

# be MUSE





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## INSIDE

NATIONAL DAY PARADE  
OVER THE YEARS  
» **pg.03**

SINGAPORE HERITAGEFEST  
2012: RECOLLECT, REFLECT,  
RECONNECT!  
» **pg.12**

45-65: LIBERATION, UNREST...  
A NEW NATION  
» **pg.16**

THE SINGAPORE BOTANIC  
GARDENS: A LIVING AND  
GROWING HERITAGE  
» **pg.24**

9 - 19 KRETA AYER ROAD:  
MODERN OFFICE,  
YESTERYEAR CHARM  
» **pg.30**

NIGHT FESTIVAL  
» **pg.40**

PORTRAIT OF A  
CONTEMPORARY  
ROMANTIC ARTIST  
» **pg.44**

EMILY OF EMERALD HILL:  
SINGAPOREAN IDENTITY  
ON STAGE  
» **pg.52**

A LIFE OF PRACTICE:  
KUO PAO KUN  
» **pg.58**

THE WEDDING DRESS:  
200 YEARS OF WEDDING  
FASHION FROM THE  
VICTORIA AND ALBERT  
MUSEUM, LONDON  
» **pg.64**

UNDERSTANDING ISLAMIC  
ARCHITECTURE  
» **pg.72**

MUSEVIEWS  
» **pg.36**

MUSECALENDAR  
» **pg.37**

## EDITOR'S MUSEINGS

We have already entered the third quarter of the year which is traditionally considered the 'heritage quarter' of Singapore.

Between the months of July and September, Singapore sees major events related to our multicultural heritage, nationhood and identity. It is the best time to get out from the comfort of our home and office and take in all that culture and the arts that is on show through festivals, exhibitions and events. By participating in some, or all of these various events, we get to experience Singapore's cultural diversity first hand and appreciate it and learn more about our neighbours.

July is the month when we commemorate *Racial Harmony Day* to remind us of the fragility of our multicultural heritage and not to take racial harmony for granted. It is also the month of the *Singapore Food Festival* and when the National Heritage Board (NHB) and partners hold the annual *Singapore HeritageFest*. Now into its ninth year, the festival has some very exciting treats for one and all this year. August is when we celebrate our nationhood and reflect on what makes us truly Singaporean. It is also when NHB holds its annual *Night Festival*. This year, the festival has taken on a slightly different angle which must not be missed.

Since it is the time of the year when we all celebrate everything Singaporean, this issue of *BeMUSE* is dedicated to each and every one of us who calls Singapore home no matter where we may be living, studying or working.

Happy 47<sup>th</sup> National Day and we hope that this issue sparks off an interest to find out more about our heritage and history – from a personal, community and national angle.

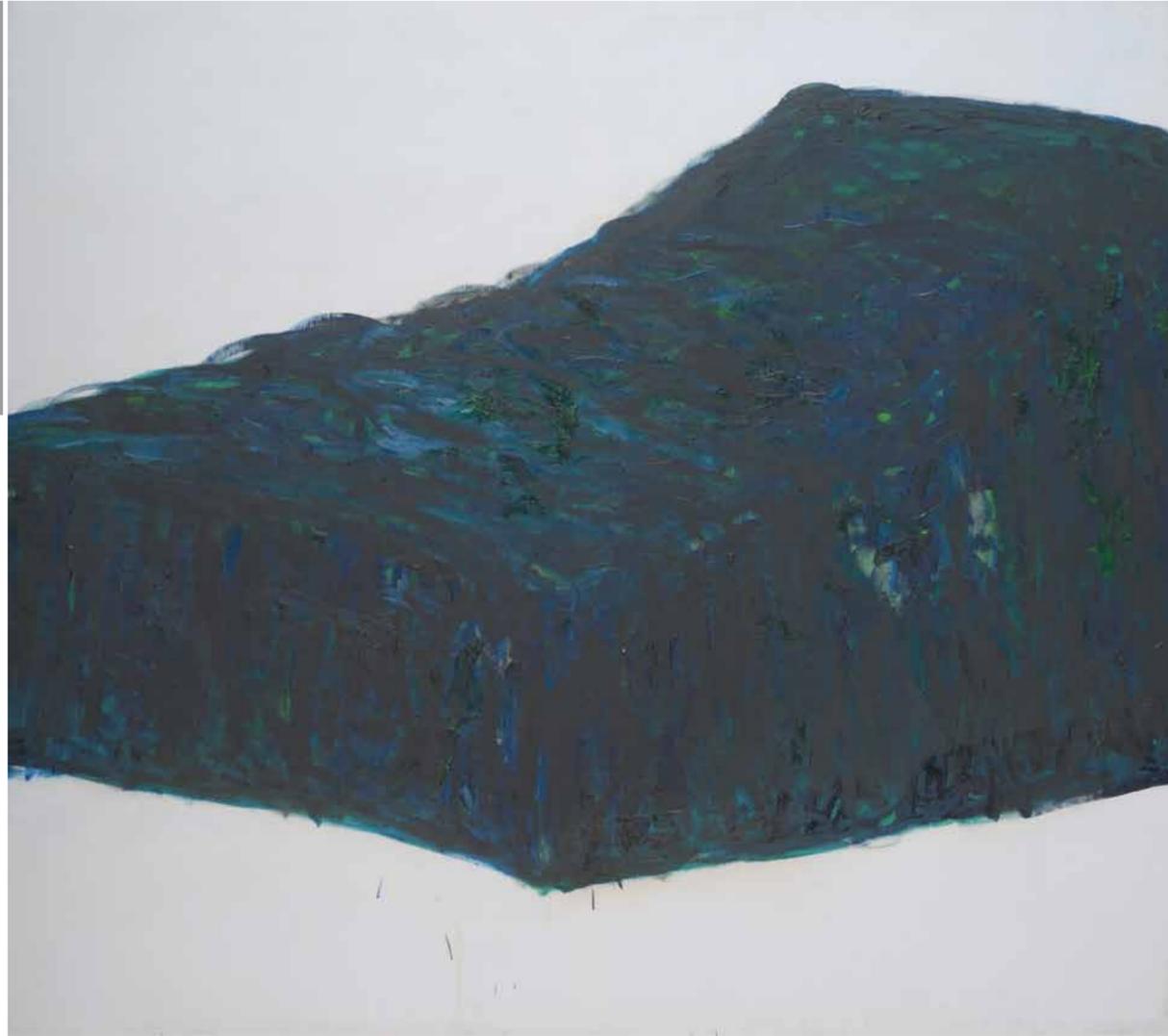
THANGAMMA KARTHIGESU  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**SEA-SLAB (TIGHT BED)**  
BY JEREMY SHARMA

JEREMY SHARMA,  
*SEA-SLAB (TIGHT BED)*,  
2006, 122 X 137 CM,  
OIL AND ACRYLIC ON VINYL,  
SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM  
COLLECTION

SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

MUSEGALLERY.



Jeremy Sharma is a young Singaporean multidisciplinary artist with an affinity for painting. A member of the defunct KYTV (Kill Your Television) artist collective which explored the boundaries between performance art (such as rock music) and visual art, Sharma's contemplative paintings have won acclaim. His paintings demonstrate unusual techniques, such as stamping, scraping, smearing and bandaging, which create as they destroy, resulting in interesting canvas surfaces.

*Sea-slab (Tight Bed)* is from a series of works Sharma termed *The Massive* (undertaken in 2006), inspired by ideas

he explored in his postgraduate course at LASALLE College of the Arts. While on a trip to Venice, he looked out to sea and wanted to capture the 'blocks of water'.

Sharma's work is a painting of form, a crystallisation of abstraction and figuration, and which the artist described as "a work of 'subtraction'".

The artwork is currently being featured as part of the exhibition, *Panorama: Recent Art from Contemporary Asia*, at the Singapore Art Museum.





