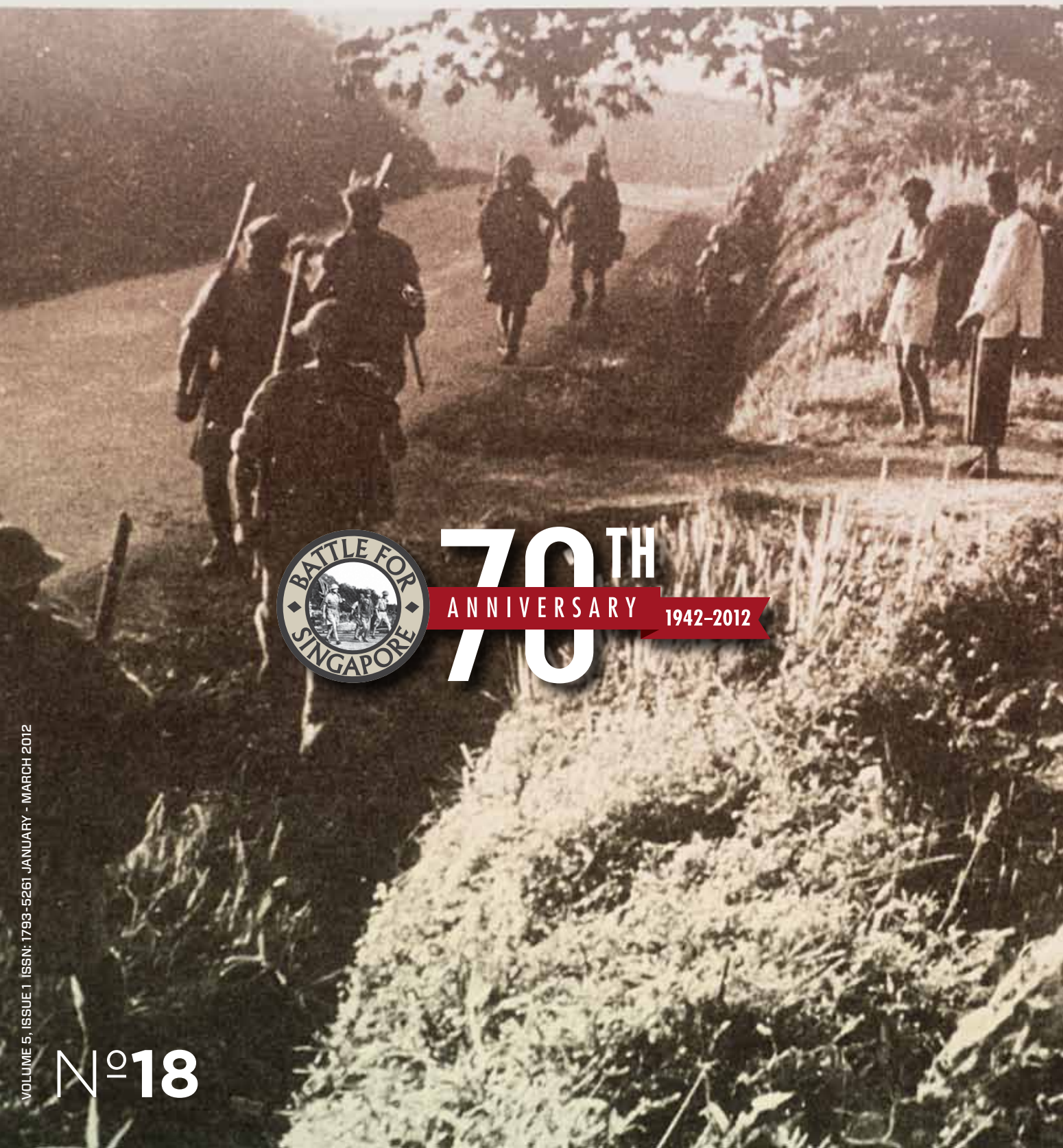
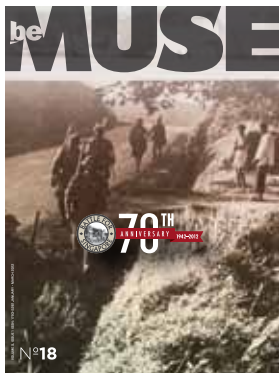


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70TH
ANNIVERSARY

1942-2012



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EDITOR'S MUSEINGS

It is the start of a new year, and a very special one indeed as it marks the passing of 70 years since the start of World War II in Southeast Asia and the fall of Singapore to the Japanese. While we have come a long way since then, vivid memories of this pivotal phase in Singapore's history lives on.

This issue of *BeMUSE* commemorates this important chapter of the Singapore story by bringing readers through a journey into the past. We will show you monuments where wartime events took place and the memorial sites to honour the war dead. There you will see the many other deep imprints left on the landscape by the battle for Singapore and the three years eight months of Japanese Occupation, as well as the contribution of this darkest chapter in Singapore's history to the nation's independence in 1965.

At the same time, as we welcome 2012, we hope all our readers will take a little time off their busy schedules to explore the many hidden treasures in Singapore's heritage landscape. A good starting point will be to take part in the events organised by the National Heritage Board and various partners, in commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of the Battle for Singapore. Take a guided tour through a pre-war air raid shelter in Tiong Bahru, and make a journey through the World War II Trail. Visit the exhibition at the National Library Gallery to view World War II artefacts uncovered during an archaeological excavation at Adam Park. Over a hundred pieces of artwork depicting life in the prisoner-of-war camps, will also be on display at the National Library Gallery. These works from the National Archives of Singapore's Haxworth Collection were created by ex-prisoner-of-war and accomplished artist William Haxworth.

For the generation who has lived through 1942 and the Japanese Occupation, emotions are raw and memories are deep. And for the many readers who are born well after this darkest period in Singapore, we hope that the monuments, shared memories, and numerous other forms of remembrance are more than just history lessons; but serve as valuable resources to explore and engage in this important past at an emotional level, deepening our appreciation of what Singapore is today while preserving this vital part of Singapore's heritage.

On the lighter side of things, the 2012 calendar will be filled with numerous interesting exhibitions and exciting events by the National Heritage Board and its museums. Take a journey back in time at the Asian Civilisations Museum to the era when superior quality India textile dominated the world. Be intrigued by artworks of an emerging generation of Singapore contemporary artists at *The Singapore Show: Future Proof* held at the Singapore Art Museum.

We hope that the contents offered by *BeMUSE*, together with the many exhibitions and events by the National Heritage Board and its museums, will enrich the life of every reader in this new year. Last but not least, all of us at *BeMUSE* would like to wish all our readers a peaceful, rewarding and happy 2012!

THANGAMMA KARTHIGESU
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

NODDING HEAD PARSİ MERCHANT

CHINA, PROBABLY GUANGZHOU
(FORMERLY KNOWN AS CANTON),
19TH CENTURY
PAINTED CLAY
HEIGHT: 39.4CM
2011-01505

This moustached figure has been identified as a Parsi – possibly a merchant – because of his *paghri*, a traditional male Parsi headgear. He wears a belted tunic and pantaloons under his coat, a common outfit for men from the late-17th century onwards. The weighted head rests on the neck, and nods when the figure is moved.

The figure was modelled by hand from clay, fired, and then painted. The life-like



ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

appearance of the face indicates that it was modelled on a real person. Miniature figures like these became popular in the mid-18th century. They were produced mainly in Guangzhou, the mandatory base for most foreign merchants in those days, either for the export market or on commission from interested buyers. Figures portraying European and Asian traders, or Chinese merchants, officials, and workers have survived in large numbers, but depictions of Parsi merchants are rare. These portraits of workers and artisans in their everyday life were popular souvenirs bought by foreign travellers. Many of these figures are humorous, often bordering on caricature, which was and still is an essential part of their appeal as novelty collectibles.

The Parsis descend from the Zoroastrians, who as early as the eighth century left Islamic Iran for India to avoid religious persecution. Both groups followed Spitaman Zarathushtra, the Iranian prophet also known as Zoroaster, who lived some time between 6000 and 600 BCE. During the 17th century, many Parsis migrated to Bombay (Mumbai) at the invitation of the East India Company. There they prospered as shipping tycoons, international traders and brokers. Parsi families arrived in Singapore by the mid-19th century. As merchants and philanthropists, they contributed to the country's prosperity. Some of their names and legacies remain familiar to many Singaporeans today.

LEE FOUNDATION ATRIUM AT THE SINGAPORE PHILATELIC MUSEUM

Ms Grace Fu, Senior Minister of State for Information, Communications and the Arts, officiated the *Naming Ceremony* of the Lee Foundation Atrium at the Singapore Philatelic Museum on 7 October 2011. The atrium was named after the Lee Foundation, in recognition of its \$1.2 million donation to the museum from 2007 to 2010. The donation enabled the museum to organise 24 exhibitions during this period, including “*Dragons, Treasures and Masterpieces*” and “*Comics and Superheroes*”. The museum also organised school programmes which benefited 77,000 students, as well as free programmes on open house days which attracted 296,000 visitors from 2007 to 2010.

(Below from left to right) Mr Michael Koh, CEO, National Heritage Board; Ms Grace Fu, Senior Minister of State for Information, Communications and the Arts; Mr Daniel Teo, Chairman, Singapore Philatelic Museum; Ms Tresnawati Prihadi, General Manager, Singapore Philatelic Museum



Heritage Hop-About at Explore Singapore! 2011

Visitors explored and discovered Singapore's colourful past, rich heritage, exciting art and vibrant cultures through 17 museums, 27 national monuments and over 20 activities, island-wide, in just two weeks!

Explore Singapore! 2011 started on 21 November 2011 with a hop, skip and jump! For the first time, the Preservation of Monuments Board (PMB) worked with both public and private monument owners to open up 27 historical buildings that have been designated by PMB as national monuments. Special tours were conducted by heritage ambassadors, Mark Lee and Suhaimi Yusof, who infused fun and excitement into this learning journey.

At the same time, interactive educational tours were conducted by members of the Museum Roundtable such as Sentosa, Singapore City Gallery and the IRAS (Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore) Gallery. Heritage enthusiasts enjoyed night tours at Fort Siloso, and were brought on a journey through the clans in Chinatown. The public was also entertained by interactive tours on tax matters and its evolution over the past 20 years, and were given a glimpse into Singapore's history at the National Museum of Singapore through the eyes of a 'visiting foreign journalist'.

Families enjoyed two weeks of non-stop fun-filled heritage and cultural activities.

Explore Singapore! 2011 ended with a big bang on 4 December 2011, as the public enjoyed open house on that weekend at the Asian Civilisations Museum, the Singapore Philatelic Museum, the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall and the Singapore Art Museum. A wide range of programmes and activities, with Singapore's yesteryears as themes, were held at these museums, including movie screenings, a showcase of vintage cars, gallery viewings, musical performances, as well as old time games such as *five stones* and *chap-teh*.



“THE ADVENTURES OF TINTIN” EXHIBITION OPENS AT SINGAPORE PHILATELIC MUSEUM

The Adventures of Tintin exhibition at the Singapore Philatelic Museum was officially opened on 4 November 2011 by His Excellency Roland D. A. Van Remoortele, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Royal Embassy of Belgium.

The Adventures of Tintin is a comic book series created by famous Belgian comic artist, Georges Remi (1907-1983), also known as Hergé. The exhibition celebrates the works of Hergé and explores the influences in his work and career. It also traces the development of characters in the comic series, particularly young reporter Tintin who began his adventures in 1929 with his faithful dog companion Snowy. These adventures were published in 24 titles, and took them to different places around the world, including India, Tibet and China in Asia; Congo in Africa; Arabia in the Middle East; Russia in Europe; North and South America; and even the Moon! The comic series has been translated into more than 100 languages, including Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Malay, Thai and Arabic; and over 200 million copies have been sold worldwide.

The exhibition features the full range of Tintin postage stamps issued by Belgium, France and the Netherlands; and these stamps are from the Singapore Philatelic Museum's Permanent Collection. At the same time, rarely seen original stamp artworks, colour trials, and other philatelic materials from the Museum Voor Communicatie in the Netherlands and L'Adresse Musée de La Poste in France are on display for the first time in Singapore. Fans can also look forward to a display of Tintin comics and collectibles.

The exhibition, launched in early November to coincide with the 10 November 2011 release of the animated movie *The Adventures of Tintin: Secret of the Unicorn* in Singapore, will be held until 31 May 2012.



His Excellency Roland D. A. Van Remoortele (right), Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Royal Embassy of Belgium, on a guided tour of the exhibition with Senior Curator, Lucille Yap (left).

MUSELIFE.



MUSEINGS.

Fragment: women battling a *gajavyala* (detail)
Gujarat, 13th or 14th century
104 x 154 cm
Cotton: block printed, drawn and painted, resist and mordant dyed

COTTON COMMODITY HOW INDIAN TEXTILES SHAPED HISTORY



TEXT BY **DAVID ALAN HENKEL**
IMAGES COURTESY OF
ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

Above:
Hanging (*kain leluhur*):
large flowers and cartouches
Coromandel Coast, 18th century
171 x 277 cm, Cotton; drawn and painted,
resist and mordant dyed

FOR THE BETTER PART of the past two millennia, India was a leading source of textiles for trade. Cotton cloth, along with a much smaller but highly valuable quantity of silk, was traded from production and distribution centres in Gujarat in northwest India and the Coromandel Coast in the southeast. Little known today, these textiles had a wide ranging and lasting impact on human civilisation in interesting and sometimes surprising ways. These textiles are the subject of the exhibition, *Patterns of Trade: Indian Textiles for Export, 1400–1900*, currently held at the Asian Civilisations Museum until 3 June 2012.

Evidence from excavations in the Indus Valley dating back to about 4,500 years ago shows that Indians had already developed

the technology to weave cotton into cloth at that time. Two thousand years ago, Indian artisans and traders had built on their knowledge, along with a parallel expertise in painting and dyeing cloth, to become the world's leader in textile production. They had held this position until the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century.

India's advantage in textile production not only stemmed from its technological edge. The Indian subcontinent had a large population, which provided the workforce to perform the labour-intensive job of producing textiles. India also had ample land and a distinct dry season that made the region an ideal place to grow cotton. These advantages allowed Indian producers to manufacture a large surplus of cloth

which it could trade to foreign markets.

The bulk of India's textiles were cotton of modest quality – plain colours or simple, repetitive patterns of checks, stripes or floral lattices. These textiles were sold in foreign marketplaces more cheaply than cloth could be produced locally. At the other end of the market, India's weavers and dyers were capable of producing cotton and silk textiles of exquisite quality and beauty.

The Indian textile industry was both productive and efficient. First, weavers living in or near cotton growing areas would process and weave the cotton into cloth. Next, the cloth would be graded; following which middlemen would purchase the cloth and send it to workshops for dyeing, printing and painting. Dyers had to be located near adequate sources of clean water to ensure the quality of the bright and colourfast dyes which India was famous for. After dyeing, the agents would sell the cloth to merchants heading to foreign ports. India's traders had developed a sophisticated understanding of the markets they served, providing feedback to producers on the types and qualities of cloth that were most in demand. These merchants, often settled and had families in their host markets and were able to relay information to the agents about what colours, designs, formats and levels of quality were most desirable. At the height of the Indian textile trade, merchants even brought back local designs and motifs which the painters and dyers faithfully copied.

