does not necessarily or automatically

occur, as Mark Twain (1835 – 1910) (wrongly) believed when he declared travel as "fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness". A traveller must first be receptive to change before his mind can be broadened. In fact, it often happens that travel simply confirms a person's prejudices and deepens them. European travellers who colonised Asia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were schooled to presume their racial and cultural superiority, and many judged Asians in those terms without further reflection. Similarly, the extensive voyages of the Ming Admiral Zheng He (1371 – 1435) were less attempts to explore and understand the world than efforts to validate the Chinese worldview. Part of the draw of modern commercial tourism, packaged in a sanitised form, is that it entertains without really challenging expectations. But this approach to travel, while potentially satisfying, bears little fruit. As writer James Michener (1907 – 1997) exclaimed, "If you reject the food, ignore the customs, fear the religion and avoid the people, you might as well stay at home."

"I dislike feeling at home when I am abroad."

– George Bernard Shaw

If the biggest obstacle to discovery is the illusion of knowledge, what the great explorers like Ferdinand Magellan (1480 – 1521), Christopher Columbus (1451 – 1506) and Ibn Battuta (1304 – 1309) had in common was a unique thirst for understanding that drove them to transcend the received wisdom of their time. It was their sense that there was something, or many things, in the world beyond what was generally understood, which led them to push and then burst the boundaries of what was known with formidable determination.

Everyday travellers attempt something on a micro-scale akin in spirit to what the great explorers accomplished, when they allow the boundaries of their personal perceptions to be pushed by new experiences, and permit their understanding of the world to be changed. And arguably, it is this frame of mind more than anything else that distinguishes a traveller from a mere tourist.

The American writer Maya Angelou once wrote that "perhaps travel...by demonstrating that all peoples cry, laugh, eat, worry, and die, can introduce the idea that if we try and understand each other, we may even become friends." And while Mark Twain's confidence that travel could end narrow-mindedness and bigotry was over optimistic, possibly Angelou's more modest claim is something worth hoping for.

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