## NATIONAL DAY PARADE OVER THE YEARS

IMAGES FROM **MITA COLLECTION**  
COURTESY OF **NATIONAL ARCHIVES**  
OF SINGAPORE

EVERY 9<sup>TH</sup> OF AUGUST IS CELEBRATED WITH STYLE IN SINGAPORE. THE TRADITIONAL FLY-PAST OF SINGAPORE'S STATE FLAG, EXCITING PARACHUTING PERFORMANCES BY THE RED LIONS, AND THE MARCH PAST OF THE PARADE CONTINGENTS HAVE BECOME SYNONYMOUS WITH OUR NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATIONS.

THROUGH THIS SHOWCASE OF NATIONAL DAY PARADE (NDP) PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN BY THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS (MICA) PHOTO UNIT, WITNESS HOW THE CELEBRATION OF OUR NATION'S INDEPENDENCE HAVE TRANSFORMED OVER THE YEARS, AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF MICA PHOTOGRAPHERS.

« President Yusof bin Ishak taking the salute from the review stand along the City Hall steps. Behind him were Singapore's first Cabinet Ministers, including then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. (1966).  
Source: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.

(Page 3): The para-troopers, now commonly known as the Red Lions, participated in the NDP for the first time in 1992. Five para-troopers jumped from a helicopter flying 1,200 metres high and landed on a target in the middle of the National Stadium. (1992).  
Source: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.



Spectators filled the buildings and sides of Upper Pickering Street as the different parade contingents marched past. (1966). Source: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.



As Singapore celebrated its first National Day, spectators took advantage of a high-rise building in Chinatown to get a better view. (1966).  
Source: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.



Many citizens crowded around as performers dressed in costumes paraded past Hill Street (1975).  
Source: Ministry of Information, Culture and the Arts.



Eager spectators crowded Elgin Bridge to witness the parade. Before Singaporeans could watch the NDP on television, most citizens would wait around strategic locations to catch a glimpse of the celebrations. (1966).  
Source: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.



(Top): Parade goers, dressed according to the colours of their NDP tickets, joined in the traditional march past of contingents, transforming the Padang into a kaleidoscope of colours. (1993). Source: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.  
 (Above): 25 F-16 fighter jets roared above the Padang, forming the number '25' to celebrate Singapore's 25<sup>th</sup> year of independence. (1990). Source: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.  
 (Facing page): Fly-past of Singapore's National Flag by helicopters from the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF). (1990). Source: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.



## SINGAPORE HERITAGEFEST 2012 RECOLLECT, REFLECT, RECONNECT!

*SINGAPORE HERITAGEFEST (SHF) 2012* brings culture to your doorstep at nine Festival Satellite Hubs from 20 to 29 July 2012!

Take a walk down memory lane with traditional toys at Tiong Bahru Plaza, recollect the void deck of HDB (Housing and Development Board) flats as a social space at Changi City Point, and experience Peranakan culture in the quaint neighbourhood of Katong.

At Century Square, soak up the adrenaline of the *Malaysia Cup* and Kallang Roar. The Festival Opening at Velocity@Novena Square also invites Singaporeans to share the passion of our home-grown sports heroes and star athletes.

Recollect the golden age of Singapore cinema with P. Ramlee at Bugis Junction and look forward to short films by local filmmakers at Jurong Point.

Over at Causeway Point, explore gold and its significance in local culture. At Hougang Mall, six Singapore national monuments will be featured using 360-degree interactive virtual tours that let visitors explore the monuments right at the mall.

Look forward to a glorious array of exhibitions, performances, games, heritage trails, a forum on heritage blogging, a workshop on writing your family history and more. Come savour Singapore's shared heritage and create lasting memories of your own!



**Ms Stephanie Ho**  
GENERAL MANAGER,  
ASIAMALLS MANAGEMENT PTE LTD

AsiaMalls is strongly supporting *SHF 2012* with three sponsored mall venues, including two new partners Hougang Mall and Century Square (Tampines) which are on board for the first time. Stephanie shares the excitement about *SHF*:

*"Friends and colleagues we spoke to are excited about SHF coming to the suburban malls near them. They are looking forward to the performances, workshops and exhibits.*

*Century Square is especially excited to be part of SHF 2012 for the first time, and to be the Satellite Hub celebrating our nation's Football Fever.*

*We believe that a country's heritage is a vital part of a nation's consciousness and identity, and our heritage speaks to all current and new citizens on how a fledgling nation has become the iconic Singapore we know today. We are proud to be part of this educational process."*



**Mr Goh Kok Wee**  
SENIOR ASSISTANT DIRECTOR,  
NATIONAL INTEGRATION COUNCIL

The National Integration Council has supported *SHF* for years, as the festival provides opportunities to bring together people from different backgrounds to celebrate and learn about our shared heritage, thus promoting greater understanding and harmony. Kok Wee, who has seen through two festivals, has many personal reflections and observations:

*"SHF has been a very nostalgic personal experience for me, especially when I visited the SHF 2011 exhibition which featured kampong life. I spent my early childhood years in a kampong, too - it was a fishing and coconut plantation village called Mata Ikan, which is now part of Changi Business Park. I remember that the doors of the kampong houses were never closed, and Malays, Indians and Chinese all lived as one big kampong family.*

*Yes, SHF does bring different communities together! When I visited SHF, I noticed that fellow Singaporean Malays, Indians and Chinese parents were pointing to the exhibition and animatedly regaling their children with stories of a Singapore in a bygone era.*

*One encouraging trend I have observed is the effort to make the SHF more accessible and relatable to the average heartland Singaporean. The Satellite Hub approach is fantastic and really makes SHF an inclusive national-level festival that provides opportunities for Singaporeans and visitors from all walks of life to partake in the festivities. Well done!*

*Going forward, I think it would be nice for Singaporeans to bring to SHF a personal item of interest that reminds them of our country's early history. My view is that anyone could be a contributor to heritage, or keeper of heritage; you need not be a millionaire to contribute. Together, we are the creator of Singapore's common heritage."*



**Ms Jamila Adal**  
GREENVIEW SECONDARY SCHOOL  
HEAD OF DEPT,  
PASTORAL CARE & STUDENT SERVICES

The students of Greenview Secondary School are putting their energies into organising an adventure style *Kallang Roar Heritage Game*, which will be held at Century Square and the vicinity of Tampines on 22 and 29 July. Held in conjunction with the SHF Hub's *Football Fever*, this student-run game will bring together football fans and the residents of Tampines in a creative and fun exploration of our heritage. Jamila's inspired musings lend much food for thought to the festival team:

*"SHF gives us the opportunity to celebrate our common humanity. I feel that this year's festival could bring together different communities over their love of heritage or football, or those who simply want to learn more about Singapore's past. When we look at our past and see how every community has its own stories of happiness and heartaches, trials and tribulations, we could learn to see beyond our differences and understand how, essentially, we are all the same.*

*Football is a wonderful example of our 'common space', and the love we share for it binds us together as a community - regardless of our race, language or religion.*

*Greenview Secondary School's participation in SHF demonstrates our commitment to connect our community to their roots and history. We believe it is only when we understand where we came from and how we arrived here that abstract concepts like 'nationhood' and 'identity' become meaningful for our young. My students have benefited tremendously from participating in SHF. Apart from learning how fun history could be, they have acquired skills in conducting research and public speaking, developing poise and self-confidence."*



**Ms Toh Pei Shiang**  
VELOCITY@NOVENA SQUARE  
ADVERTISING & PROMOTIONS MANAGER

The opening exhibition celebrates Singapore's sports stars who have, through their determination, grit and strength, brought glory to the country in fields like swimming, table tennis, shooting, sailing and many more. With the *London Olympics* around the corner, this hub will bring together sports and heritage fans alike, with memorabilia, artefacts and stories from the athletes. There will also be stations to try your hand at sports, performances and more. The Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts Dr Yaacob Ibrahim will launch *SHF 2012* at Velocity@Novena Square on Saturday, 21 July 2012, kicking off the ten-day *SHF* journey. Pei from the Velocity@Novena Square team shared her thoughts on being a second-time venue sponsor for *SHF*:

*"The festival is fun and interesting, presenting history and culture in a lively and interactive way. It has been heartening to see Singaporeans of different races and creeds coming together to enjoy the activities.*

*SHF allows young Singaporeans to learn more about Singapore's past, what Singapore stands for and what it means to be a Singaporean. SHF also gives the older Singaporeans a chance to reminisce about the past, and lets them reflect on their achievements in nation building. This is important as Singapore seems to start and build new things all the time, but only by going into the past can one go into the future. SHF is one of the ways to do that.*

*We are happy that Velocity can contribute to this process. We are very honoured that the National Heritage Board has selected us to be their partner again for 2012."*



**Ms Meenakshi Mehta**  
VICE-PRINCIPAL,  
GLOBAL INDIAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL,  
QUEENSTOWN CAMPUS, SINGAPORE

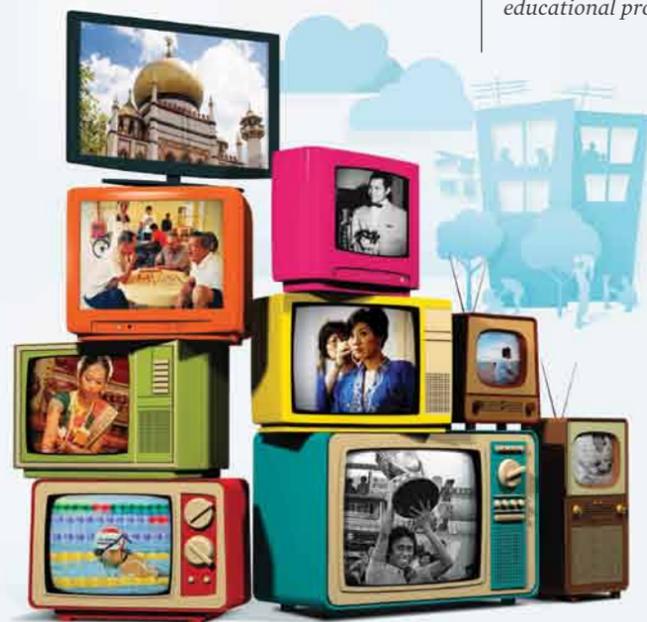
Global Indian International School (GIIS) students are coming forward to support *SHF* by performing at the Satellite Hubs and volunteering as Festival Ambassadors to guide visitors through their *SHF* experience. This participation in *SHF 2012* has greatly inspired Meenakshi, who has personally taken the lead on *SHF* as a major project for the school. Here are her thoughts:

*"SHF is a unique platform for the interplay of varied cultures.*

*GIIS, which has schools the world over, sees SHF as an ideal forum to give its students an opportunity to share in Singapore's culture. Participating in SHF will further enhance and hone the students' understanding of varied cultures, thereby enabling them to be more tolerant of and better respect different cultures and traditions.*

*This festival, we hope, would enable the students to transcend all boundaries and be learners and creators of a better tomorrow. There is a lot of learning to be gleaned through the sharing of cultures, and I am looking forward to the festival as a crucial tool of learning - in terms of culture, life skills and soft skills.*

*We are looking forward to a collaborative culture emerging from here and for GIIS to take this collaboration with SHF forward."*





## 45-65: LIBERATION, UNREST... A NEW NATION

“... [W]e cannot depend on other people – white man, black man, yellow man, whoever it might be – to look after us; we must look after ourselves. You see, this is our country and we’ve got to rule ourselves.”

– GERALD DE CRUZ, ORGANISING SECRETARY OF THE MALAYAN DEMOCRATIC UNION (MDU), SINGAPORE’S FIRST POLITICAL PARTY FORMED IN 1945, IN AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW, SEPTEMBER 1981.

IN SHARING THE POLITICAL VISION HE ONCE held for post-war Singapore, Gerald De Cruz captured the prevailing mood among an emerging class of young leaders who were determined to rid Singapore of colonial rule after the British returned at the end of the Japanese Occupation. This marked the awakening of a political consciousness among the masses in Singapore that led to the determined struggle for decolonisation and self-rule – the part of the national narrative most Singaporeans today are familiar with. Lesser known perhaps, but equally important to Singapore’s post-war history, were the men-on-the-street whose lives and stories during this period played a part in shaping Singapore’s quest to build a national identity as it journeyed towards nationhood.

A collaboration between the National Archives of Singapore and the National Museum of Singapore, *45-65: Liberation,*

*Unrest ... a New Nation* traces Singapore’s post-war history from 1945 to 1965 through six different themes. Using selected artefacts and a range of archival materials such as photographs, oral history interviews, as well as historical documents and footage, *45-65* provides an objective perspective of everyday life in Singapore in the two decades leading up to independence. Just as it illustrates the hardships and challenges faced by the people of Singapore during this tumultuous period, the exhibition offers a glimpse of the cultural dynamism that was prevalent then, thus giving Singaporeans and other visitors today an opportunity to look at how the nation was formed.

### THEME I: POST-WAR SINGAPORE

Although there was widespread jubilation following the Japanese surrender in 1945, the sense of triumph was soon replaced by a sobering atmosphere as Singapore’s immediate post-war years were marked by pressing social and welfare needs. Living conditions were abysmal as the problems of overcrowding continued after the war, forcing families to live in crammed and filthy slums and squatters that had poor ventilation and lacked proper sanitation. Severe shortages of food and healthcare plagued the population, which was also threatened by outbreaks of fire and diseases due to the poor living conditions and overcrowded situation.

Yet, in spite of these challenges, this period saw the brewing of an early national consciousness, shaped by the voluntary spirit of locals who rallied to provide wel-

« Guests and victims of the Bukit Ho Swee fire celebrating the opening of five blocks of flats built to resettle those who lost their homes. Approximately 16,000 people were made homeless by the disaster, which razed the previous squatter settlement. (1961). Source: Ministry of Information, Communications and Arts.

fare support on the ground for a common social cause. The Social Welfare Department (SWD), for example, started a chain of popular "People's Kitchens" in 1946 that offered affordable but nutritious meals to the needy. A similar programme, the Children's Feeding Scheme, was established in 1947, where the SWD supplied free meals to malnourished children. In the face of urgent healthcare needs, and as the colonial administration attempted to curb the spread of diseases such as tuberculosis, cholera and small pox, volunteers also offered their help in providing free healthcare services including mass immunisations and x-ray screenings for the people.

**THEME II:  
STIRRINGS OF DISCONTENT**

With the image of the all-powerful Western imperialists shattered in World War Two, the widespread social and welfare problems in post-war Singapore soon became sources of discontent that fuelled the spread of political agitation against the colonial government. Different groups within the local population tapped on the ongoing

issues of food shortages, unemployment and poor living conditions to garner support as they jockeyed for power. Frustrated with low pay and poor working conditions, many workers participated in strikes instigated by the communist-influenced trade unions, as illustrated by the Hock Lee Bus riots in 1955.

Trade union activism at that time also saw active participation by students from Chinese-medium schools, whose grievances against the colonial government centred on the relative lack of job opportunities and government aid compared to students from other language-medium schools. Prior to the Hock Lee Bus riots – during which they, too, joined the pickets – the Chinese middle school<sup>1</sup> students had organised their own demonstrations to protest against the National Service Ordinance which took effect in 1954, seeing military conscription as a form of colonial oppression that would disrupt their studies.

Apart from labour and student riots, communal tensions and inter-ethnic conflicts were other causes of violent unrests in the 1950s and 1960s. The Maria Hertogh

riots in 1950 and the communal clashes that broke out during Prophet Muhammad's birthday celebrations in 1964 are stark reminders of a turbulent period in Singapore's history.