The earliest evidence we have on foreign trade of Indian textiles is in the Roman account of the first century. The Romans called Indian cotton "woven air", in praise of its lightness and quality. These accounts described Indian cloth as a luxury good; however, the quantities were sufficient for Pliny the Elder to complain in 77 CE (Common Era) that Roman coffers were being emptied into India. Historical records from about the same period also mention Indian cotton being sent as gifts to the Emperor of China. The oldest examples of Indian cloth are fragments found at archaeological sites in Egypt, along the coast of the Red Sea at Berenike (old Bernice), and date to the fifth century. More fragments, which date from the ninth century, were excavated at Quesir Al Qadim and Fustat (Old Cairo).



Textile production and major trade centres in the Indian subcontinent, 1600-1900

The fragments found in Egypt are proof that trade in Indian cloth continued to flow even after Rome's gradual decline. The Islamic world also embraced Indian textiles after its rise in the seventh century, and the new religion spread to both South and Southeast Asia along the same routes on which Indian textiles were traded. By the end of the 15th century, this robust and complex network had spread throughout the Indian Ocean basin and from the western coast of Africa to China.

When the Portuguese captured Malacca in 1511, the Portuguese chronicler Tomé Pires estimated that the annual value of Malacca's textile trade was worth 460,000 cruzados, the equivalent of almost 20 tonnes of silver. At that time, Malacca

was one of the world's richest cities, and Southeast Asia had grown to be a crucial market for Indian trade cloth. Island Southeast Asia was also the source of some of the world's rarest and most desirable spices and aromatics, as well as other valuable commodities. Aside from the fragments found in Egypt, the earliest Indian trade textiles which survive today were found in the eastern half of the Indonesian Archipelago. These came from the remote islands of Maluku, as well as Timor and especially from the Toraja Highlands of Sulawesi. Some of these textiles have radiocarbon dates which range into the late 13th century.

Maluku, a tiny cluster of islands in the far Eastern Archipelago, was for much of

Hanging: *dandia* dancers (detail)
Gujarat, 15th century
112 x 580 cm
Cotton; drawn and painted, resist and mordant dyed



history the world's only source of nutmeg, mace and cloves. These so-called "fine spices" were used to preserve and flavour food as well as for their perceived medicinal powers. For centuries, these spices were literally worth their weight in gold in the West. Not surprisingly, traders flocked to the islands, bringing with them Indian cloth which were highly prized by the islanders.

While Maluku was more important economically during the time of the spice trade, it is Toraja which is the source of most of the earliest trade textiles that have been found. The Toraja called these textiles *ma'a* or *mawa* and believed that they served as a sacred bridge to the afterlife. *Ma'a* were used in funerals and other ritu-

als and allowed the Toraja to interact and communicate with their ancestors. After the Dutch took control of the coastal ports of Sulawesi, the Toraja became isolated from the outside world and could no longer replace their Indian cloth. Instead they had to carefully preserve these textiles for generations, whereas in most other areas the cloths eventually disintegrated, were lost or replaced.

Early inscriptions found at archaeological sites clearly indicate that Indian cloth had been traded into Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula, Borneo and Java in as early as the ninth century. The earliest and finest pieces discovered in this area, however, date from the 17th and 18th centuries. These were found in the remote interior areas of

Skirt cloth (*kain leluhur*): patchwork centrefield
Coromandel Coast, 17th or 18th century
223 x 422 cm
Cotton; drawn and painted, resist and mordant dyed



Hanging: *dandia* dancers (detail)
Gujarat, 15th century
112 x 580 cm
Cotton; drawn and painted, resist and mordant dyed



Hanging (*ma'a*): women with veenas and parrots
Gujarat, mid-15th to mid-17th century
93 x 513 cm
Cotton; block printed, resist and mordant dyed

Lampung and Jambi in southern Sumatra, and almost all originated from the Coromandel Coast.

The reasons for this are complex. For one, the pepper boom of the 17th century had significantly increased the flow of cloth into the region during this period. More importantly, large amounts of top quality cloth were brought in by traders as gifts to local rulers. These found their way into the interior of Sumatra where they came to be valued as a form of currency which could be accumulated as wealth. These cloths eventually became heirlooms and were used in social rituals such as wedding exchanges. While the practice of storing these textiles as wealth was eventually abandoned by the more cosmopolitan trading



Fragment: women battling a *gajavyala*
Gujarat, 13th or 14th century
104 x 154 cm
Cotton; block printed, drawn and painted, resist and mordant dyed

Spread (*palampore*): eight-pointed star and floral motifs
 Coromandel Coast, late-18th century
 254 x 216 cm
 Cotton; drawn and painted, resist and mordant dyed



centres of the coast, the people of Lampung carefully stored their early trade textiles until the 1970s and 1980s, when they began to re-emerge in the antiques market.

In the 17th century, the European East India Companies began shipping Indian cloth home along with cargoes of spices and Chinese porcelain. The cloth quickly became a sensation. Compared to the drab woollens and linens the Europeans were used to, the Indian cloth's beauty, quality and affordability made them hugely popular in Europe. European textile producers at first were unable to compete, which in turn threatened the livelihoods of tens of thousands of local textile workers. Even high taxes and import restrictions could not halt the flood of Indian cloth into Europe.

Beginning from the 18th century, innovators in Europe began to seek out the secrets of Indian textile production and started to develop ways to manufacture cloth more cheaply and efficiently. Mechanical innovations provided the key. Over the course of the century, new machines led to an explosion in productivity, which helped spark the Industrial Revolution.

By the mid-19th century, Europe was exporting more cloth to India than it imported. This cloth was cheaper and of better overall quality. European producers also captured much of India's market share in other Asian and African markets. This had a disastrous impact on India's textile industry, wiping out almost all of India's indigenous textile production.

Indian trade textiles had a lasting influence on the development of textile designs. While the new machine-made cloths were less expensive and more consistent in quality, they continued to draw on the design legacy of their Indian predecessors. The bright floral prints and dense styles of the 19th and early-20th centuries were direct descendants of Indian chintzes traded to Europe hundreds of years before.

Nowhere else perhaps is the influence of Indian trade textiles more noticeable than in island Southeast Asia, where many of the indigenous textile traditions were profoundly shaped by their long and nearly continuous interaction with Indian cloth. Indigenous communities around the archipelago actively incorporated the designs and motifs of Indian cloths into their own



Top:
 Large skirt cloth (*kain dodot*): floral lattice
 Coromandel Coast, late-17th century
 230 x 309 cm
 Cotton; drawn and painted, resist and mordant dyed

Above:
 Hanging (*kain patola*): caparisoned elephants
 Gujarat, late-18th or early-19th century
 109 x 416 cm
 Silk; double ikat

textiles. As the 18th century progressed and Indian textiles became more expensive, textiles made in Indonesia began to replace Indian cloths. Inexpensive and high quality machine-made plain white cotton from the Netherlands provided the raw materials for a boom in batik production in Java, which the Dutch colonial government actively encouraged.

Even today's fashion has continued to draw on the legacy of popular Indian designs. Once familiar with the designs, you will begin to spot them everywhere, such as in the repeating floral spray of a

printed dress and in the scrolling border of a hemline. Indian trade textiles have left an indelible mark on the way we dress ourselves and decorate our homes. Perhaps even more profoundly, Indian trade textiles are a reminder that the globalised world we live in today has roots that go back thousands of years.

RARE, UNUSUAL, AND INTIMATE

THE NEW COLLECTION OF SARONG KEBAYA AT THE PERANAKAN MUSEUM

TEXT BY JACKIE YOONG
IMAGES COURTESY OF
ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

SARONG KEBAYA: *Peranakan Fashion and its International Sources* opened in April 2011. Through 131 exquisite pieces, the exhibition traces the historical and stylistic evolution of the Peranakan sarong kebaya from its roots in the 16th century. The exhibition is arranged chronologically around five thematic sections: *Distant Origins, 16th to 18th centuries; Slave Girls and Heiresses, 19th and 20th centuries; Being Tropical; Lace Kebayas and Batik Sarongs in the 19th century; Lace as Identity: Nyonya Fashion, 1900–1960.*

To share more treasures from the Peranakan Museum's extraordinary collection, over 50 new pieces have recently been installed and will be on display until 8 April 2012. As textiles are sensitive to light, the more delicate pieces from the original display have been returned to storage. Some of the new garments address the demand for more examples of certain themes. At

Blouse (*Lian Lah Por Teh Sah*)
Europe (tailored in Penang), 1910–1930
Cotton organdie



MUSEINGS.

Facing page:
Kebaya, Europe (tailored in Penang), 1930s
Silk satin and machine-made embroidery
Peranakan Museum, Gift of Mr & Mrs Lee Kip Lee

Sarong, Java, Pekalongan, 1930s
Signed: Eliza van Zuylen, Cotton (drawn batik)
Collection of Mr & Mrs Lee Kip Lee

the same time, the new collection enriches the exhibition with more fantastic patterns and creative combinations.

Unusual kebayas of rich fabrics and unique cuts are on display for the first time. Two luxurious silk kebayas have been added to the exhibition – a treat as silk kebayas do not survive the test of time well. These were probably reserved for special occasions such as weddings. One of them is especially notable for its small size, designed for a toddler.

Other highlights of the new collection include more batik masterpieces signed by their designers, as well as rare sarong decorations inspired by the European fairy tales *Snow White* and *Little Red Riding Hood*. The exhibition gets up close and personal with three generations of *nyonyas* (Peranakan Chinese ladies) who discussed their memories of wearing, buying, and making sarong kebaya in a video made especially for the exhibition.

Visitors also get to peek into the world of luxurious nyonya undergarments from the past century. This new intimate section of the show – *From Corset Covers to Camisoles* – is drawn from Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee's generous donation of over 100 Peranakan and Dutch Eurasian undergarments from the 19th and 20th centuries. Six representative pieces that display changing Peranakan notions of beauty are featured, including a camisole with gold straps and gilt silver buttons – probably made for an Indonesian Peranakan bride.

Much of this exhibition is drawn from an earlier donation by Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee of over 400 Peranakan and Southeast Asian garments. Their gift illustrates the evolving fashions of Peranakan women through the years and reveals their inspirations and aspirations.

Jackie Yoong is Curator, *The Peranakan Museum*



Below:
Kebaya, Europe (tailored in Indonesia), 1890–1910
Cotton and machine-made broderie anglaise
(white needlework), Peranakan Museum,
Gift of Mr & Mrs Lee Kip Lee

Sarong, Java, Pekalongan, 1910s
Signed: Lien Metzelaar, Cotton (drawn batik)
Collection of Mr & Mrs Lee Kip Lee





Fig. 1. An example of a flowering tree design on a *kalamkari* from the Coromandel Coast in the ACM collection, radiocarbon dated 1670-1695.



Fig. 2. Tools of the trade—traditional *kalam* for drawing. The *kalam* is made from bamboo with a bulb of hair that acts as a dye reservoir.

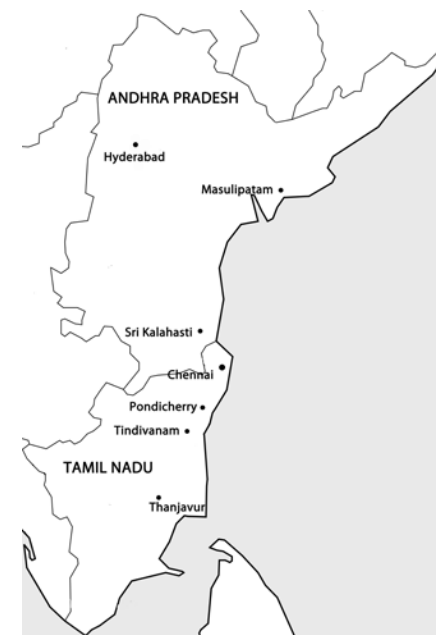


Fig. 3. Map showing the places we visited during the trip.

TECHNOLOGY MEETS ART

PRODUCING INDIAN TRADE CLOTHS

TEXT BY SOH GEK HAN

SINCE THE BEGINNING of the Common Era, Indian cotton cloths have been exported to global markets as far west as the Mediterranean and as far east as Japan. By the mid-18th century, India had emerged as the world's leading producer of beautifully painted, printed and dyed cotton textiles. These textiles were used in a multitude of ways, including as garments and hangings. Of the three Indian textile manufacturing centres—Gujarat in the west, the Coromandel Coast in the southeast and Bengal in the east—the Coromandel Coast was the most celebrated for *kalamkari*, or hand painted cotton textiles, which were admired for their artistry and brilliance of colours obtained from vegetable dyes¹ (see Fig. 1). *Kalamkari* means pen-work and is derived from the Persian words for pen, *kalam*, and craftsmanship, *kari*. (Fig. 2)

The Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) recently acquired a collection of Indian trade cloths, a large part of which is now on display in a special exhibition at the museum. The collection will be featured in a catalogue to be published in April 2012. The curators conducted research on Indian textiles, viewed other collections, and documented living traditions of textile painting and dyeing in India. In April 2011, I travelled with these curators to the Coromandel Coast to study textiles and learn the techniques of painting and dyeing from master artists and dyers (Fig. 3). This article sketches the stories of the people and the technology behind the painting of Coromandel Coast *kalamkari*. The modern concept of “technology” brings to mind mechanical efficiency, which is usually

not associated with art or crafts. But I discovered that Indian artists and craftsmen are accomplished technicians who have invented and mastered the skills and technical know-how to wield the *kalam* and work with vegetable dyes. It was invaluable to watch the processes that were not apparent or mentioned in books, and to learn about the techniques from practising craftsmen.

In Sri Kalahasti we met Mr Niranjan, a *kalamkari* artist. Mr Niranjan is the third generation of a proud line of artists trained in *kalamkari*. He recently visited the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, where works by his father and grandfather are part of the collection. He explained that he was able to recognise *kalamkari* painted by his forefathers because an artist's painting is like his handwriting, which a trained eye can discern. Mr Niranjan showed us some of his own intricately drawn *kalamkari* (Figs. 4 & 5), and we noted that one of them is a flowering tree motif similar to the 18th-century piece in the ACM collection (Figs. 1 & 4). Such intricate pieces can take up to three months to complete.

Mr Niranjan's workshop became our classroom. There, we learned about aspects of the craft not described in books. (Refer to panel which details the process.) For instance, instead of using the traditional pen or *kalam*, Mr Niranjan sometimes uses a thin bamboo cane to paint very fine lines (Fig. 6). He also showed us his newly developed method of applying white fine lines on areas of red. The traditional way is to apply a fixing agent² on the areas to be dyed red, and then boil the cloth in a red dye vat. Mr Niranjan's new method is to ap-



Fig. 4 & Fig. 5. Examples of intricate *kalamkari* done by Mr Niranjana. Such detailed pieces can take three months to complete.



Fig. 6. A young artist using a thin bamboo cane instead of the traditional *kalam* to draw fine lines.

ply acidic lemon water to the alkaline fixing agent before dipping the cloth into the red vat. The lemon water neutralises the fixing agent, so that areas where it is applied do not take up the dye and thus remain white. I was struck by Mr Niranjana's knowledge of chemical processes, as well as his ingenuity and artistic creativity in using something easily available to achieve a remarkable effect.

Having studied textile painting techniques, we travelled south to learn about colours and natural dyes. Before the invention of synthetic dyes in the 19th century, colours on textiles came only from dyes made from plants, minerals and animals. Indian dyers had both the skills and the materials for producing the most intense reds and deepest blues (Fig. 7). Coromandel Coast dyers had access to the best sources of red dye from chay root (a low-growing plant known scientifically as *Oldenlandia umbellata*), and blue from true indigo (a flowering shrub known scientifically as *Indigofera tinctoria*). In Pondicherry, Tamil

Nadu, we visited The Colours of Nature, a dye house that specialises in natural indigo dyeing.