**THEME III:  
POLITICAL AWAKENING**

As the process of decolonisation spread across Asia after World War Two, calls for self-government in Singapore gained momentum amid post-war uncertainties and instability. Young, educated members of a disaffected class began to organise themselves, coming together to discuss the shortcomings of the government and plan their course of action, with the ultimate goal for Singapore to break away from colonial rule. It was under such a climate of political awakening that Singapore's constitutional development got underway, as the British took cautious steps to introduce greater local participation in government elections from 1948 to 1959.

The breakthrough came after the Rendel Commission of 1953 increased electoral powers, which led to David Marshall be-



« A mobile immunisation team on a regular visit to a kampong (village). Bringing healthcare to rural areas was aided by the donation of a mobile dispensary from the Rotary Club of Singapore in 1947. (1950). Source: National Archives of Singapore.



Students holding placards with anti-colonial slogans during the Singapore Chinese Middle School Student Union riots. They were protesting against the detention of four Chinese student leaders and expulsion of 142 students from Chinese High School and Chung Cheng High School for pro-communist activities. (1956). Source: National Museum of Singapore.



There was a sharp increase in Singapore's population in the years immediately following the Japanese Occupation, and overcrowding was a major problem. (1950s). Source: National Museum of Singapore.

**EXHIBITION INFORMATION:  
45-65: Liberation, Unrest ...  
a New Nation**

7 July - 18 November 2012  
Stamford Gallery, Level 1,  
National Museum of Singapore  
This exhibition is the third and final instalment of a series of exhibitions that the National Archives of Singapore has put up on post-war Singapore. The first two exhibitions were *10 Years that Shaped a Nation, 1965-1975* and *The 2<sup>nd</sup> Decade - Nation Building In Progress, 1975-1985*.

Admission is free. A series of public programmes will also be held in conjunction with this exhibition. Please visit [www.nhb.gov.sg/NAS/event.asp](http://www.nhb.gov.sg/NAS/event.asp) for more details.

A publication *45-65: Liberation, Unrest ... a New Nation* will be launched in end 2012. It will provide an in-depth account of the two decades and offer more insights into the developments during the period. Do look out for it and get a copy.



« Volunteers assisting the Social Welfare Department to distribute food to the needy. (1954). Source: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.



Many first-time voters casting their votes on polling day during the first General Elections in Singapore. (1959).  
Source: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.

coming Singapore's first Chief Minister in 1955. This was followed by three rounds of constitutional talks with the British to negotiate self-government for Singapore, culminating in the country's first election for a fully-elected Legislative Assembly in 1959. The 1959 General Election was won by the People's Action Party (PAP), and Lee Kuan Yew was sworn in as the first Prime Minister of Singapore.

#### THEME IV: TOWARDS NATION-BUILDING

One of the tasks the PAP embarked on after winning the 1959 General Election was to carry out the social transformation it had promised the people, as the government looked to laying the grounds for building the nation. This included kick-starting Singapore's industrial development, and improving workers' welfare, the healthcare

system, housing, education and transport.

Dr Goh Keng Swee, then Minister for Finance, called for the formation of the Singapore Economic Development Board (EDB) in 1961 to spur the country's economic growth through industrialisation and investment promotion, driven by the priority to provide enough jobs for the people given the massive unemployment at that time. Equal impetus was given to resolving Singapore's housing problems, with the Housing and Development Board (HDB) set up in 1960 to build mass public housing to ease the overcrowding situation. Primary healthcare was also made more accessible to the people of Singapore as hospitals were modernised and mobile clinics were started, while health education and mass campaigns against diseases were launched. Reforms were implemented in the classrooms, too, as the education sys-



The first locally-born *Yang di-Pertuan Negara* (Head of State) of Singapore, Yusof Ishak, sworn in at City Hall on 3 December 1959. Then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew standing on his right and Chief Justice Sir Alan Rose to his left. (1959).  
Source: National Archives of Singapore.

tem was streamlined and improved to cater to the differing needs of the people.

At the same time, the PAP leaders recognised the importance of developing a sense of national identity among the people, which they believed was tied to creating a Malayan culture in Singapore. Led by then Minister for Culture S Rajaratnam, the government sought to foster a multicultural and multiracial Malayan identity through the *Aneka Ragam Rakyat* (*People's Cultural Concerts*), a series of free outdoor traditional shows organised to foster better understanding among the different ethnic groups. The *National Loyalty Week* was also held in 1959 to introduce national symbols including the state flag and national anthem to the people, which the government hoped would encourage a sense of loyalty among the people to the new nation.

#### THEME V: CULTURAL LIFE

Diverse cultural activities were already taking place on the ground at the time the government started to introduce initiatives and programmes aimed at promoting a sense of common Malayan identity among the people. While the PAP had created the People's Association (PA) to cultivate racial harmony and social cohesion among the population via recreational activities in community centres, such communal interactions were also playing out in public spaces including the three "World" amusement parks<sup>2</sup>, cinemas and the Singapore Badminton Hall. Scenes of people from different ethnic backgrounds mingling with one another were common at these venues, as they came together to enjoy boxing matches, cultural dances, movies and sports.



(Top): Completed blocks of HDB flats in Queenstown, the first satellite town in Singapore. (1962).  
Source: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.

(Middle): A sketch by students at Buona Vista Youth Centre during the official opening of *National Language Month*, launched by the Ministry of Culture to encourage more people to learn Malay as the national language to foster a shared national identity. (1965). Source: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.  
(Bottom): Seamstresses at work in Wing Tai Garment Factory. Textiles were one of the many sectors that Singapore invested in on the move towards industrialisation during the 1960s. (1963). Source: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.



A PAP press conference on the separation of Singapore from Malaysia, a few days after the announcement on 9 August 1965. (1965).

Source: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.

#### THEME VI: MERGER AND SEPARATION

When Singapore attained self-government in 1959, it symbolised the culmination of a momentous period of political awakening that had begun in the aftermath of the Japanese Occupation in 1945. As the desire of the people to manage their own affairs grew, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew was convinced that complete independence could only be achieved through merger with the Federation of Malaya. This would quell the mounting threat of communism in Singapore, and at the same time secure the country's economic future as Malaya would provide a hinterland and common market for Singapore's manufactured goods.

However, Federation Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman did not share the same vision. He viewed the merger with Singapore's predominantly Chinese population as a threat to the privileged position of the Malays in Malaya, not to mention the threat of communism spreading to Malaya. In Singapore, the political party Barisan Sosialis – founded by left-wing members of the PAP who were expelled from the party in 1961 – also resisted the idea of a merger, fearing that their democratic rights and personal freedom would be curtailed.

Singapore, however, did become a part of the Federation in September 1963, after the Tunku finally proposed the creation of Malaysia following fears that a pro-communist government might take over in Singapore after the PAP's defeat in the 1961 by-election in Hong Lim.

It was a union fraught with tension. The Sukarno government of Indonesia was against the merger, viewing it as a neo-colonial conspiracy by the British, which led Indonesia on an armed campaign against Malaysia during a period known as *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation) from 1963 to 1965. Relations between the governments of Singapore and Malaysia did not improve after the merger, with one of the thorns being the PAP's decision to contest the 1964 General Election in Malaysia, which the Malaysian government interpreted as a challenge to their political power. Social tensions were also heightened during the racial riots in 1964 between the Chinese and Malays in Singapore, during which 22 people were killed and 461 injured. Furthermore, merger with Malaysia did not

produce the expected economic deliverance for Singapore, as the Malaysian common market proved to be a pipe dream. It soon became clear that these irreparable differences made disengagement inevitable. On 9 August 1965, Singapore separated from Malaysia and became an independent and sovereign state.