This dye house is run by its Spanish owner, Mr Larraona. Upon entering the workshop, we were greeted with the pungent smell from indigo fermentation. This is the secret to indigo dyeing—insoluble indigo has to be reduced to a soluble state by fermentation so that it can be absorbed by the cotton. Once dyeing begins, the indigo must be converted back to its original insoluble state to remain colourfast on the yarn. While Indian dyers have known this intuitively for centuries, it took over 30 years of research in the late 19th century to create a commercially successful synthetic indigo dye. As the workshop employees demonstrated the dyeing process (refer to panel on natural indigo dyeing), we noticed that the yarns were yellow as they emerged from the dye pots. But after they were beaten and reacted with atmospheric oxygen, they oxidised and turned blue, returning to indigo's insoluble state.



Fig. 7. *Kalamkari* with bright red and deep blue captivated export markets. Red and blue are key *kalamkari* dyes. Example of a brightly coloured *kalamkari* with different shades of red from chay and indigo for blue. Collection of ACM, radiocarbon dated 1732-1782.

PAINTING KALAMKARI



a) Key sketch drawn with burnt tamarind twigs. Before this, the cloth is washed and pounded to rid the cotton of impurities which could result in uneven dyeing. The cloth is then soaked in a solution of buffalo milk and myrobalan to ensure that the dyes and mordants do not spread beyond the applied areas.



b) Outline in *kassim*, a mineral dye.



c) Alum is applied on parts to be dyed red.



d) The cloth is boiled in red dye vat to achieve the colour.



e) Yellow is applied.



f) Blue is applied directly or by a wax resist method: the areas not to be blue are covered in wax so that they do not accept the blue dye when immersed in the vat.



g) Green is achieved by painting blue over yellow. When the colouring is completed, the cloth will be washed, starched and rubbed with a shell to produce a glossy appearance.

The workers dyed the yarns repeatedly to achieve deeper blues, but this was done in a new dye bath each time since the dye oxidises when exposed to air.

Mr Larraona explained that while synthetic indigo dyes are as colourfast as natural indigo, natural dyes processed from the indigo plant are more environmentally friendly. He said that his dye pots have been in use for more than 15 years and produce no waste products. I found out later that synthetic dyes are also hazardous to the health of the dyers: they can cause nerve damage, something that natural indigo does not do. Besides being a powerful dye for textiles, indigo is also used to blacken hair.

We began this trip with the objective of documenting indigenous, living textile traditions for our exhibition and publication. By the end of the journey, however, we had acquired more than just video footage and photos—we saw firsthand the techniques practised by artists and learned processes not found in books. We also made contacts with artists and government institutions.

Suggestions for further reading on Indian textile painting and dyeing techniques

Crill, Rosemary. Chintz: *Indian Textiles for the West*. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2008.
Gittinger, Mattiebelle. *Master Dyers to the World*. Washington DC: The Textile Museum, 1982.
Ramani, Shakuntala. *The Art and Craft of Natural Dyes*. Chennai: Kalakshetra Foundation, 2004.

In addition, we saw different models for reviving traditional crafts, including government support and funding as well as direct entrepreneurial production for markets. Mr Larraona's and Mr Niranjana's workshops exemplify the latter. Mr Larraona's workshop is a commercial enterprise supporting the revival of a traditional craft. He sells naturally dyed cotton yarn and denim cloth to clothing companies. Mr Niranjana runs a business designing and painting *kalamkari*. He also trains artists by offering internships that teach the basics of the painting technique. Those who complete the internship can either paint for his business or leave to paint on their own. Mr Niranjana also devotes time to research on historical styles of painting designs, such as the previous styles of painting the flowering tree design (Fig. 1).

Museums can take an active role in preserving this tradition by educating visitors on the sophistication and beauty of such textile production techniques. This can be done through exhibitions and programmes, as well as through museum stores which provide markets that help artists such as Mr Niranjana. In addition, artist residency programmes in museums can reach out to the public through craft workshops and demonstrations. Interactions with artists can be a powerful link between the public and the art they view in museums. They can learn that art is not dead and entirely divorced from the present, but is as alive as an artist's daily culture and creativity.

Having spent nine days witnessing artists at work and their amazing techniques (which I previously had only read about in books), I have come to respect these crafts not just as artistic skills, but also as sets of sophisticated technologies, passed down through family histories. It was heartening to see the revival of *kalamkari* and the use of natural dyes. I was moved by the artists' passion with their crafts, as well as their pride in their cultural heritage. And it was indeed refreshing to be treated with generous hospitality. The land and its history, the people and their arts, will draw me back to India after this maiden trip.

Soh Gek Han is Manager (Research Unit) at the Asian Civilisations Museum.

∨ NATURAL INDIGO DYEING



A) A piece of indigo cake used for dyeing. Blue comes from indigo. It is also used to produce, with red dye, shades of purple, or with yellow, shades of green.



B) Washing the yarns before dyeing. The organic cotton yarns are washed before dyeing so that the threads open up and take the dye evenly.

C) Dyeing takes place in earthenware pots, each containing around 350 litres of dye. The pots are buried underground to keep the dye at a constant temperature. Potash and lime are added to the indigo and water to aid in fermentation, deoxidising the solution and dissolving the indigo. After dyeing, the yarns are beaten to facilitate oxidation. Yarns are dyed repeatedly to produce a deeper blue.



D) The yarns are boiled, washed and dried before they are sent to other production centres to be woven and stitched into clothes for sale.

Endnotes:

1. *Kalamkari* refers to the technique of drawing and painting on textiles but may also be used for block-printed textiles made to look like *kalamkari* cloths.

2. A fixing agent is also known as a mordant, a metallic oxide that opens up the tight molecular structure of the cotton fabric so that the dye can bond with the cloth fibre and thus remain colourfast.

RHYTHM OF SECRET-STRING

TRUONG BE,
RHYTHM OF SECRET-STRING, 2005,
LACQUER ON BOARD,
180 X 360 CM,
COLLECTION OF NATIONAL HERITAGE
BOARD

THE NATIONAL ART
GALLERY

Truong Be (born in 1942 in Quang Tri, Vietnam) is regarded today as one of the leading masters in lacquer painting in Vietnam. A graduate of Hanoi University of Fine Arts, Truong Be furthered his studies in Budapest, Hungary, before returning to Vietnam to teach at the Hue University. He is currently a full-time artist and has been prolific in creating abstract lacquer paintings.

Rhythm of Secret-String is one of Truong Be's signature works, drawing inspiration from the energy and rhythmic flow of a string in motion. This painting is his most ambitious composition to-date in terms of its size and complex composition. It demonstrates the artist's masterly handling of the pumice lacquer technique, where the surface is expertly polished to reveal the numerous layers of gold and silver.





THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

THE PERFORMANCE OF IDENTITY ON A CONCRETE JUNGLE ISLAND

THE SINGAPORE SHOW
FUTURE PROOF
14 JANUARY TO 15 APRIL 2012

SINCE THE BIRTH of contemporary practice in Singapore – signalled by the formation of The Artists Village, 5th Passage as well as the landmark exhibition, Trimurti from 1988 – artists here have been exploring increasingly diverse mediums of creative work. Performance art, site-specific installations, graphic design and interactive media have become popular alongside new incarnations of painting and sculpture. *Future Proof* presents artworks by 26 exciting young Singapore artists with innovative and original art practices. Their artistic ventures take place from streets to galleries, their concerns local to geopolitical, their materials both found and acquired. The strong and consistent presence of these young Singapore artists in the local and international contemporary art landscape has enlivened the Singapore creative scene and inspired the birth of numerous other self-taught artists in Singapore.

Presented in galleries, corridors and street sides all at the same time, the exhibition draws from the Singapore Art Museum's permanent collection and special new commissions, reinforced with artworks from the personal holdings of respective artists, *Future Proof* offers a measure on the contemporary art practice of Singapore artists today.



TEXT BY DAVID CHEW
IMAGES COURTESY OF
SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM



Facing page and above image: Shah Rizzal, *This Is Home*, 2011. Brown paper, Clothing poles, Thread and Spray-paint, and video, 110 x 96 x 100 cm, Artist Collection. Images courtesy of Shah Rizzal.

THE NOTION OF 'PLACE'

Singaporean filmmaker Royston Tan's documentary *Old Places* captures distinctive places in Singapore that are close to people's hearts, so as to preserve memories that are increasingly disappearing from our landscape. "By collecting these images (of old places), it balances the sense of displacement people feel when familiar places disappear"¹. As such places are filled with meaning, the loss of many of them in the rapidly evolving Singapore landscape is even more deeply felt by people².

The notion of 'place' is a very powerful one. It is the stage and backdrop to all human activity. Given our culturally constructed lenses and frames, it is part and parcel of human activity, experience and communication. Beyond that, however, in the most deeply seated myths and notions of landscape and place is the idea of rootedness – where ideas of home and belonging, of locality and identity, and of the social dangers of change and modernisation exist³, all being intricately and strongly tied to 'place'.

The difference between 'site' and 'place' is that of the quantitative versus the qualitative. Rather than simply measuring the physical world, looking at 'place' measures the spiritual, political and moral qualities of a particular area, recording and representing the space and time of how people in that place have lived their lives⁴.

Landscape is embedded in the practical uses of the physical world as nature and territory. But by further looking at landscape through political and legal contexts, what emerges from specific geographical, social and cultural circumstances is a site for the negotiations of social, economic, and political geographies (of territory, border, exchange), as well as power relationships and subordination. Thus the spatial expression of one living in a particular territory is rooted in subjects such as land and sea, untamed spaces, and urban skylines⁵.

More than just physical land or the marked territories of a country, the idea of 'place' when interlinked with memory, reveals a more abstract quality of a site that could be perceived as its (true) "culture"⁶. To do so would be to "excavate below our conventional sight-level of the physical to recover the veins of myth and memory that lie beneath the surface" – to reveal the

power of social memory in shaping individual and social identities, as well as its presence in the physical world^{7,8}.

'Place' thus becomes the site for the performance and expression of identities: a site for identity to negotiate with social, economic, and political geographies.

Through their works, the artists in *Future Proof* explore some of the contexts that have shaped both the nation's identity and their own – visualising, conceptualising, recording and representing the space and time they live in.

PERFORMANCE OF IDENTITY IN 'PLACE'

In 2005, an exhibition titled *islanded* was organised by the Institute of Contemporary Art Singapore. It featured 12 artists from different island states, focusing on the anxiety of people living in such states.

As the exhibition curators noted, to be 'islanded' was not the result of natural forces, but rather of a complex set of political, social and cultural mechanisms⁹, often intricately linked to nation building.

Early contemporary Singapore art by artists such as Tang Da Wu explored this, particularly with his influential creation *Earthworks* in 1980. Through this work, Tang tried to capture Singapore's rapidly changing social and economic landscapes through representing the drastic physical changes in Ang Mo Kio – a rural site which was rapidly transformed and urbanised into a public housing area – by hanging linen clothes in gullies.

Future sites of contestation and negotiation in the Singapore landscape will be many, but well-supported by her people, proof that the Singapore identity was (and is) in the making and being performed ever more so.

The red brick National Library Building at Stamford Road, for example, was an institution for many. It housed not only Singapore's first free public library but also countless fond memories. When it had to make way for the Fort Canning Road tunnel leading from Stamford Road to Penang Road, passionate calls were made by Singaporeans to save this red brick building. A letter by Kelvin Wang to *The Straits Times'* Forum page on 8 December 1998 sparked off a debate that lasted some seven years. Wang wrote:

MUSEINGS.

*"Bras Basah has lost too many unique buildings already, and we should not lose the National Library because it would mean that Singaporeans will not only lose another part of their history, but also a part of what forms their collective memory, which helps make Singapore 'home'."*¹⁰

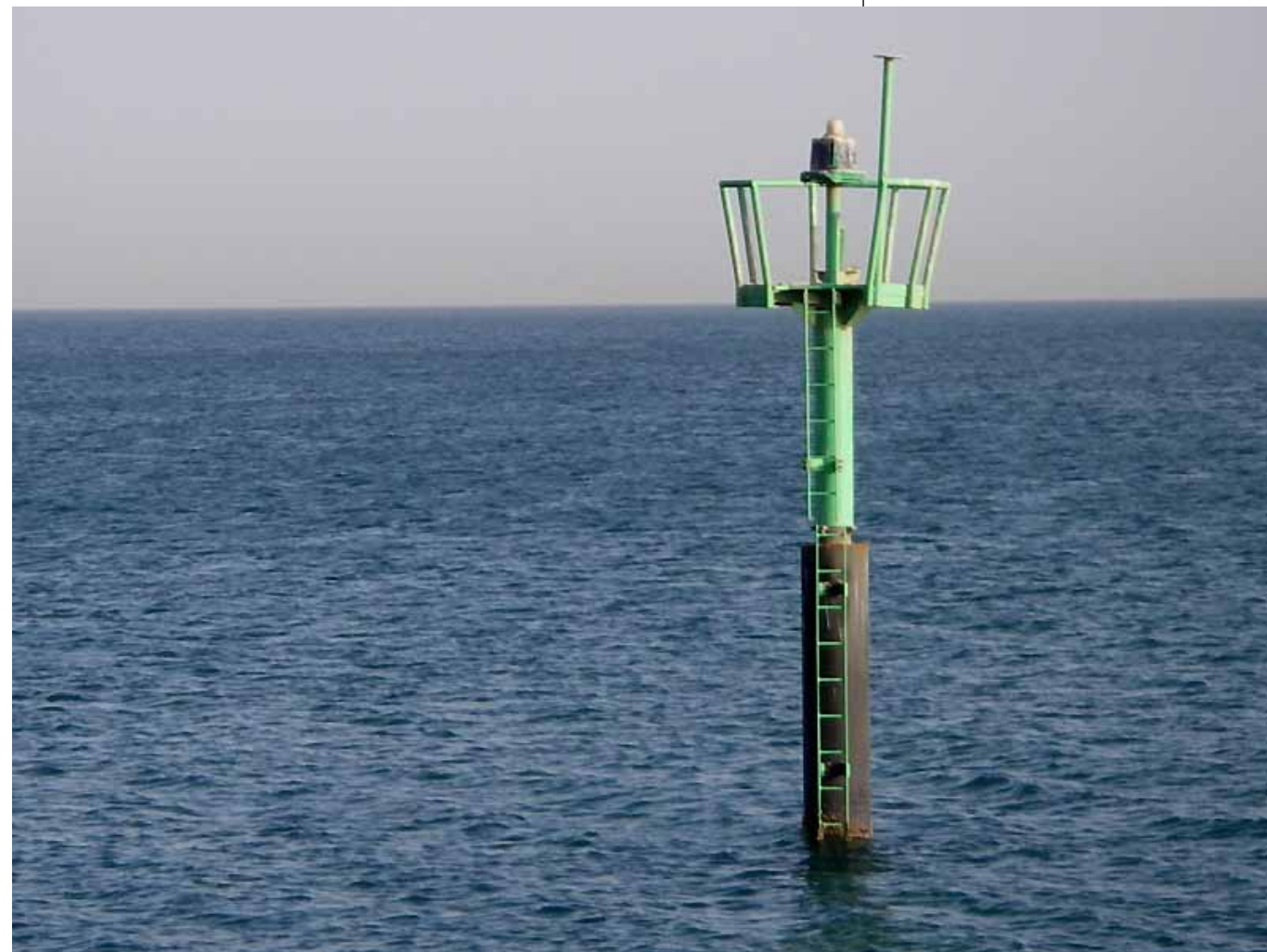
Today, all that remains of the former red brick building are its "two wretched red pillars standing forlorn"¹¹. Support for this former building, however, stands unwavering. And so is the recognition of that point in Singapore's recent history where a rare moment of civic activism tried to save a landmark building cherished by so many Singaporeans.

One of the few 'artist village' enclaves in Singapore, other than The Artist Village in Ulu Sembawang, also had to make way for an economically-driven project, the integrated resort and casino on Sentosa¹². What was one of the few tranquil sites in Singapore for artists to creatively practise their craft is now home to hotels, a casino, and a theme park; but not before a group of artists including Milenko Prvacki, David Chan and Max Kong fought to keep the village alive.

THE SEA

An island, by definition, is completely surrounded by sea. This characteristic and Singapore's geographical location have been featured as two key reasons for the island's development from its origin as a fishing village founded by Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819, to the global port and metropolis it is today. Being an island, Singapore's true territorial boundaries lie not on land but in our surrounding coastal waters. Such characteristics make the maritime territory a site of negotiation and performance of identity for Singaporeans.

The island of Pedra Branca (white rocks in Portuguese) is one such site, located in the eastern entrance of the Singapore Strait between the Malaysian state of Johor and the Indonesian island of Bintan. In 1980, Singapore lodged a formal protest in response to a map published by Malaysia claiming Pedra Branca¹³. During the trial at the International Court of Justice between the two countries in November 2007, the issue of defining a country's sovereignty and right to rule were debated heatedly, especially in the vast and indeterminate



Charles Lim, *Inside Outside*, 2005, Photographs & ship radio connection, Variable dimension, Artist Collection. Image courtesy of Charles Lim.

space of sea territory.

Inside Outside (2005) by Charles Lim attempts to encapsulate this. Lim's photographs of water border markers taken around Singapore waters over a period of one week represent the real border of the nation, despite water around and under it flowing in and out. Especially for an island state, the defining boundaries of the nation's territory out at sea, he puts forth, does not just signal where its sovereignty ends – it also denotes the border that represents the line between belonging and foreignness; and the ever changing ebb and flow, too, of the nature of identity that is

constantly in a state of flux.

Displaced (2003) by Francis Ng, is a set of photographic prints of water taken up close, abstract and seemingly universal, focusing on its relationship with the horizon. The photographs were taken at cardinal points in Singapore, with the artist immersing himself in water to capture each shot. The fluidity of one's relationship with the surroundings, occasionally with the threat of being engulfed, similarly puts forth the tension, fragility and sometimes confrontation of one's ever evolving identity and place in the world.



Above:
Donna Ong, *Crystal City*, 2009,
Glassware, Variable Dimensions, Artist Collection.
Image courtesy of Osage Gallery Ltd.

Left:
:phunk Studio (in collaboration with Keiichi
Tanaami), *Eccentric City: Rise and Fall*, 2010,
Tatebanko paper box structures with video
installation, Variable dimensions, Singapore Art
Museum Collection. Image courtesy of Todd Beltz
Photography.

ing in tourists and high net worth individuals to boost the economy dominating all other arguments. If anything, the issue showed a newfound spirit of expressing one's identity and place at the national level, which were acknowledged by journalists and ministers alike¹⁸.

Chun Kaifeng's sculptures ¥ € \$ (2010) and *The Ride of a Lifetime!* (2010) are expressions of the heated debates surrounding this new entertainment district in Singapore. ¥ € \$, with its currency symbols, spells out the chorus of anticipation of money to be earned. And the paint splashed on its back is not unlike the marks made by loan sharks on the doors for their defaulting borrowers. Instead of the thrill and joy associated with most amusement park rides, *The Ride of a Lifetime!* gives the impression of a prison and a sense of melancholy. The monochromatic models – while deliberately made to be reminiscent of toys and playthings from childhood – contain rather sharp social critique, conveying the strong need for freedom and individuality in a dispassionate society.

THE CITY

Another site of negotiation is the city itself. Developed rapidly since the nation's independence in 1965, the swift urbanisation and modernisation of Singapore have transformed her physical landscape from *kampong* villages into a vast concrete jungle of imposing high-rise modernist architecture. Taking place over several decades, this transformation – like many modern cities today – has proven to be traumatic to the city's inhabitants. Even after the dust settles and the skyscrapers take over the landscape, this site of negotiation becomes even more contested¹⁴.

The newly designated Marina Bay district, where the skyline is dominated by the distinctive shapes of the Singapore Flyer and Marina Bay Sands integrated resort, adds to the Singapore skyline that already boasts of symbols of economic success such as the banking and financial centres. The Marina Bay Sands and the Singapore Flyer have also become sites of negotiation for the Singapore identity, with the pursuit of economic agenda and spirit of pragmatism running up against the moral and the social¹⁵, to the point of some Singaporeans comparing this to giving up the Singapore soul and moral fabric^{16,17}. The debate was fierce and heated, with the focus on bring-

Playing with the notions of truth and what the eye really sees is what Donna Ong's installation, *Crystal City* (2009), is about. The installation, made up of inverted everyday glassware, is magically transformed into a city skyline, a metaphor for great cities like London and New York where anyone with a dream 'can make it big'. This beauty, however, comes with fragility and danger as it can all crash quite easily and quickly. :phunk studio's *Eccentric City: Rise and Fall* (2010) likewise comments on this fragility of cities, as well as the aspirations and ambitions they are built on. *The Decline of Western Civilization* (After Penelope Spheeris) (2010) by Gerald Leow, in addition, questions what authentic culture is in a synthetic and constantly evolving world.

NATURE

Describing Singapore's pristine orderliness and highly controlled state, many – including government officials and bodies – have used the metaphor of the well-tended garden versus the wild rainforest, with the bonsai plant often being used as the ideal state to reach towards. Kwok Kian Woon's essay on *The Bonsai and the Rainforest: Reflections on Culture and Cultural Policy in*



Above: Genevieve Chua, *After the Flood* #10, #11, #12, 2010, Hand-coloured photographs 52 x 231cm, Singapore Art Museum Collection.

Below: Genevieve Chua, *After the Flood* #1, 2010, Hand-coloured photographs, 52 x 77 cm, Singapore Art Museum Collection.



Singapore noted the price for this order and structure – “social disciplining through a system of policing and punishment”¹⁹. Just as how Singapore’s luxuriant greenery in the urban landscape is “no accident”, neither is her success today: “A good gardener, with all good intentions, curbs the growth of weeds and tends to the health of the plants; in some cases to protect saplings from the elements.”

The physical, natural landscape (on the decline in Singapore) has come to represent the tussle between an organic situation versus one that is state-controlled and pruned. The lush, diverse (and wild) rainforests of the tropics (used as a metaphor for multiculturalism by the late Kuo Pao Kun) contrast against the bonsai, which is the “end product of Will versus Nature” – the product of a controlled growth to represent an ideal aesthetic view of nature²⁰. Amid the orderly, nature and the wild outdoors has become a site for Singaporeans to express themselves against the structured concrete garden they live in, even if it is filled with creepy crawlies and wild things.

The accidental and spontaneity in the wild can be seen in Ang Soo Koon’s *YOUR LOVE IS LIKE A CHUNK OF GOLD* (2011) and Melissa Tan’s *Under The Blanket of Bedrock* (2011). Both works speak of events that happen out of chance, transforming the everyday into something extraordinary. Tan’s paper sculptures speak of how undue pressure can transform rocks into crystals; while something comforting and familiar like bread becomes the unusual site for growth of crystals in Ang’s bread and crystal sculptures. But the wild does hold its horrors for those brought up in a well-manicured bonsai garden, as Ang’s work, along with Genevieve Chua’s *After The Flood* (2010) series of photographs, convey. The spontaneous growth of crystals on bread is sharp and menacing, no matter its beauty; while Chua’s hand-painted photographs of secondary forest sites²¹ in Singapore conveys the fear of the unknown beneath the surface and what lies beyond the manicured lawn.

BEYOND DOCUMENTING AND REPRESENTING

The works by the artists in *Future Proof* go beyond merely documenting and representing. By taking measure of the world rather than just measuring it, these artists have tried to include the remembered, the imagined, and the contemplated; capturing the spiritual, political, moral and social elements of identity.

David Chew is Assistant Curator, Singapore Art Museum

¹ Heritage is HIP. (2011, November 26). *The Straits Times*.

² *Lianhe Zaobao* (2011, December 18) ran a commentary by Zhang Zhuan Xin, who highlighted how Singaporeans who have returned from abroad felt displaced, needing time to adjust back to life in Singapore. Zhang noted that in a few short months, Singapore has lost the Tanjong Pagar Railway Station, Old School and Bukit Brown cemetery, which added to the sense that Singaporeans are losing our places of heritage. Zhang noted that Singaporeans have begun to show an interest in preserving our heritage and memories of such places, so as to build shared memories. Zhang opined that it was essential to have a shared memory in this fast changing world in order to create a sense of rootedness.

³ DeLue, R. Z. & Elkins, J. (Ed.). [2008]. *Landscape Theory*, p.38. NY: Routledge.

⁴ Cosgrave, D. (Ed.). [1999]. *Mappings*, p. 2-4. UK: Reaktion Books.

⁵ DeLue & Elkins, p.18-20, 90.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.163.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.35.

⁸ William Lim once noted that “a well-known saying in the architectural fraternity (is) that a nation gets the architecture it deserves”. [Lim, W. (2004). *Architecture, Art, Identity in Singapore – Is there life after Tabula Rasa?* p.31. Singapore: Asian Urban Lab.] Indeed, the social, economic, and political realms eventually manifest themselves in the physical.

⁹ *islanded* exhibition catalogue, 2005, Institute of Contemporary Arts, Singapore

¹⁰ Wang, K. (1998, December 8). “Let’s not lose National Library”. *The Straits Times*.

¹¹ <http://2ndshot.blogspot.com/2010/08/putting-heritage-right-at-old-national.html>, retrieved December 5, 2011.

¹² Chew, D. (2006, October 16). Artists Village to be vacated to make way for Sentosa IR. *TODAY Newspaper*.

¹³ *Sovereignty over pedra branca/pulau batu puteh, middle rocks and south ledge (Malaysia/Singapore)*. (2008, May 23). Retrieved from International Court of Justice: <http://www.icj-cij.org>.

¹⁴ Lim, p.27-30.

¹⁵ Tan, K. P. (2004) *Making the decision: Economics, Morality and the Public Sphere*. IPS Forum on the Casino Proposal.

¹⁶ *Are we chasing the high net worth foreigners away?* (2011, August 12). Retrieved December 10, 2011, from: <http://mysingaporenews.blogspot.com/2011/12/are-we-chasing-high-net-worth.html>.

¹⁷ 14 Dec 2011, *MBS and RWS casinos perfect spots for sleeping*. (2011, December 14). Retrieved December 12, 2011, from: http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/Singapore/Story/STIStory_744453.html.

¹⁸ “I think this is a topic which has aroused considerable public interest and many people who have written in have expressed their views candidly and with deep conviction. At the national level I think Singapore is moving its discussion of national issues up one notch.” - Then Second Minister for Trade and Industry, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, commenting on the debate before a final decision was made. (<http://www.reach.gov.sg/Portals/0/File/Shaping%20the%20future.pdf>. Retrieved 2011, December 12.)

¹⁹ Kwok, K. W. (2004). *The Bonsai and the Rainforest: Reflections on Culture and Cultural Policy in Singapore*. In Tan, C. K. & Ng, T. (Eds.), *Ask Not: The Necessary Stage in Singapore*. Marshall Cavendish International.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.1-26.

²¹ These sites of nature are of secondary forests, and not of primary forests, underlining the losing battle nature has as a site of negotiation in the context of urbanisation in Singapore.

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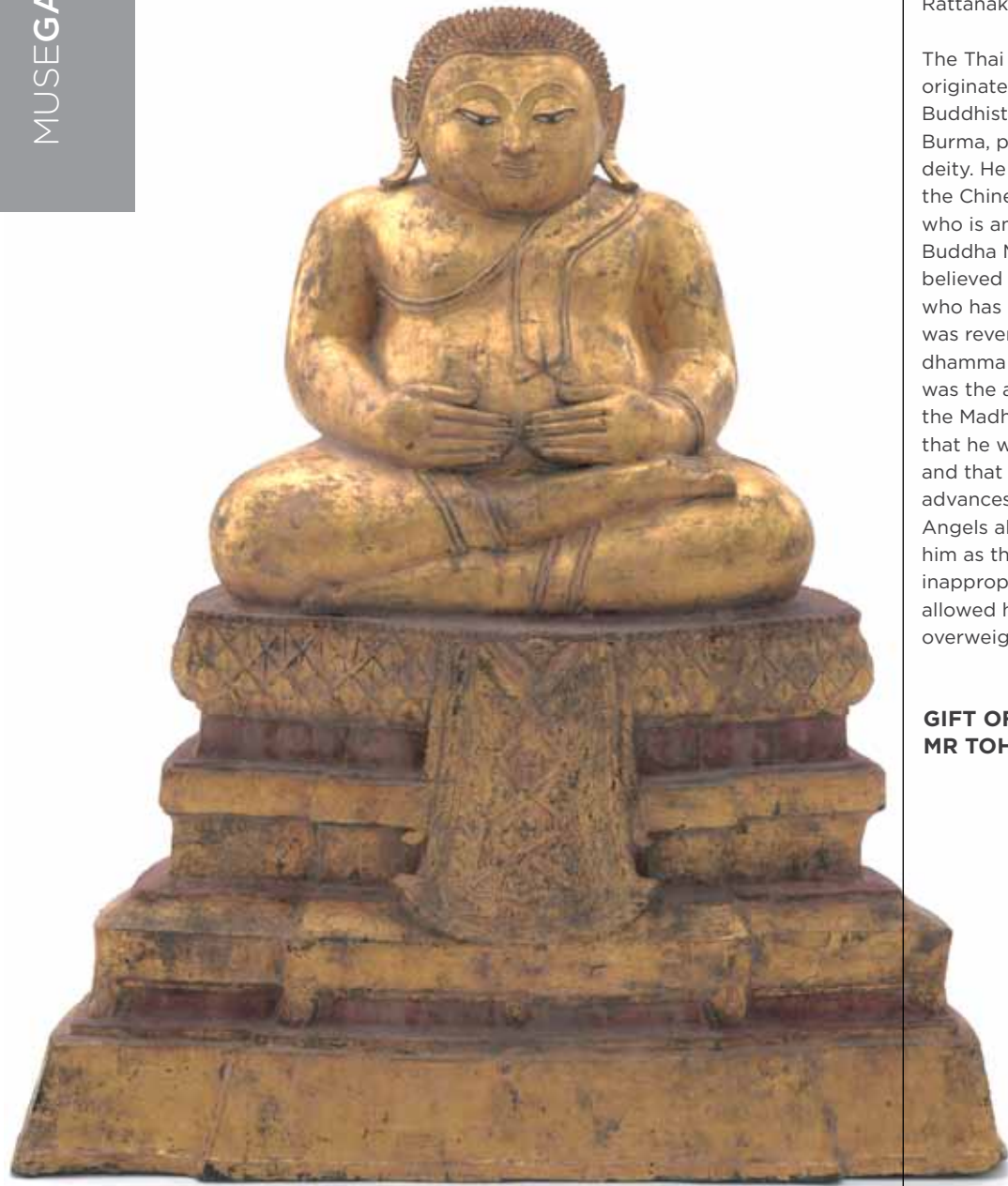
Tan, C. K. & Ng, T. (Eds.). [2004]. *Ask Not: The Necessary Stage in Singapore*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International.