#### A NEW CHAPTER

*"The misfortunes that befell Singapore in the first decade of her existence, from a self-governing state to a fully independent republic, are forgotten by observers who believe ours has been a smooth and easy transition to self-sustaining growth. The truth is quite the reverse ..."*

– DR GOH KENG SWEE, A SOCIALIST ECONOMY THAT WORKS (1976).

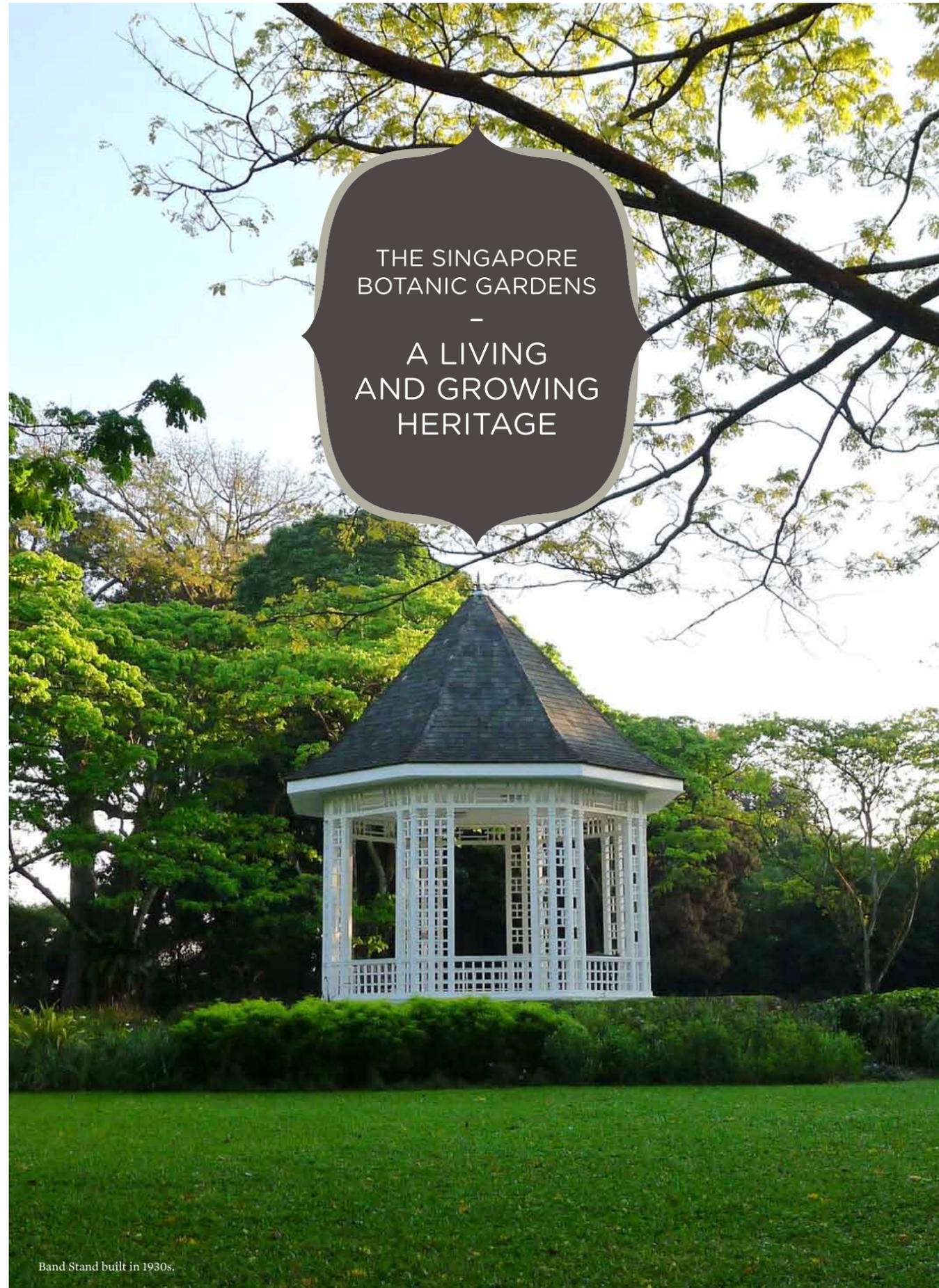
The status Singapore enjoys today as an independent nation state, together with its social and economic stability, were built on the foundations laid during the difficult post-war years. From political strife to economic uncertainty and social unrest, the challenges Singapore faced from 1945 to 1965 had shaped its formative years as a fledgling nation in its quest to build a national identity and secure independence.

Through this exhibition, visitors are able to gain an insight into the daily lives of the people during these two decades, a time when bread and butter issues – food shortages, housing and healthcare woes – were the main concerns of families in Singapore. At the same time, Singaporeans today will have the opportunity to understand how these 20 years had set in motion the nation-building process and played a part in moulding the Singapore we know now.

*Priscilla Chua is Assistant Curator, National Museum of Singapore.*

<sup>1</sup> The equivalent of today's secondary schools and junior colleges.

<sup>2</sup> Gay World (Happy World), Great World and New World.



Band Stand built in 1930s.

TEXT BY DR NIGEL TAYLOR  
IMAGES COURTESY OF  
NATIONAL PARKS BOARD



Main gate in 1890s.

THE SINGAPORE BOTANIC GARDENS (SBG), arguably the Republic's most important intact historic site, is living and growing in many ways.

In 2011/2012, SBG recorded more than four million visits, making it the world's most popular botanic gardens. On 13 April 2012, the gardens was conferred the inaugural *International Garden Tourism – Garden of the Year Award* by the Canadian Garden Tourism Council, for providing visitors with enjoyable and unforgettable world-class garden experiences.

SBG, however, is not just about numbers and awards. Its history is significant for Singapore, the Southeast Asian region, as well as the many individuals whose memories and daily experiences have been enriched by the gardens' green oasis.

#### THE BEGINNING

SBG is sometimes claimed to have its origins dating from Sir Stamford Raffles' time in Singapore (1819 - 1823), but this is incorrect. Two early attempts to establish a botanic garden beside Fort Canning (formerly known as Government Hill) had failed.

The first, developed by Sir Stamford Raffles himself, was an initial success. It became an ambitious 19-hectare estate by 1823, focusing on the introduction of spices, especially nutmeg and cloves, and had effectively started off a lucrative trade for the island. The garden, however, was abandoned in 1829 due to the lack of official support.

In 1836, a small part of Sir Stamford Raffles' former garden was revived by an agri-horticultural society to focus on the lucrative nutmeg production business. But this was again abandoned a decade later when the crop's market value declined.

The present SBG's Tanglin site was a new start in November 1859. Led by the charismatic Hoo Ah Kay ('Whampoa'), another agri-horticultural society negotiated a land swap deal with the colonial government, acquiring 23 hectares of abandoned plantation. The land included a six-hectare block of intact rainforest, which is a key *in situ* (natural) conservation area today to protect a diverse range of species in their native habitats.

Further land swaps and acquisitions were made in 1866. Lawrence Niven, a local nutmeg planter of Scottish descent recruited in 1860 to develop the gardens, was thereafter provided with a colonial style bungalow (today's Burkill Hall) on a hill overlooking the entire site. This accommodation, completed in 1868, caused the agri-horticultural society to fall into

Shaw Foundation Symphony Stage.





debt. In 1874, the society petitioned for the colonial government to take over the site's management.

Originally planned as a leisure garden and ornamental park exclusively for the agri-horticultural society's members, the garden grounds were not generally open to the public prior to 1875.

The handing over of the site's management to the colonial government marked a turning point for the gardens, with its purpose and accessibility changed in 1875. Specifically, it became a typical British colonial establishment, focusing on plant research and public recreation.