Tan, K. P. (2004). *Making the decision: Economics, Morality and the Public Sphere*. IPS Forum on the Casino Proposal

SEATED PHRA SANGKACHAI

SEATED PHRA SANGKACHAI
THAILAND, RATTANAKOSIN PERIOD,
EARLY TO MID-20TH CENTURY
GILDED BRONZE, MOTHER-OF-PEARL,
HEIGHT 78 CM
ACC. NO.2011-01562

MUSEGALLERY.

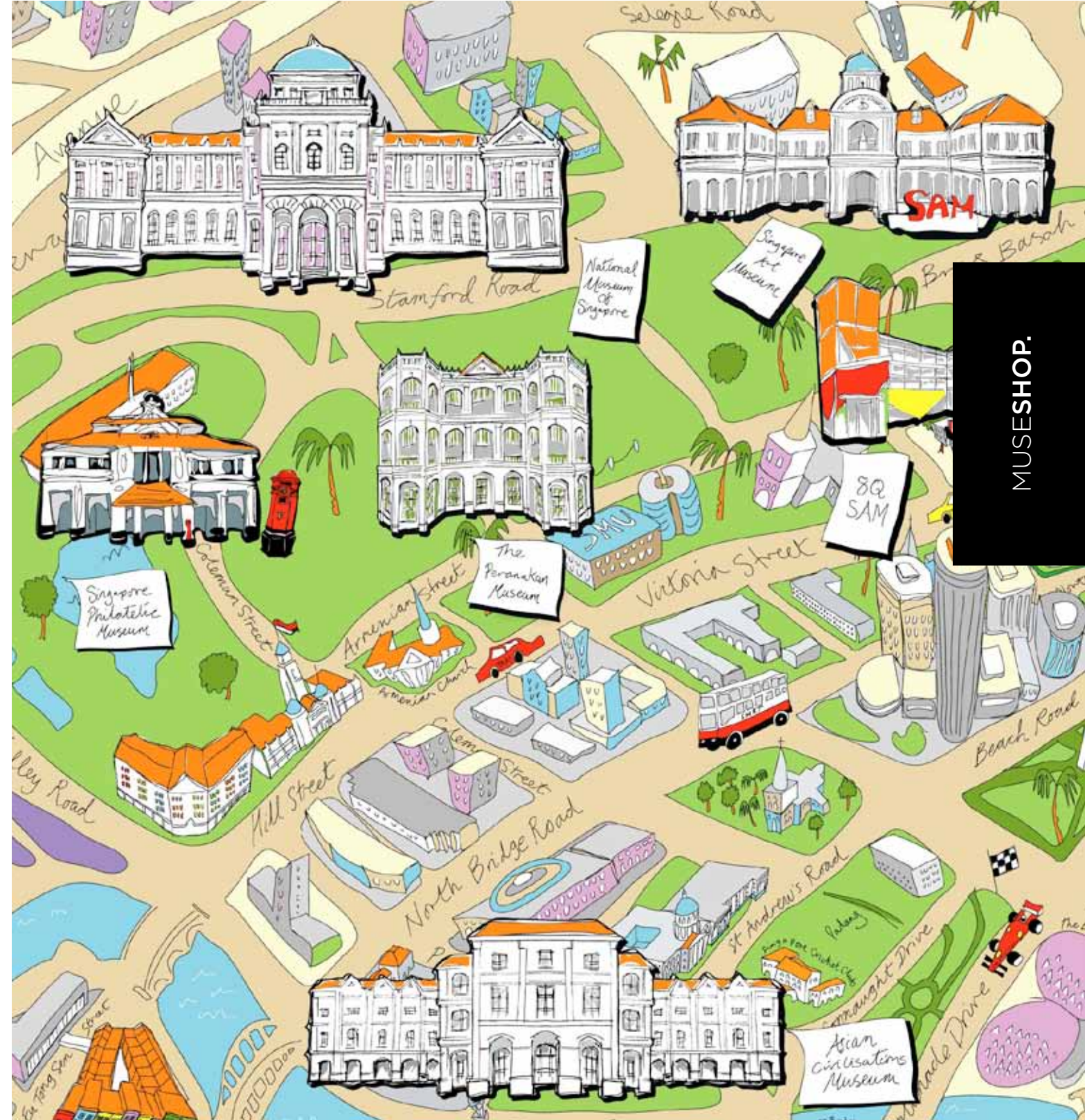


ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

This rotund, smiling figure with hands around his belly sitting on a tiered lotus throne is the monk known as Phra Sangkachai. The mother-of-pearl, finely inlaid to make his eyes, and the patterned cloth hanging down the front of the throne are typical of the earlier Rattanakosin decorative style.

The Thai Phra Sangkachai may have originated from early Theravada Buddhist traditions of the Mon culture in Burma, probably as a wealth-bestowing deity. He is sometimes confused with the Chinese Laughing Buddha, or Budai, who is an incarnation of the future Buddha Maitreya. Phra Sangkachai is believed to have been an Arhat (one who has attained enlightenment), and he was revered for his ability to explain the dhamma teachings in a clear manner. He was the author of the first Pali Grammar, the Madhupinadikar Sutta. Stories tell that he was once extremely handsome and that he attracted unwanted advances from women as well as men. Angels also mistakenly worshipped him as the Buddha. To avoid such inappropriate attention, Phra Sangkachai allowed himself to become extremely overweight and unattractive.

GIFT OF MR TOH SOON HUAT



MUSESHOP.

THE MAP OF SINGAPORE MUSEUMS

Produced by the National Heritage Board, this set of merchandise was created from an artist's impression of the key museums and attractions at Singapore's Arts and Heritage District.

The museums shown in this map are the Asian Civilisations Museum, the National Museum of Singapore, the Peranakan Museum, the Singapore Art Museum and the Singapore Philatelic Museum.

This range of merchandise is available at the Singapore Art Museum, the National Museum of Singapore and the Asian Civilisations Museum.





PATTERNS OF HERITAGE

If you are looking for a truly chic and unique gift idea, check out Patterns of Heritage, a series of patterned merchandise inspired by the Indian textiles in Singapore's national collection, some of which are over 600 years old.

Loved for their quality and bright unfading colours, these Indian textiles became treasured heirlooms, passed down from one generation to the next. For centuries, their popularity and profound influence left an enduring mark on the way we do business, the way we dress and how we decorate our homes.

This inspiration, translated into the Patterns of Heritage series, shows the deep roots of today's globalised world, as well as the surprising and fascinating impact of cultural exchange.

This series of merchandise is available at the Asian Civilisations Museum lobby. Selected items are also available at the rotunda of the National Museum of Singapore.



Donna Ong, *Crystal City*, 2009.
Glassware, Variable Dimensions, Artist Collection.
Image courtesy of Osage Gallery Ltd.

// ASIAN CIVILISATIONS
MUSEUM**Patterns of Trade
Indian Textiles for Export,
1400-1900**• *Till 03 June 2012*

This special exhibition takes you on a journey back in time to the era when India clothed the world.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, millions of metres of cloth were produced each year in the subcontinent (mainly in Gujarat and on the Coromandel Coast), and traded to various parts of Asia, the Islamic world and Europe. Wherever they were traded Indian textiles like these created a sensation. Loved for their quality and bright, unfading colours, many became treasured heirlooms in remote and isolated islands of the Indonesian archipelago, and were often passed down from generation to generation.

Patterns of Trade: Indian Textiles for Export, 1400-1900 showcases over 70 pieces of strikingly patterned and brightly coloured Indian fabric from a recently acquired collection. These extraordinary cloths, some over 600 years old, show the deep roots of today's globalised world, as well as the surprising and fascinating impact of cultural exchange. Innovative and immensely popular, they continue to influence the way we dress and how we decorate our homes.

This exhibition marks the first time that a major part of this important collection is shown to the public.

Providing For the Afterlife:**Han Funerary Art**• *Till 4 March 2012*• *Shaw Foundation Foyer*

For thousands of years, the Chinese buried precious objects in graves to provide for the departed in the afterlife. These burial objects – often miniature versions of people, cooking utensils, tools and animals – are called *mingqi* or 'spirit objects'. This exhibition introduces the broad range of Chinese funerary objects from the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220CE).

**The Tang Shipwreck:
Gold and Ceramics from
9th-century China**• *Till 17 June 2012*• *Gallery 2*

Comprising some 60,000 objects, the cargo of the ill-fated 9th-century Arab

merchant ship – which sank off the coast of Belitung Island in the Java Sea – illustrates the early trading networks between China, Southeast Asia and West Asia. The exhibition features the highlights of this extraordinary find, including exquisite metal wares and rare ceramic objects. Produced in Tang China, the forms and motifs of these items reflect cross-cultural influences and the aesthetic sensibilities of this period.

**Shadow Spaces: Photographs
of the Old Supreme Court Building**• *17 March to 21 October 2012*• *Shaw Foundation Foyer*

Historical buildings hold memories – of events, activities, and people. The spaces, now undergoing renovation, are recorded and revealed in these photographs by Los Angeles-based photographer Sean Dungan.

// SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

Credit Suisse:**Innovation In Art Series****The Collectors Show: Chimera
Asian Contemporary Art from
Private Collections**• *Till 25 March 2012*

The Collectors Show: Chimera brings together major works of Asian contemporary art from private collections around the world. A tribute to the art patrons of today, the exhibition offers an insight into the breadth and richness of private art collections, introducing visitors to the personal visions and passions that shape them.

Titled *Chimera*, a deliberately evocative word that references both the mythological hybrid monster and the idea of an illusion, fantasy, or delusion, the exhibition presents contemporary art in all its various and hybrid forms, from painting to sculpture, to new media and interactive multi-media. The works selected eschew conventional spectacle in favour of a reflection on vision and visuality, offering up visually seductive surfaces tinged with undercurrents of anxiety. These artworks remind us of the spectres of our age – questions and issues which continue to haunt us and test our judgement at every turn and corner of our new millennium.

The Collectors Show: Chimera is a parallel event of Art Stage Singapore 2012 and independently organised by the Singapore Art Museum.

// SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

**The Singapore Show:
Future Proof
14 January – 15 April 2012**• *Singapore Art Museum (SAM) at 8Q, 222 Queen Street,
SAM Front Lawn & The Substation*

Since the birth of contemporary practice in Singapore, signalled by the formation of The Artists Village, 5th Passage and the landmark exhibition, *Trimurti*, artists here have been exploring various genres of creative work - from sculpture and paintings to performance art, site-specific installations to graphic design and interactive media.

The Singapore Show: Future Proof presents artworks from young artists whose innovative and unique practices have generated attention and accolades in various art circles. Their artistic ventures take place from streets to galleries; their concerns local to geopolitical; their material both found and acquired. With strong, consistent and resilient presence in the local as well as international contemporary art scenes, these motivated youth have enlivened Singapore's art landscape and can be considered to be amongst those to look out for today.

The Singapore Show: Future Proof is a parallel event of Art Stage Singapore 2012. Presented at SAM at 8Q with SAM-commissioned installations at 222 Queen Street, SAM Front Lawn and The Substation. The public installations are supported by the National Heritage Board's Precinct Development Unit.

// NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
SINGAPORE**Dreams & Reality: Music at an
Exhibition**• *5 – 27 January 2012 | 8pm*• *Duration: 60 minutes*• *Exhibition Galleries, Basement | S\$48 (includes handling fees)*• *20% discount for four or more concerts*

Don't miss this rare opportunity to listen to Impressionist music masterpieces performed by leading musicians from Singapore and the region, while surrounded by art works featured in the exhibition *Dreams & Reality: Masterpieces of Painting, Drawing & Photography from the Musée d'Orsay, Paris.*

This eight-concert series, presented in conjunction with the exhibition, highlights and explores the many similar aesthetics and trends shared by Impressionist music and art. From the dream-like to the virtuosic, be lulled and thrilled by iconic compositions of Debussy and Ravel, as well as their contemporaries in Europe and America.

Featuring acclaimed recitalists Melvyn Tan, Albert Tiu, Dennis Lee, Toh Chee Hung and the T'ang Quartet, *Dreams & Reality: Music at an Exhibition* promises an illuminating start to the musical calendar of the New Year!

- Official Piano Sponsored by Steinway & Sons

**ASEAN Museum Directors'
Symposium: Film as a Language
of History**• *13 –14 January 2012*• *9.30am – 6.30pm*• *Gallery Theatre, Basement*• *Free admission with registration*

The National Museum of Singapore (NMS) presents a two-day symposium to explore timely questions on the role film plays in the way we make sense of our collective and personal histories. This symposium will be a platform to discuss the way history is represented and experienced through the filmic medium, and the implications of this process on our understanding of the past.

Besides presentations by Kenneth Paul Tan, Farish Ahmad-Noor, Nick Deocampo, Riri Riza and Chalida Uabumrungjit, the symposium will feature a selection of films that deals with the issues of history and memory. This includes Tan Pin Pin's *Invisible City* (2007) and Atsushi Funahashi's *Deep in the Valley* (2009), which will be accompanied by post-screening discussions with the filmmakers and Raya Martin's *Independencia* (2009).

A special highlight of the symposium is a forum that reflects on the history of NMS's utilisation of and engagement with film in its galleries and Cinematheque.

The Asean Museum Directors' Symposium is an annual feature programme organised by the National Heritage Board of Singapore's museums since 2009.

To register, please email to nhb_nm_cinematheque@nhb.gov.sg with your name and contact details. Seats will be reserved on a first-come, first-served basis.

For the latest schedule, please visit www.nationalmuseum.sg

**The Golden Age of Mexican Cinema
A Programme of the National
Museum Cinémathèque
Co-presented with the Mexican
Embassy of Singapore**• *26 – 29 January 2012*• *Various Timings*• *Gallery Theatre, Basement | S\$9 (includes handling fees)*

The period from the 1930s to the 1960s has been marked as the historical peak of Mexican cinema, which encapsulated the heartbeat of a nation on the brink of modernity. Reflecting localised realities and fantasies, films during that

golden epoch were popular forms of entertainment in the everyday lives of Mexicans. They were also symbolic of the idealistic search for a uniquely Mexican filmic aesthetic to establish a unified national identity.

Exploring the rich legacy of this lively Golden Age of Mexican cinema, this programme features masterpieces by Mexican auteurs (filmmakers with unique individual styles) such as Fernando de Fuentes and Emilio Fernandez. The featured films will include the revolutionary epic *Vámonos con Pancho Villa!* (1936), as well as the exquisite melodrama *Enamorada* (1946) starring beautiful Maria Félix.

The Golden Age of Mexican Cinema is part of a cultural exchange between Mexico and Singapore to explore the most vibrant episode of each country's cinematic history. The Golden Age of Singapore Cinema, which features classics from the era of major studios from the 1950s to 1960s, will be held in Mexico in late-2012.

For film schedules, please visit <http://www.nationalmuseum.sg>

**Merdeka! The Films of Usmar
Ismail and Garin Nugroho
A Programme of the National
Museum Cinémathèque**• *28 – 31 March 2012 | Various Timings*• *Gallery Theatre, Basement | S\$9 (includes handling fees)*

Merdeka! is a special presentation of six major works by Usmar Ismail and Garin Nugroho, two master filmmakers who have shaped modern Indonesian cinema. It pays tribute to these two pioneers and their spirit of independence.

Regarded as The Father of Indonesian Cinema, Usmar started PERFINI, the first wholly-owned Indonesian film company, in 1950 – a year after Indonesia won its independence, *Merdeka*. He made the first films that showed the real lives of Indonesians and their struggle for independence.

Subsequently, Garin fought to re-establish an Indonesian independent cinema outside of Suharto's autocratic New Order regime. Garin actively fostered a community of filmmakers with his films, and became the key catalyst in spurring the arrival of the Indonesian New Wave in late 1990s.

A highlight of the *Merdeka!* programme is the world premiere of the National Museum of Singapore's restoration of Usmar's *Lewat Djam Malam / After the Curfew* (1954), which won

Best Film at the first Indonesian Film Festival in 1955.

For film schedules, please visit www.nationalmuseum.sg

// SINGAPORE PHILATELIC
MUSEUM**Message Me**• *Till 31 March 2012*

Through the Singapore Philatelic Museum's permanent collection of communication equipment and over 200 postage stamps, *Message Me* explores the importance of communication and its development from the Stone Age to modern day. With interactive exhibits, this exhibition is designed to provide a fun and engaging experience for school children and families. Through the exhibits, one is able to discover the many different forms of communication. The alphabet, semaphore signalling, Morse code, as well as the World Wide Web made public about 20 years ago, are highlights of inventions that have bridged distance and time.

The Adventures of Tintin• *Till 31 May 2012*

Tintin is the famous young reporter in the comic book series created by Belgian comic artist Georges Remi (1907 - 1983), also known as Hergé. Tintin and his dog companion Snowy enjoyed exciting adventures that took them to various places in the world such as Tibet, Congo, America, Russia and even the moon!

View the full range of Tintin postage stamps issued by Belgium, France and the Netherlands. These Tintin stamps are from the Singapore Philatelic Museum's Universal Postal Union Collection. In addition, rarely seen original stamp artworks, colour trials, as well as other philatelic materials from the Museum Voor Communicatie in the Netherlands and Musée de La Poste in France are on display for the first time in Singapore.

Imagine Dragons• *24 January – December 2012*

With 2012 being the Year of the Dragon, the Singapore Philatelic Museum is bringing dragons to life with stamps and interactive displays. Designed for children aged five to ten years old, this exhibition will bring them into the world of dragons and let their imaginations fly! Do you know that dragon legends appear in every continent in the

world? Meet dragons from across the globe, including ones from Singapore! Discover what makes the mythical creatures tick, explore a dragon's lair and unearth some 'real-life' dragons.

// THE NATIONAL ART GALLERY

Notable Acquisitions**Exhibition 2011:****Featuring works by Tan Oe Pang**

• *Exhibition held at the Singapore Art Museum's premises till 5 February 2012*
The *Notable Acquisitions Exhibition* is an ongoing exhibition by the National Art Gallery, Singapore, featuring recent acquisitions and donations. The exhibition features a selection of Tan Oe Pang's works, drawn from a donation collection received by the Gallery. This selection comprises a variety of Tan's works in the ink and oil medium.

Singapore artist Tan Oe Pang is one of Singapore's established ink artists. His daring use of ink and vivid composition in art pushes the boundaries of Chinese ink practice, marking him as one of the most innovative practitioners in the medium today. Tan was a participant in the prestigious International Biennial of Arts Valparaiso and the International Biennial of Arts Sao Paulo, Brazil.

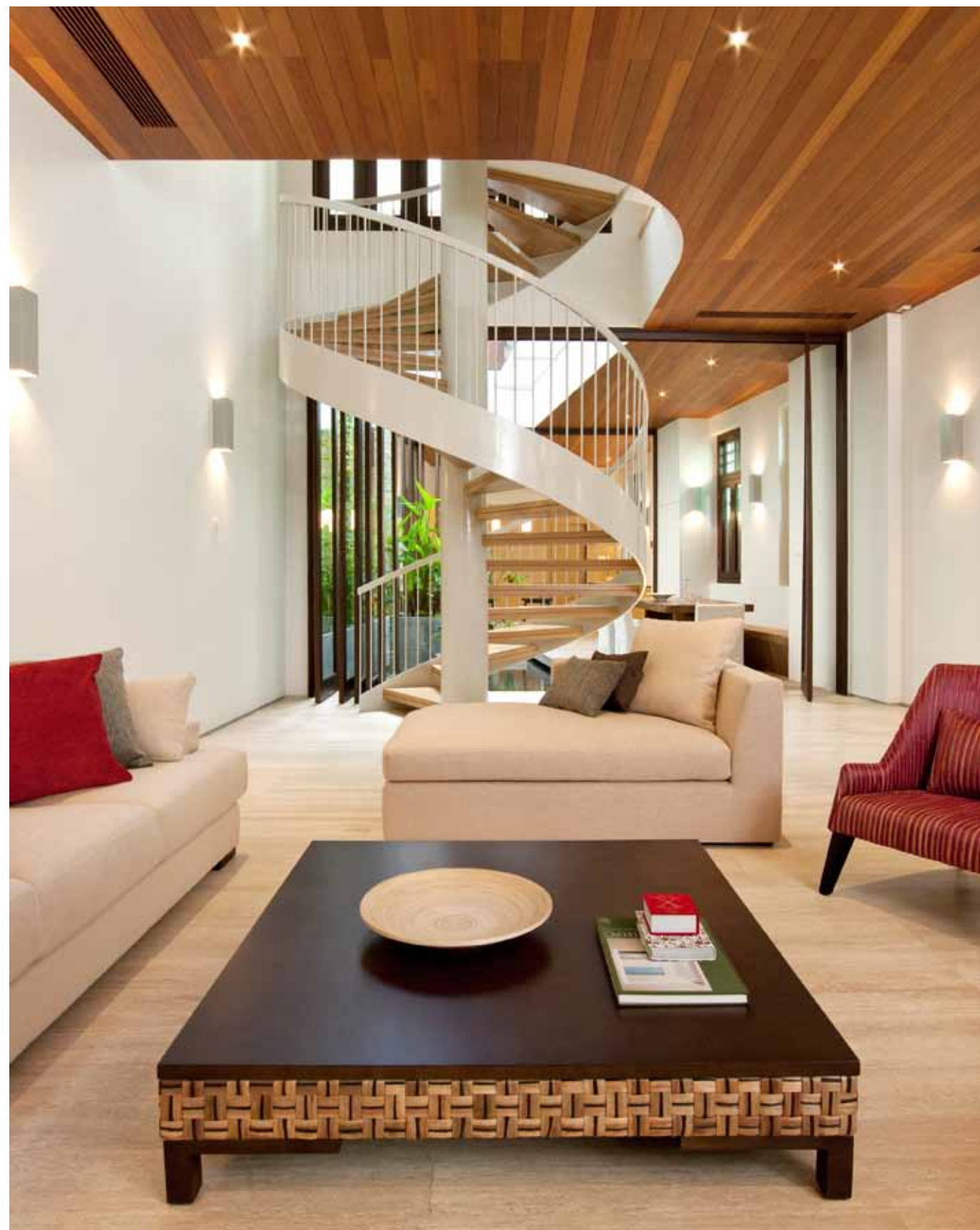
Seeing the Kite Again Series II

• *Exhibition held at the Singapore Art Museum's premises till 12 November 2012*

This exhibition, entitled *Seeing the Kite Again*, is inspired by the late master Wu Guanzhong's metaphor of a kite and how it expresses the connection between an artist, his life and the people around him. By bridging Chinese and Western aesthetics, Wu blazed the trail for the modernisation of Chinese art. In 2008, the internationally acclaimed artist donated his largest gift of 113 important works to the National Heritage Board. Selected paintings from the donation have been presented by the National Art Gallery, Singapore since 2009. The current exhibition showcases some of Wu's most outstanding works produced from the 1960s to 2000s in the oil and ink medium.



MUSEDESIGN.



TEXT BY **CHERYL SIM**
IMAGES COURTESY OF **ONG&ONG PTE LTD**

A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

68 Cairnhill Road

SITUATED AT THE END of a row of 28 shophouses, this was once a tiny, wedge-shaped two-storey terrace house. Likely to be built in the 1930s, this “art deco style shophouse” was previously uninhabited and had been in a state of neglect for many years.

Accorded the conservation status in 1989, it has now been revived and transformed into an award-winning spacious family home. Specifically, its exemplary transformation has made it a Category B winner of the 2010 Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) Architectural Heritage Award.

NORMALISING THE LAYOUT AND FACADE

Being the last house on a tapering site, the shophouse has the shortest length from front to back. Its site is an oddly-shaped trapezium, with the front of the house wider than its back.

The house had an awkwardly-shaped forecourt prior to the refurbishment. There was also a dead-end five-foot-way next to the house, along one of its sides. This five-foot-way started from its front to about one-third way along its side, ending where it met a bedroom wall. Another irregularity was the shophouse backyard. It was extremely narrow, and one’s shoulders could touch both sides of the house at its

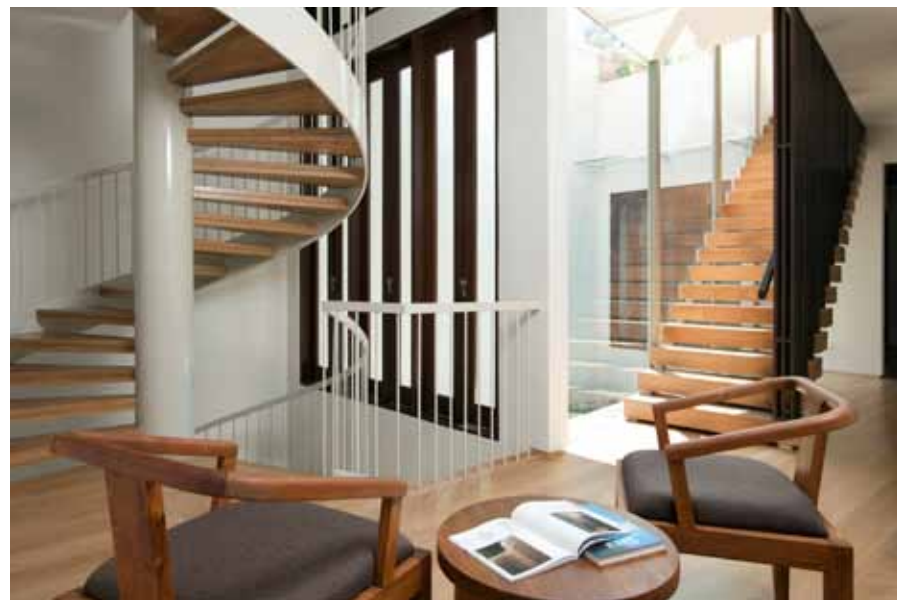
narrowest point. There was an inaccessible piece of land next to the yard, isolated due to the building of the neighbouring condominium’s boundary wall.

Taking on the restoration challenge, the project team’s first triumph was in ‘normalising’ the layout and façade of the house.

The first storey was reconfigured to incorporate precious space from the five-foot-way. Application was made to the authorities to subsume the unused five-foot-way to the side of the house, which enabled the living room on the first storey to gain almost one-third additional space.

The empty land next to the backyard was also integrated into the house, providing new and much-needed living spaces. On the first floor, a powder room, a maid’s room and bathroom, as well as a laundry room were created with the new space. On the second storey, shifting the bedroom – originally located at the front of the house – to the back was thus made possible. The creation of a new en-suite and master bedroom at the rear of the house has provided greater privacy and less noise pollution from busy Cairnhill Road at the front.

The awkwardly-shaped forecourt was also rectified by bringing the forecourt walls in line with those of other shophouses in the row.



A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

A number of new features were created during the restoration process.

At the back of the first storey, a water garden was created in the open courtyard, allowing for maximum light penetration and to increase the sense of connection to the outdoors. Adjacent to it, a deck was created, serving as a partially-alfresco dining area, playing up the seamless transition of inside-outside space.

On the second storey, a jack roof typical of houses of the earlier era was built. This allows more light to penetrate the interiors. Also, with the installation of the jack roof, space was made available for a mezzanine level, which houses a guest room with ensuite.

The roof terrace is another new addition, designed as an area for entertainment. It has a barbecue pit and an open deck, allowing for alfresco dining and barbecues whilst enjoying unhampered views of the adjacent condominium gardens and pool.

MUSEDESIGN.

PRESERVING THE OLD CHARM

The use of wood was prevalent in this restoration, revitalising this historic structure whilst retaining its old world charm.

The retention of the open-to-sky forecourt celebrates this distinctive feature of pre-war architecture.

All existing timber windows and doors were carefully stripped, treated, varnished and restored. Those that were rotten beyond recourse were carefully replaced with replicas that matched the originals. Due to the widening of the house by encompassing the five-foot-way area and the land next to the old backyard, new walls were constructed and new windows installed. The new facade windows on the ground level were replicated to look exactly like the restored original ones. Similarly, the new windows on the mezzanine floor were cloned to create a sense of continuity.

In addition, the original linear staircase was replaced with a new and modern version of the old cast iron spiral staircase of yesteryears, both for visual interest and to create more useable space.

Given the structure's advanced state of disrepair, the restoration effort was an outstanding one. The project team was commended for salvaging as much as possible, as well as for repairing and expertly replacing what they could not. Existing timber windows, doors and mouldings were fixed and reinstated. The balcony on the second floor was also thoughtfully brought back to its former glory using original cast iron railings, adding to its authenticity.

After many years of neglect, this conserved shophouse has finally been given a new lease of life.







STORIES THEY TELL

MONUMENTS AND SINGAPORE DURING THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

SEVENTY YEARS AGO on 15 February 1942, Lieutenant-General Arthur Ernest Percival and three other officers walked to the Ford Factory. At the factory, they met with General Tomoyuki Yamashita of the Japanese Imperial Army to sign the surrender document.

Located in Upper Bukit Timah Road, the factory was Ford's first motorcar assembly plant in Southeast Asia, completed just the year before. General Yamashita took over the premise and turned it into a Japanese headquarters, where he awaited Lieutenant-General Percival's arrival on the morning of 15 February 1942. The factory formed the setting for the British surrender, which marked the start of the Japanese Occupation that lasted three years and eight months.

Today, the Ford Factory is one of Singapore's national monuments. These national monuments are gazetted for their architectural and historic significance. While Singapore's monuments are in pristine

condition today, they too have witnessed the country's darker moments as Syonan-to.

This article looks at a number of monuments where wartime events took place at different stages of Singapore's history as Syonan-to, and how they now serve as landmarks of memories in the country's ever-changing landscape.

THE LEAD-UP TO THE FALL OF SINGAPORE

Just two months before the fall of Singapore, the Japanese struck seven locations in the Asia-Pacific region during the wee hours of 8 December 1941, including Singapore. Maurice Baker, who was a student at the Raffles College then, recalled that he was awakened in his hostel by bomb explosions, anti-aircraft guns and sirens from the air-raid alarm. Shortly thereafter, he and his classmates received news from his principal, Professor of History W. E. Dyer, that war in the Pacific had started

and Japanese airplanes would strike again. Notwithstanding the grim future, Professor Dyer urged his students to act with great compassion towards the less fortunate. Together, they organised the Raffles College Medical Auxiliary Service, bringing medical volunteers to serve in disaster areas while the college became a makeshift hospital for the wounded.

Raffles College was one of the buildings that were used for new purposes during wartime to serve people in that time of need, and Professor Dyer's spirit of compassion was echoed elsewhere. As air raids intensified and soldiers started retreating from Malaya into Singapore, several other makeshift hospitals emerged to help existing hospitals cope with the increasing number of wounded. Such makeshift hospitals in the city included the St Andrew's Cathedral, Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall and the St Joseph's Institution. While these buildings were not designed to house hospital beds and operating theatres, the



Surrendering at the Ford Factory
National Museum of Singapore Collection

medical volunteers made do with the spaces and replaced the existing furniture, swiftly transforming them into hospitals. Today, although pews have long since replaced the beds at St Andrew's Cathedral, history is memorialised in the plaques dedicated to servicemen who perished in the Second World War, as well as the First. The extension of the church's north transept in 1952 also became known as the War Memorial Wing.