**EARLIEST ATTRACTIONS**

The Bandstand was one of the earliest attractions created in the SBG. First laid out in the early 1860s and situated at the highest point of the site at that time, it was a focal point of the gardens' original landscape design. The present octagonal structure was built in 1930, and was the stage for early evening performances by military bands for many years. While no longer used for music performances today, the Bandstand continues to be one of SBG's best-known features.

The Swan Lake, added to the gardens in 1866, also continues to be a key feature in today's SBG. Its landmark island with the big clump of elegant *nibung* palms has become a timeless facet of the gardens' landscape. Besides offering scenic vistas, the lake serves as an important source of



water supply for the gardens. The Palm Valley was developed in 1879 after the colonial government took over the site's management. Today's Palm Valley is home to more than 220 species of palms, and is perhaps the most strikingly beautiful element of SBG's landscape.

**SBG'S FORMER ADMINISTRATORS**

The history and development of SBG is tightly intertwined with the history and efforts of its many dedicated administrators since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

James Murton, SBG's first administrator under the colonial government's management, started the Herbarium, which laid the foundations for scientific research on flora in the Malay Peninsula and beyond. Today, the Singapore Herbarium is housed in an underground vault and provides a home to some 700,000 dried specimens, of which 8,000 are known as 'Types'. 'Type' specimens are reference points for accurate identification of plant species, making the Herbarium a place of pilgrimage for scientists from around the world. While the Herbarium is not for public access, some examples of herbarium specimens can be viewed by the general public at SBG's Library of Botany and Horticulture, Public Reference Centre.

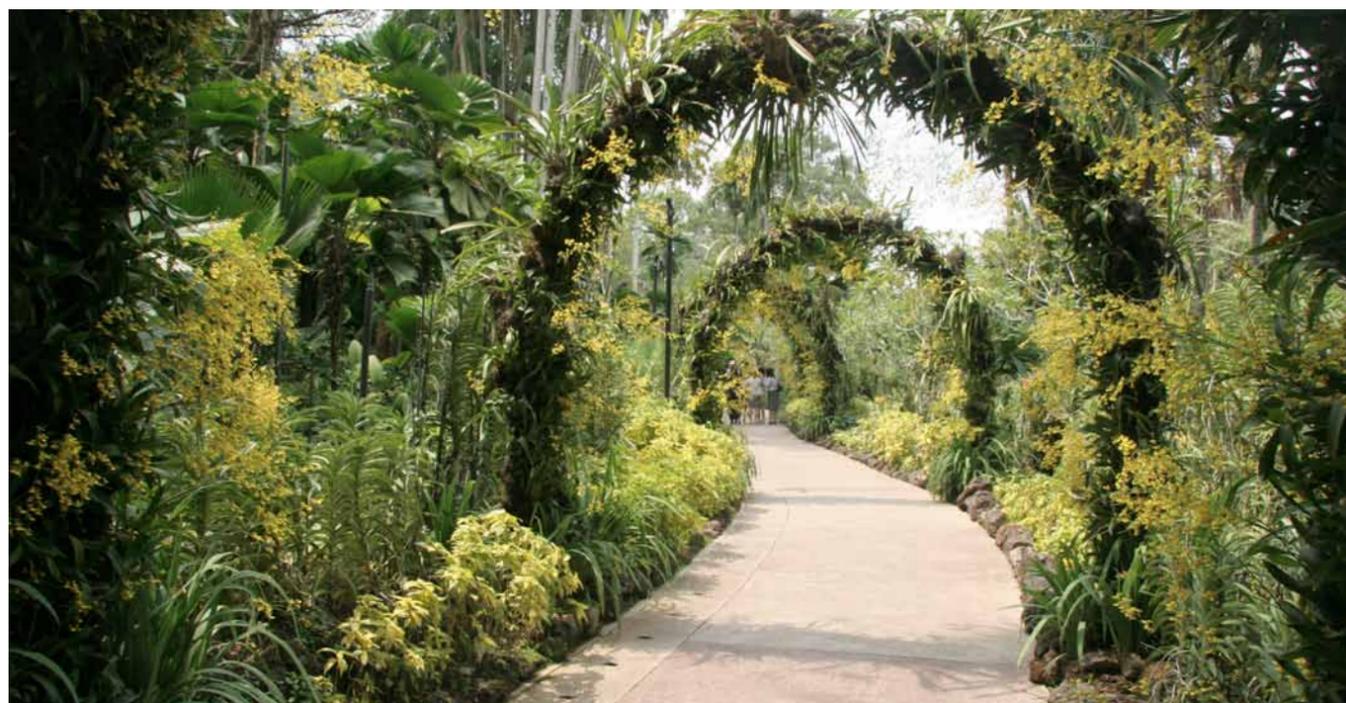
In 1880, Nathaniel Cantley, SBG's second administrator under the colonial government's management, planted the first Rain Trees at SBG. The specimen at Nassim Gate today may be one of these originals. This Central American species of Rain Trees is now seen throughout Singapore, providing the much needed shade and relief in the country's hot tropical weather.

Particularly notable was Henry Nicholas Ridley, who was appointed SBG's Director in 1888. Ridley was, by any measure, a truly exceptional individual. He worked tirelessly for 23 years and ushered SBG into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was the most productive period in the gardens' history. During the 1890s and early 1900s, Ridley devised successful propagation methods and discovered a way to harvest commercial quantities of rubber latex without harming or killing the trees. His name was synonymous with rubber as he had single-handedly convinced Straits Settlements' planters to plant the crop, transforming the



(From top): Holttum Hall 1958, orchid culture laboratory. Henry Ridley with rubber tree. Lawrence Niven, a local nutmeg planter of Scottish descent.

« (Clockwise from top): The Monkey Bridge of *Entada spiralis* 1920s. Bandstand Hill, 1877. Sugar palms at Singapore Botanic Gardens, 19<sup>th</sup> century.



region's agricultural economy with seeds produced in the SBG. Ridley also promoted oil palm, and some of his stock plants can still be seen today between the Healing Garden and the Garage at the SBG.

Like his predecessors, Ridley was interested in orchids. In 1893, he identified a new orchid hybrid and named it *Vanda* 'Miss Joaquim', which has subsequently become Singapore's national flower. Ridley also planted the sealing wax palms, now the brand logo of SBG and seen in many parts of the gardens.

Another notable SBG Director was Eric Holttum, who took charge in 1925. Holttum succeeded in developing a new segment of the horticulture industry. This time it was orchids, achieved in the laboratory instead of the plantation (with Holttum Hall being his laboratory). Today, Holttum's laboratory method is used universally for orchid propagation and the raising of hybrids. It has become a major industry in Southeast Asia, and one which the region is famous for.

**SBG SINCE WORLD WAR TWO**

While the SBG was left largely intact during the Japanese Occupation, an addition – though not well known – is the flight of brick steps down to the Plant House. The bricks and steps were constructed by prisoners of war, which were revisited by some Australian veterans in 1995.

« (Top row, from left): Palm Valley today. 1882 Rain tree at Nassim Gate.  
 (Middle row, from left): Historic oil palm in Singapore Botanic Gardens. Crane Fountain, National Orchid Garden. *Nibung* palm on island in Swan Lake.  
 (Bottom row): Arches of Golden Showers orchid, National Orchid Garden. Photo by Graham Charles.



Main (Tanglin) Gate at Singapore Botanic Gardens today.

Driven since 1956 by the ever popular naming of VIP orchids for foreign and local dignitaries, SBG has become a significant source of new hybrids. Outstanding hybrids have been cultivated in the gardens, which have received recognition worldwide. Today, around 1,000 hybridisations are carried out each year. Some examples of these can be seen in the VIP section of the National Orchid Garden beside Burkill Hall.

From the 1960s onward, former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew pushed forward his vision on the greening of Singapore. SBG took a central role in this process, experimenting with plants, training gardeners in horticulture and landscaping, and planting up parks and roadsides. The 'special park', however, continues to be SBG; not least from the 1990s when it was enhanced in many ways by the visionary Director, Dr Kiat Tan (Gardens by the Bay is his latest brainchild).