Nearby, one of Singapore's biggest pre-war structures, the Municipal Building (the former City Hall), took in people who needed shelter from the ongoing air raids⁸. Constructed between 1926 and 1929, the building was designed with a long frontage made up of 18 colossal columns. This was to reflect the colonial rule's strength and the Municipal Council's important functions, which had expanded significantly in the 1920s. During air raids, the building's large size and thick walls could provide people with adequate protection from the

blasts. The Municipal Council recognised this, and also created additional shelter for another 150 people within the building by cutting into the rear of the building's main stairway facing St Andrew's Road.

People also sought shelter and solace in places of worship amid the chaos. These places provided both spiritual help and physical protection to the people, who held on to the hope that Japanese troops would not wreak havoc in these religious places and they would hence be safe. In fact, Japanese troops did receive instructions to leave religious organisations alone. In Kampong Glam, people who lived in villages around the Sultan Mosque – both Malays and non-Malays – fled to the mosque during air raids and prayed for safety there. Venerable Pu Liang opened the doors of Siong Lim Monastery in Toa Payoh, the largest monastery in Singapore and Malaya at that time, to people living in the vicinity during air raids. Likewise, Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church

also served as a medical centre and bomb shelter. Its exterior walls facing the street were thickened and reinforced to prevent shrapnel from penetrating the church, providing protection to the wounded and others hiding there. In addition, it had a trapdoor located in its social hall, leading to a hideout where British soldiers hid when they tried to escape from Japanese troops.

Some places of worship, however, could not escape the damage and harm caused by war. For instance, the Sultan Mosque was not always trouble-free. A bomb had fallen into its compound during an air raid, damaging one of its ancillary buildings.

Although the Japanese troops had been instructed to leave religious organisations alone, they still entered Siong Lim Monastery to capture Venerable Pu Liang and a few of his disciples in 1942, for they were keen supporters of the anti-Japanese resistance movement. Venerable Pu Liang, who came to Singapore in 1921, condemned the Japanese invasion of China in 1937



Top: An ancillary building of the Sultan Mosque hit during an air raid. National Museum of Singapore collection

Reminder of the past: thickened walls to prevent shrapnel from cutting through the walls of the Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church
Image by Preservation of Monuments Board, 2010

and fiercely supported the anti-Japanese movement. In the late-1930s, he donated Siong Lim Monastery's Vesak Day monetary collection to the China Relief Fund. As the monastery's premises were huge and Japanese troops were not supposed to enter this place of worship, anti-Japanese groups had secretly conducted trainings in the monastery. Specifically, Venerable Pu Liang permitted Allied troops to train their pilots and technicians there. He also allowed a training centre to be set up to train drivers and mechanics to ply the treacherous Burma Road into China, so as to maintain supplies for the Chinese troops. His support for the anti-Japanese movement was too great for the Japanese to ignore, resulting in his arrest in 1942.

On the morning of 15 February 1942, Lieutenant-General Percival and other Anglicans attended communion service at St Andrew's Cathedral before he surrendered Singapore to the Japanese. The cathedral remained open for service throughout the





Students of the St Joseph's Institution (then known as Bras Basah Boys' School) growing crops on the green space before the school. Today, that space is the car park of the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) which now occupies the building (next page).

Source of archival photograph: Wong Hong Suen. *Wartime Kitchen: Food and Eating in Singapore 1942-1950*. Singapore: Editions Didier Millet and National Museum of Singapore, 2009, p.24. This source referred to *The Syonan Gaho*, 5 September 1942 (1995-1102). Source of Former St. Joseph's Institution as the Singapore Art Museum: Preservation of Monuments Board, 2008.

Japanese Occupation, and its membership grew with more converts in that period.

YEARS OF FEAR: 16 FEBRUARY 1942 - 12 SEPTEMBER 1945

While people in Singapore created new purposes for existing buildings to protect lives, the Japanese occupied some of the country's key buildings and converted them into spaces that evoked public fear. The *kempeitai* (military police) were housed in these buildings to keep a close watch on the people. For instance, the Hill Street Police Station built between 1934 and 1936 as a police station and barracks for the police force to ensure order in Singapore, became one of the *kempeitai* offices where the military police committed atrocities and tortured their victims.

The Japanese also used the former Cathay Building, which opened as Singapore's first air-conditioned cinema in 1939, as an outlet for Japanese propaganda. Japanese movies and propaganda films were screened in the theatres, with rare



treats of German and Italian films. As the building was designed to house offices and apartments, it was a suitable venue for the Japanese Propaganda Department, which was also the media centre for all newspapers in Singapore and Malaya. Given its prime location as a cinema which attracted movie-goers, Cathay Building and its surroundings became a good spot for the Japanese to display severed heads of looters and thieves to strike fear in people. Rudy Mosbergen, a 13-year-old student then, was one witness of this gory scene:

"As a little boy I heard some people talking down there, they said, you know if you go to Cathay Building, there is a head chopped off. I went down to Bras Basah Road, next to Hotel Rendezvous now. And from there I could see, I looked across next to the Cathay Building, there was a table and that fellow's head was there."

Education was disrupted. Schools were either shut down or became tools of propaganda for the Japanese. Raffles College, one of the two tertiary institutions at that



time, became a medical facility and later the headquarters of the Japanese military. Chinese schools such as Tao Nan School (which houses the Peranakan Museum today) stopped functioning during the Japanese Occupation. They were targeted by the Japanese as they had supported the anti-Japanese movement, and the premises were occupied by the Japanese army. Ng Kim Hua, a student of Tao Nan School then, recounted that the Nationalists had visited Chinese schools in Singapore to recruit young men for China's battle against the Japanese. Lin Shiping, who taught at Tao Nan School from 1939 to 1942, shared that several teachers went into hiding after the Japanese occupied Singapore in 1942. His colleagues, Wang Zhixue and Xue Fanglun, were caught and killed. English schools such as St Joseph's Institution, on the other hand, were more fortunate. They were allowed to continue functioning to serve the needs of the Japanese. St Joseph's Institution reopened as the Bras Basah Boys' School after serving as the Red

Cross Hospital. The students' daily tasks, however, included growing crops in the green space in front of the school during lesson time, so as to support the "Grow Your Own Food Campaign". The Japanese implemented this self-sustaining policy as food was becoming increasingly scarce.

THE JAPANESE SURRENDER AND SINGAPORE'S INDEPENDENCE 20 YEARS THEREAFTER

The difficult lives experienced by people during the Japanese Occupation finally ended on 12 September 1945 with the Japanese surrender and the end of the Second World War. While Ford Factory witnessed the beginning of the Japanese Occupation on 15 February 1942, the Municipal Building celebrated its end on 12 September 1945. This joyous occasion was widely reported in *The Straits Times*, marking the paper's revival after it stopped operating on 15 February 1942. People gathered around the Municipal Building to witness the Japanese's march to surrender.

Spectators planted themselves at vantage points – including the base of the dome of the former Supreme Court and the roof of the Municipal Building – to witness this historic moment. *The Straits Times* report, "Japanese in Malaysia Surrender at Singapore" dated 13 September 1945², described this momentous event:

"All vantage points had their large or small groups of spectators. Any roof within was packed with Chinese, Malays and Indians determined to see this historic ceremony."

"Scene of so many important civic meetings which had produced decisions leading to the great development of Singapore in the old era, the Municipal Council chamber yesterday became a stage for a drama of the greatest historical importance."

This important event began with a formal ceremony at the Padang, followed by the solemn proceedings in the surrender chamber. Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander in Southeast Asia, inspected the parade at the Padang.



“Mosquito bombers” – British combat aircrafts – flew over in salute, big Sunderland flying boats used in long-range reconnaissance and bombing missions droned over, which were then followed by Dakota transports. The Japanese representatives arrived shortly thereafter and proceeded to the Municipal Building where they waited to sign the surrender document, witnessed by several individuals including the Sultan of Johore. He shared:

“I have never before been so stirred. I am glad to have been there to watch these fellows sign. I am proud to have had the honour of witnessing their formal surrender”.

In a matter of nine minutes, the Japanese officially surrendered, and the surrender was publicly declared by Lord Louis Mountbatten on the steps of the Municipal Building.

Twenty years later in 1965, Singapore declared its independence also at the Municipal Building, followed by several National Day parades at this location to celebrate its independence.

The Municipal Building has thus witnessed Singapore’s transformation from colonial rule, to subjugation to the Japanese, to independence.

REMEMBERING: MONUMENTS AND MEMORIES

Seventy years on, people’s bravery and actions are remembered through stories and memorials. For instance, the iconic block with the clock tower of the Singapore General Hospital was renamed Bowyer Block in memory of John Herbert Bowyer, Chief Medical Officer of the Outram Road General Hospital. Bowyer died in Sime Road Internment Camp during the Japanese Occupation on 1 November 1944. Also, just across the padang facing the Municipal Building stand two memorials. One is the Cenotaph, built to commemorate the war dead; while the other is the Lim Bo Seng Memorial to honour an individual.

The Cenotaph, unveiled on 31 March 1922 by the Prince of Wales, was erected in honour of the 124 men from Singapore who died in action during World War I. A second dedication was made between 1950 and 1951 to those who died during World War II. Unlike the first dedication, the second did not have any names because the number of war dead was overwhelming. Instead, the message “*They died so we might live*” was inscribed.



Two of the Esplanade Memorials – Cenotaph and Lim Bo Seng Memorial – reminding us of the sacrifices made by individuals. Images by Preservation of Monuments Board, 2011

Previous page, top: Victory Day: Proclamation of Japanese Surrender before the Municipal Building, 12 September 1945. National Museum of Singapore collection. Previous page, bottom: The Surrender Chamber in the Municipal Building. National Museum of Singapore collection.

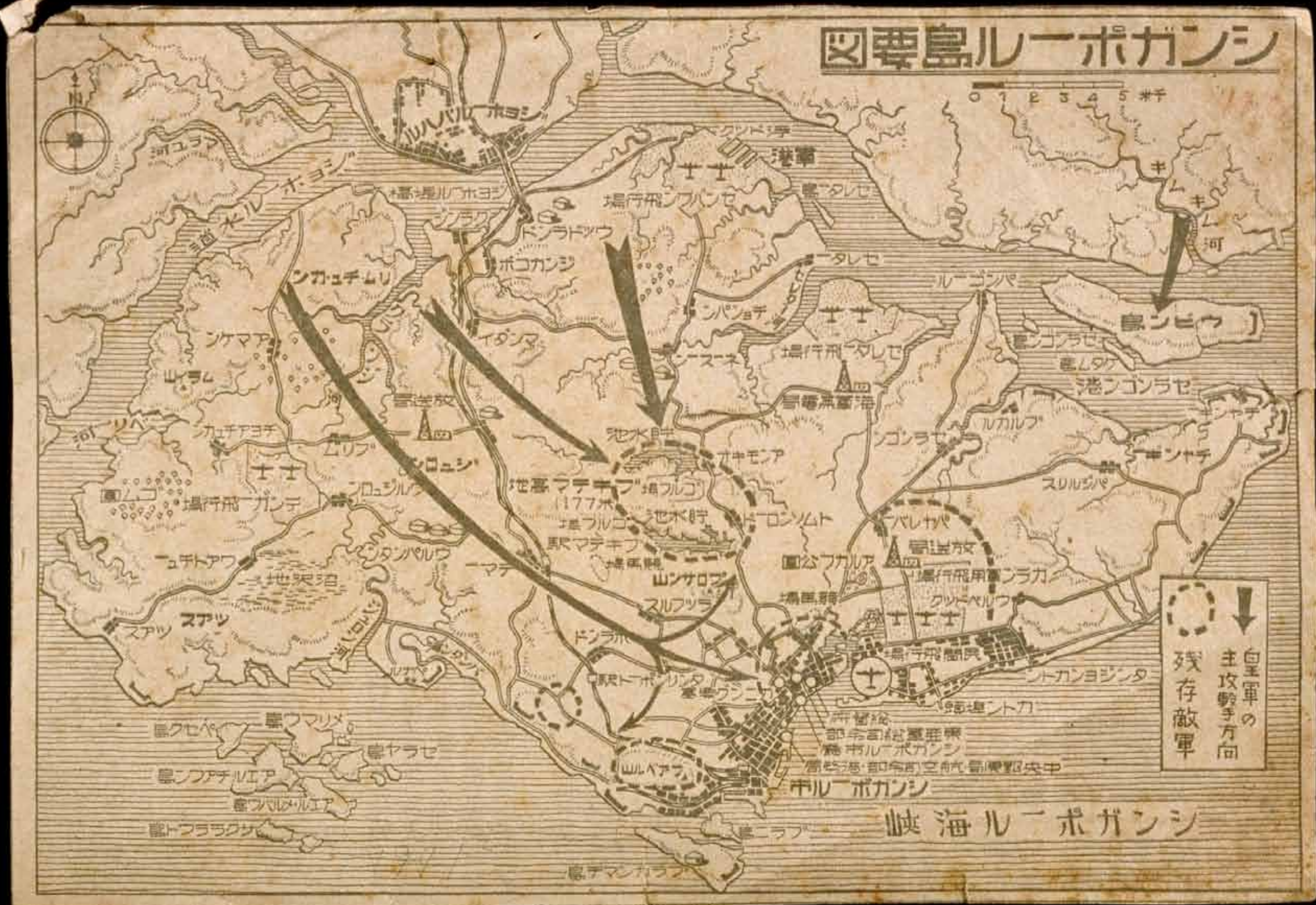
Just beside the Cenotaph, the Lim Bo Seng Memorial was dedicated to Lim Bo Seng, a man who assumed leadership for anti-Japanese activities during the Second World War. Unfortunately, he perished on 29 June 1944 following his capture by the Japanese at a road checkpoint. The construction of the memorial faced much challenges as the plans for the memorial were rejected at least five times by the government. Under the Memorial Committee’s perseverance, it was finally constructed and unveiled on 29 June 1954, a decade after Lim’s passing. The committee persisted probably because it wanted future generations to know and remember the story of Lim, who could also represent other unnamed individuals who had sacrificed themselves for Singapore’s freedom.

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Foo Min Li is Manager, Preservation of Monuments Board





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1942

AND THE FALL OF SINGAPORE

:
70 YEARS LATER

THE PASSAGE OF TIME OPENS A WINDOW FOR HINDSIGHT TO ENTER, ALLOWING US THE PRIVILEGE OF RETROSPECTION. IN THIS CONTEXT, A PIVOTAL EVENT LIKE THE FALL OF SINGAPORE TO THE JAPANESE ARMY ON 15 FEBRUARY 1942 AND SUBSEQUENT MILITARY OCCUPATION BY THE JAPANESE HAS INVOKED, OVER THE LAST 70 YEARS, A LONG AND STILL UNENDING RIVER OF MEMORIES, PUBLICATIONS, DOCUMENTARIES, PUBLIC EXHIBITIONS AND OTHER FORMS OF REMEMBRANCE, SO MUCH SO THAT IT COULD ARGUABLY BE REGARDED AS “THE MOST REMEMBERED EVENT” IN THE HISTORY OF SINGAPORE.

TEXT BY ISKANDER MYDIN

IMAGES BY NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE COLLECTION



THE LONG SHADOW OF 1942

The conquest of Singapore was linked to a chain of Japanese attacks which began with dramatic speed from the last hours of 7 December 1941 into the dawn of 8 December 1941. Within this short period of time, the Japanese military struck across 6,000 miles of ocean westward from Hawaii to Wake to Guam to Hong Kong to the Philippines to Malaya and Siam¹. The first months of 1942 marked the peak of the Japanese military conquest not only of Singapore, but also of the European colonial territories in the Pacific region.