SBG's landscape is unrivalled for its beauty and timeless tranquillity, yet only 10 minutes' walk from Orchard Road. As Singapore progresses towards its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2015 and evolves from a 'Garden City' towards the vision of a 'City in a Garden', SBG is an anchor point given its rich colonial history and its many achievements today.

*Dr Nigel Taylor is Director, Singapore Botanic Gardens.*

» **Come Celebrate With Us!**

In celebration of the *International Garden Tourism – Garden of the Year Award* conferred to Singapore Botanic Gardens by the Canadian Garden Tourism Council, visitors to SBG will enjoy the following:

**August 2012**

10% discount at The Library Shop and The Garden Shop (for Singaporeans and Permanent Residents upon presentation of Identity Card).

**September to December 2012**

10% discount on SBG Adults' Gardening Workshops (for all visitors).

9 - 19 KRETA AYER ROAD

## MODERN OFFICE, YESTERYEAR CHARM



TEXT BY **CHERYL SIM**  
IMAGES COURTESY OF  
**LIU & WO ARCHITECTS PTE LTD**

CONSTRUCTED BETWEEN 1840 AND 1900, these six adjoining units of two-storey shophouses are located within the Bukit Pasoh Conservation Area, one of the sub-districts of Historic Chinatown.

Typical of 'Transitional' style shophouses, each of these six units is simple in detail, has minimal ornamentation and features two windows on the upper floor.

Unit 9 was formerly a pub and Unit 11 a Clan Association. Units 13, 15, 17 and 19 were previously occupied by the Singapore Anti-Tuberculosis Association (SATA). In the late 2000s, these six shophouses were acquired by Wilmar International Limited, a large agribusiness group listed on the Singapore Stock Exchange, to be converted into an office for some 200 employees.

### THE CHALLENGE

The creation of an open plan office within the six conservation shophouses was a challenging task for the project team.

As Kreta Ayer Road is on a slope, the floor levels of the different units are at different heights, hence making it tricky to link the units internally and to align all floor and ceiling joists between units to achieve the open plan concept. At the same time, while creating an open plan office, the requirement to compartmentalise every two units as a structural fire precaution had to be complied with.

In addition, these shophouses were stifled by dark corners, as well as dim and narrow corridors.

The total usable space within the six units was rather small as well. And under the buildings' conservation guidelines, the area that could be increased was limited. Skilful planning was thus required to make full use of every available footprint to create a conducive work environment for Wilmar's 200 employees.



## MUSEDESIGN.

### BREAKING DOWN WALLS, OPTIMISING SPACE AND LETTING IN THE LIGHT

To achieve the single volume of space in an open plan office, walls between units were opened up to the allowable maximum of 50 percent. Fire rated roller shutters were installed at the big opening on these walls at every two units to comply with the fire department's 'compartmentation' requirement.

To minimise any undesirable visual effects of the different floor levels between units, steps were neatly introduced at passageways and workstations were strategically positioned to camouflage the level differences.

With space constraints, options to expand the floor area were explored. The attic level and roof deck garden were added as a result.

The introduction of the attic level has indeed brought about a rather significant increase in the amount of total usable space. This area also turns out to be an attractive workspace and a new experience for Wilmar's employees.

Situated at the second storey, the roof deck garden's lush greenery tastefully shields the central air-conditioning units from sight, while its water features serve as a noise buffer.

One of the project team's greatest accomplishments was their ability to come up with many ways to introduce natural light into the interior spaces. Skylights were carefully located at areas such as the office space at the first storey, the top of stairs and the pantry. Vertical slot openings were created in the restrooms to improve ventilation and provide natural light, while jack roofs were introduced at each of the six shophouse units. The external roof garden on the second floor also helps to enhance interior lighting, and at the same time provide a sense of relief to the work environment.



### A MASTERFUL RESTORATION

Before approaching the challenge of adapting the old space for a new use, the project team faithfully used the 'Top Down' approach in the restoration process to ensure protection of the internal structure from weather. Additional structures were also introduced to support new loads in the buildings, such as the attic level; as well as to ensure the integrity of the walls between units.

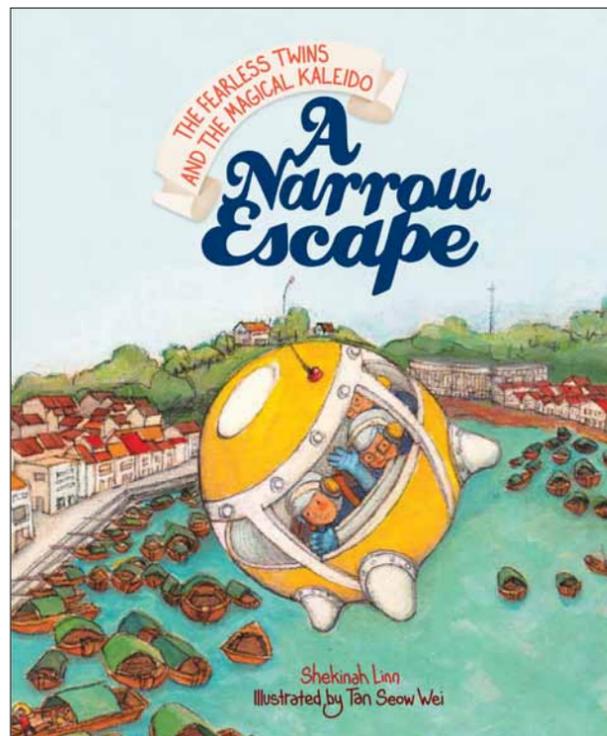
Exercising maximum retention, sensitive restoration and careful repair, the project team reinstated the key elements of the buildings' traditional exterior.

The original moulded capitals, pillars and granite thresholds on the six units' facades and five-foot-ways were restored, as were the precast vents at the front and rear of the buildings. The external walls were painted white with grey accents at the mouldings. The timber doors and windows were stained brown, and the original green glass panels were retained. The chimneys, one of the key features of conservation buildings, were also retained and restored to serve as a source of fresh air supply into the interior spaces.

The project, a masterful restoration of six shophouses, sensitively reconfigured and revitalised into a modern office for Wilmar's 200 employees, was one of the two Category A winners of the 2011 *Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) Architectural Heritage Awards*.

*Cheryl Sim is Editor, BeMUSE.*





**THE FEARLESS TWINS AND THE MAGICAL KALEIDO: A NARROW ESCAPE**

*Published by the Preservation of Monuments Board*

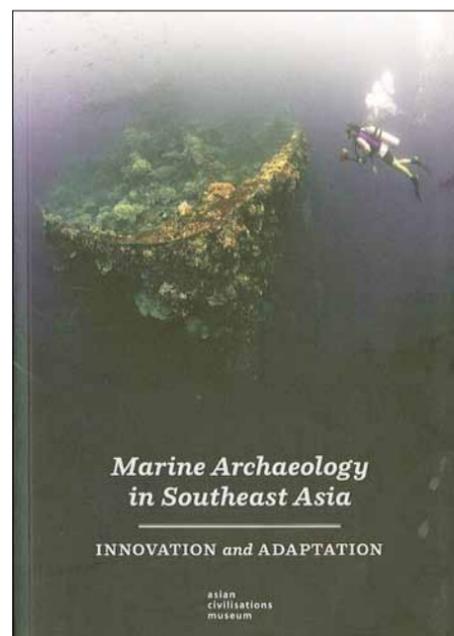
Take a ride with Toby, Tammy and their fun loving Uncle Al.

Armed with an incredible magical device, the twins swop back in to Singapore in 1935. Set against the backdrop of Singapore's most awe-inspiring buildings, the twins end up with an adventure they didn't bargain for, but can't escape from.