The conquest in 1942 marked the end of one formative phase of Singapore's history and the beginning of another. The earlier phase began in 1819 when the island was established as an entrepot by the British and Malay chiefs. It had developed into Southeast Asia's premier city by the time of the Japanese invasion. The Japanese victory overthrew more than 120 years of continuous colonial rule and abruptly ended this phase in Singapore's history.

1942 also marked the beginning of the phase in Singapore's history that could be considered as a generative process. The abrupt break from colonial rule in 1942, coupled with the experiences of defeat and occupation, contributed to a process of political awakening. This was reflected in the struggle for decolonisation over the decade following the surrender of Japan in 1945.





JAPANESE INVASION AND BRITISH SURRENDER

The invasion started in early-December 1941 with the first Japanese aerial bombing of Singapore, and ended on 15 February 1942 with the British Surrender. During this period of about two and a half months, the entire population of disparate migrant communities, as well as the colonial establishment, witnessed or experienced the full-scale horrors of modern war on the island. Among these were aerial and artillery bombardment, the sight of abandoned corpses of those killed in the fighting or bombing, the flight of refugees from the peninsular to the island, family separations in the midst of flight, as well as incidents of rape. With the impending British defeat, many foreigners and locals took flight in small vessels, desperately seeking the safety of Australia or British India, while last pockets of resistance against the invaders persisted amid the chaos and confusion of collapse.

The imminent danger following the surrender was looting². A desolate sense of abandonment can still be felt in this account of the scene at the landmark Fullerton Building:

“... Doors, desks, cupboards, safes, and suitcases had been broken open, their contents strewn everywhere over piles of empty tins and human ordure: it is a blessing that walls cannot speak or Fullerton Building would never cease from shame. Clothes, shoes, notebooks, diaries, letters, wills, bank books, insurance policies, photographs of loved ones, and all manner of personal articles...lay in utter confusion. Pictures of children were trampled into the crumpled pages of a Bible; socks were soaked in the juices of empty tins; a can opener ripped through shirts; trousers and coats were torn apart as if the looters had fought. Such was the demise of Raffles’ settlement.”³





THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

The British Surrender was followed by three years and eight months of Japanese military occupation. The period began on an ominous note. Screening and collective punishment was imposed on the Chinese community, resulting in the massacre of thousands of Chinese males during the *Sook Ching* incident. Monetary contributions were also forced from the Chinese community as a “token of atonement”. Thousands of defeated Allied soldiers were imprisoned and many were sent to work on the Death Railway. Looters were executed and their heads put on public display. In the course of the occupation, food rationing was imposed and the black market came into operation as a result. Many Eurasians were re-settled under agricultural land schemes in Endau and Bahau to grow food. An Indian National Army was also formed out of defeated British Indian Army soldiers as well as local volunteers to fight for India’s independence from British rule.

Spies, informers and confessions under torture became a dreaded phenomenon during this period of time.

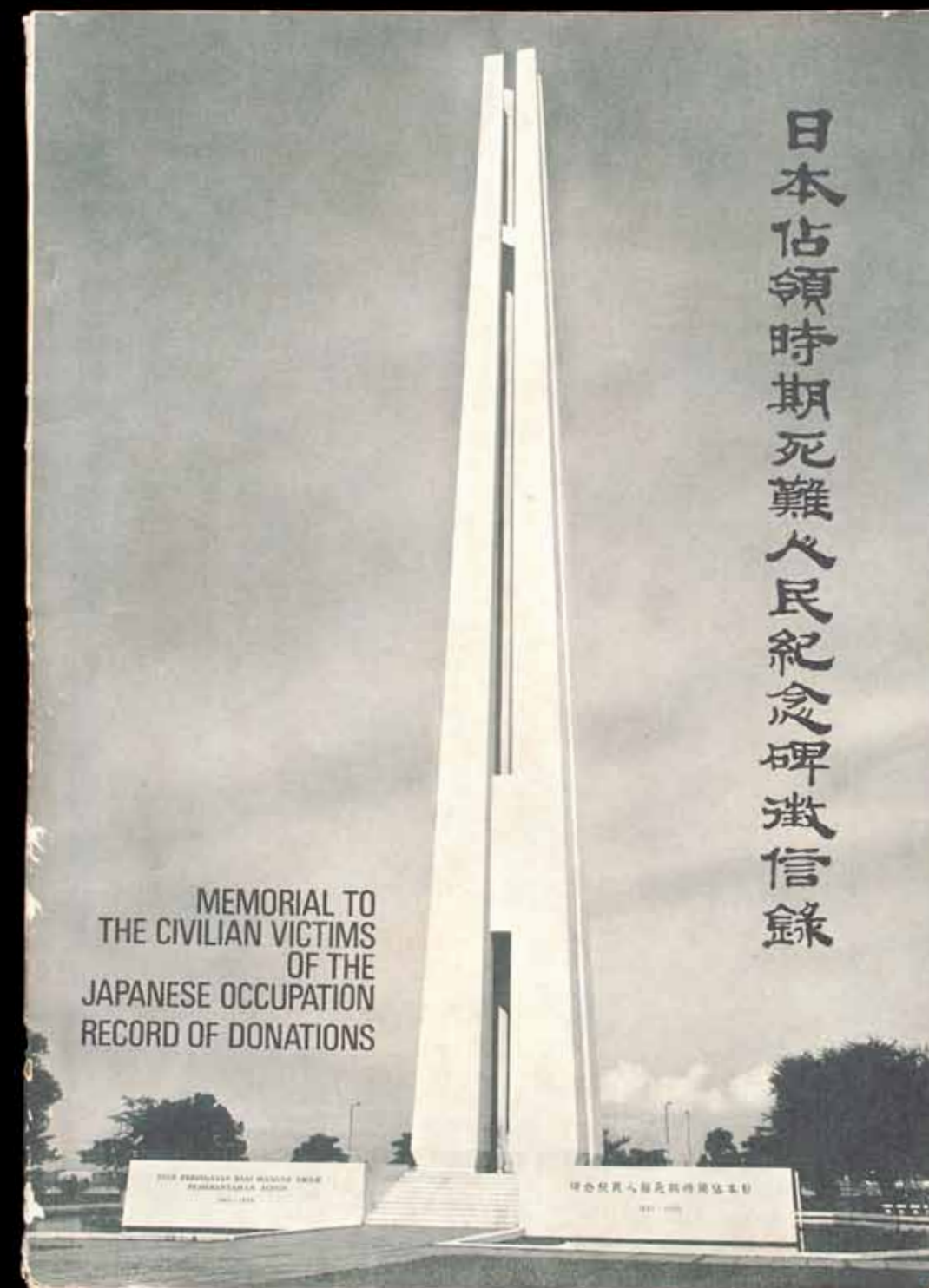
As the experiences of invasion, defeat and occupation had significantly altered the fates of thousands of individuals, the oral history recordings of a generation of survivors deposited in the National Archives of Singapore still constitute an emotionally moving account of what it meant to undergo and experience the “lived time” of 1942 and after.

LANDSCAPES OF MEMORIES

1942 and its three subsequent years are remembered in contemporary Singapore through a variety of “landscapes of memories”. Among these are memorial sites such as the Kranji War Memorial, the Memorial to the Civilian Victims of the Japanese Occupation, as well as other locations where the war and occupation left its traces, including the Changi Murals and the Johore Battery site. There are also markers of the Japanese landing sites at Sarimbun and Kranji, and that of the Indian National Army Monument. Permanent displays such as the Memories at Old Ford Factory, Reflections at Bukit Chandu, Changi Museum, the Surrender Chambers at Sentosa and The Battle Box, together with guided battlefield tours and trails relating to 1942, are also additional aspects of this landscape.

Apart from these, there are other links in this landscape which bear the marks of “Fortress Singapore”, a term popularly used in the pre-World War II period to refer to the chain of coastal fortifications, airfields, garrison barracks and the naval base, constructed as a deterrence against enemy invasion. These former defences include the preserved coastal fortifications at Fort Siloso on Sentosa; the former Royal Air Force airfields at Tengah, Seletar and Sembawang; the remnant structure of the former Naval Base; the Admiralty House; Command House; the military barracks at Selarang and Gillman; as well as traces of the Base Ordnance Depot at Alexandra.

It can be seen that 1942 and after have left a deep imprint on the landscape. These sites and traces on the surface, underground (tunnels and former ammunition storage areas), and along the shoreline (former dock structures of the naval base) are indications that this relatively short period of time has – more than any other period in Singapore’s history – left behind what can be regarded as the most enduring heritage landscape in Singapore, cast by “the long shadow of 1942”.



CONCLUSION

The 70 years since 1942 have seen the co-existence of three generations - those who experienced the war and occupation, those who were born shortly thereafter with no lived memory of the period, and those for whom 1942 may seem a distant history lesson.

For the generation who lived through the war and occupation, 1942 was a critical year that had in many ways shaped their outlook on life. The effects of war and occupation had a direct or experiential impact on this generation. The memories are deeper, prolonged, and in many cases, traumatic and unhealed. These unhealed memories in their private silence remind us of a harsh legacy of the war and occupation.

While time progresses and commemorative anniversaries come and go, in remembering the past, there is a process of interpretation and re-interpretation in accordance with our present ideas of what is important and what is not⁴. The door thus remains open for subsequent generations to explore and engage with, and hopefully to find relevance in the collective memory of the war and occupation. How the latter will be viewed 30 years from now when 1942 passes into its centenary depends to a large extent on how the distant past can be integrated into the personal memory of maturing or aging individuals who would be experiencing Singapore in its 77th year of independence. This interaction may well turn out to be a more nuanced and effective way of reclaiming and understanding the past. The narrative role of personal memory becomes important in this sense as a bridge to deal with or cope with the contingent and complex nature of individual experiences whether in war time or in other periods of historical transformations. How the young of 1942 fared individually can hopefully be an empathetic entry point for today's young generation, given hindsight, to reflect upon, interpret and come to terms with, complementing their personal memory of school lessons on wartime history, learning journeys, and Total Defence Day activities.

In the meantime, the present memorial sites, traces and remains of 1942, together with occasional news reports of war relics still being uncovered, are reminders that the "long shadow of 1942" is far from disappearing completely and that the past while fleeting, still remains with us.

Iskander Mydin is Deputy Director, National Museum of Singapore

Endnotes

1 Costello, J. *The Pacific War 1941-1945*. New York: Quill, 1982.

2 Corner, E. J. H. *The Marquis: A Tale of Syonan-to*. Singapore: Heinemann Asia, 1981.

3 *ibid*

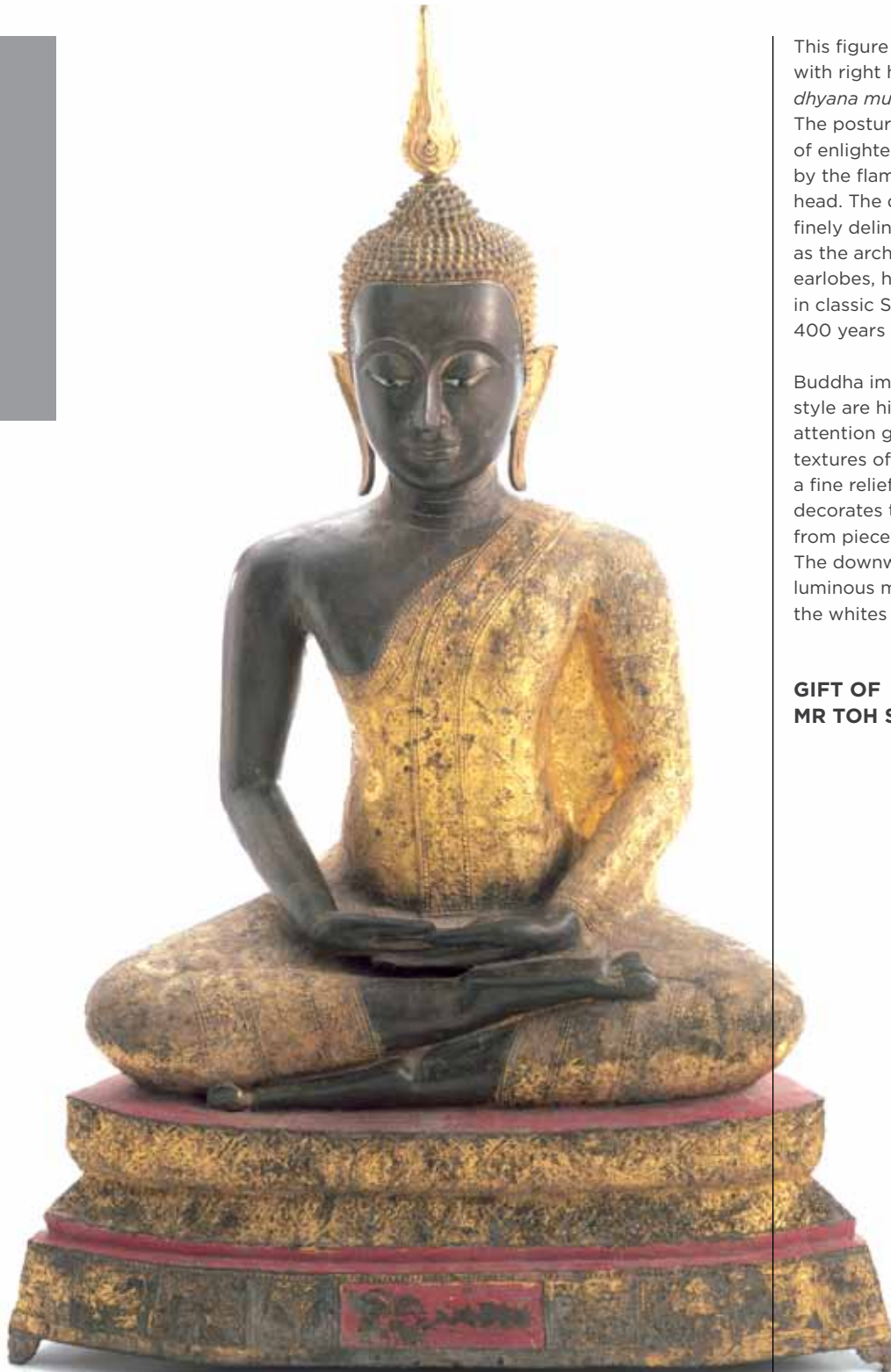
4 Berger, P. L. *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977.



BUDDHA SEATED IN MEDITATION

BUDDHA SEATED IN MEDITATION
THAILAND, RATTANAKOSIN PERIOD,
LATE-19TH TO EARLY-20TH CENTURY
GILDED BRONZE AND MOTHER-OF-PEARL,
HEIGHT 117 CM
ACC. NO. 2011-01561

ASIAN CIVILISATIONS
MUSEUM



This figure of Buddha sits serenely with right hand resting on the left, or *dhyana mudra* (gesture of meditation). The posture represents the attainment of enlightenment, which is reinforced by the flame finial emerging from his head. The dramatic finial, along with the finely delineated facial features such as the arched eyebrows and elongated earlobes, hark back to attributes found in classic Sukhothai art established some 400 years earlier.

Buddha images in the Rattanakosin style are highly decorative, with careful attention given to details like the textures of clothing. On this Buddha, a fine relief pattern made with lacquer decorates the robes, which shimmer from pieces of mirror glass and gold leaf. The downward gaze is intensified by the luminous mother-of-pearl inlaid to make the whites of the eyes

**GIFT OF
MR TOH SOON HUAT**