Will they solve the mystery of the spinning clock tower? Can they fight off the fierce flames of a huge fire? Will they escape in time? Read on to be thrilled by this story of courage, friendship and fantasy!

*Written by Shekinah Linn  
Illustrated by Tan Seow Wei*

*Available at all major bookstores from mid-July 2012.  
S\$16.00*



**MARINE ARCHAEOLOGY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: INNOVATION AND ADAPTATION**

*Published by the Asian Civilisations Museum*

Dive in to the world of underwater exploration and recovery!

Marine archaeology can tell fascinating stories of our past; of economic and cultural exchanges in which Singapore and Southeast Asia played an important role. Ceramics, glass, weapons of war, and the ancient ships themselves are invaluable records of our history. But searching for, carefully recording, recovering, and/or preserving them is expensive, time-consuming, and fraught with danger and international controversy.

This publication discusses the issues facing marine archaeology in the region through case studies from Southeast Asia, and explores perspectives from public, private and non-governmental sectors on protecting our shared underwater cultural heritage.

*Edited by Heidi Tan  
Essays by leading archaeologists, local historians, and museum professionals  
S\$25.00*



Printed by Hwa Hsu Printing Co., 103, Minto Road, Singapore.

新加坡及檳城印務公司

// ASIAN  
CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM**Islamic Arts from Southeast Asia Highlights of the Asian Civilisations Museum**

• 7 July - 4 November 2012  
• Admission charges apply  
Although Southeast Asia is home to a large Muslim population, the Islamic arts of the region have only recently attracted scholarly interest. This exhibition, drawn exclusively from the collections of the Asian Civilisations Museum, covers many artistic media, including manuscript illumination, woodcarving, metalwork, and textiles, notably batik. Religious works of art, such as Qur'ans, calligraphy, and tomb markers, will be displayed along with secular objects, including arms, textiles, and pottery from Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as from neighbouring countries – Burma, Thailand, and Singapore. Chinese porcelain and enamels made for local Muslim patrons in the region will also be on display.

The exhibition will reveal how artistic forms from central Islamic lands were transformed by regional traditions.

**Shadow Spaces: Photographs of the Old Supreme Court**

• Till 16 September 2012  
Spaces and interiors hold multiple memories – of people, events, and emotions. Photographs by Los Angeles-based photographer Sean Dungan reveal the rough, ephemeral beauty of the naturally illuminated empty spaces of the Old Supreme Court and other buildings.

Dungan works with ambient light, often in low-light situations, and specialises in capturing the atmosphere of historic spaces.

// THE PERANAKAN  
MUSEUM**Emily of Emerald Hill: Singaporean Identity on Stage**

• Till 17 February 2013

• Admission charges apply  
Written by Stella Kon in 1982, *Emily of Emerald Hill* tells the story of a Peranakan woman from young bride to strong-willed matriarch in the Peranakan enclave of Emerald Hill, in Singapore. The one-woman play reveals the struggles and sacrifices of the character Emily Gan in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

*Emily of Emerald Hill* is one of the most successful plays in Singapore and has achieved considerable international recognition. The exhibition explores this Peranakan background and examines the performance history and legacy of the play within Singapore's theatre scene. In a special installation, the playwright Stella Kon recalled and re-imagined aspects of her own family's history.

// FESTIVALS AND  
PRECINCT DEVELOPMENT**Singapore HeritageFest 2012 – Recollect, Reflect, Reconnect!**

• 20 - 29 July 2012, 10am - 9pm

**Singapore's Sporting Spirit - Inspiring Communities**

Venue: Velocity@Novena Square

As the world looks forward to the *London Olympics* in July 2012, come celebrate Singapore's sportspersons who have achieved great success in their respective fields. From the past decades to recent years, these athletes have inspired us with their strength of spirit and made us proud of our young nation!

**Football Fever – For Nation, For Passion, For All**

Venue: Century Square  
Come celebrate football – one of Singapore's favourite sports and a game that binds Singaporeans together regardless of their backgrounds. This exhibition brings the excitement of football to you and highlights the many wonderful memories we shared at the National Stadium.

**The Golden Age of Singapore Cinema – 1950s to 1960s**

Venue: Bugis Junction  
Discover Singapore's cinema heritage in the 1950s and 1960s through the works of local artists Ming Wong and Sherman Ong from the Singapore Art Museum's collection. To complete the experience, enjoy a special outdoor screening of P. Ramlee's movies!

**Singapore Short Cuts – Reflecting on Our Shared Home through Local Short Films**

Venue: Jurong Point  
Celebrating its ninth season this year, *Singapore Short Cuts*, organised by the National Museum of Singapore, is one of the most popular and widely anticipated showcases of local short films in Singapore. *Singapore HeritageFest 2012* will be presenting some of the best films over the last eight years, guaranteed to evoke memories, laughter and tears.

**Shopping For Gold – Shared Traditions and the Importance of Gold in Our Communities**

Venue: Causeway Point  
Gold is a precious metal with cultural significance for the different races in Singapore. Held in conjunction with the National Museum of Singapore's special exhibition, *Gold Rush*, this exhibition explores the history of gold in Singapore and brings back memories of goldsmith shops from a bygone era.

**Traditional Toys and Games – Connecting Communities through Generations of Traditional Games**

Venue: Tiong Bahru Plaza  
Take a walk down memory lane and try your hand at games from the yesteryears! This exhibition showcases Singapore's heritage through the world of traditional games and toys, from *five stones* and *kuti kuti* to board games, stamps and collectibles. Both the young and the young-at-heart should not miss this interactive exhibition!

// ASIAN  
CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM**Treasures of the Aga Khan Museum: Architecture in Islamic Arts**

19 July - 28 October 2012

• Admission charges apply

The Aga Khan is the spiritual leader of the Ismaili Muslim community. This exhibition is sponsored by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and affords a unique opportunity for the public in Singapore to view some of the treasures in the major collection of Islamic art created by Prince Karim Aga Khan IV.

The complex architectural traditions of the Islamic world will be explored through a hundred objects drawn from Iran, India, Turkey, Syria, Spain, and Egypt. Works of art in metal, wood, and pottery, as well as paintings and textiles covering more than a thousand years of artistic production will be on display. The exhibition considers the different concepts of space in both religious and secular environments, and visitors can learn about the diverse artistic traditions of Islamic architecture.

The exhibition will be accompanied by contextual photographs to illustrate the historical background and inspiration behind the artistic forms. A fully illustrated catalogue written by experts in each field will be available.

National Monument buildings, and be moved by the stories and challenges of the people involved in their construction. Rediscover with our rich architectural and cultural heritage, experienced through the latest interactive technology!

**Void Decks - Shared Heritage, Shared Spaces, Shared Home**

Venue: Changi City Point  
Rediscover the multi-purpose spaces beneath our HDB (Housing and Development Board) blocks. From Malay weddings to chess playing, the void deck is a social space where residents of all races interact, socialise and bond. A special section recollects the good old days of Rediffusion and encourages all visitors to take a break, listen and forge new friendships.

**Foundations of Our Communities – National Monuments and the People and Stories behind them**

Venue: Hougang Mall  
Be awed by the 360-panoramic photographs of six Singapore

Look out for exciting performances and interactive activities for the whole family

at the malls on 21, 22, 28 and 29 July! For more details, please visit [www.heritagefest.sg](http://www.heritagefest.sg).

// NATIONAL  
ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE**45-65: Liberation, Unrest ... a New Nation**

• 7 July - 18 November 2012  
• Stamford Gallery, National Museum of Singapore  
This exhibition brings visitors through the tumultuous period of post-war Singapore up until before August 1965. Using archival materials such as photographs, films, oral history recordings, as well as a selection of artefacts, the exhibition allows visitors to find out about the challenges and events of 1945 to 1965 which set the stage in Singapore's quest for independence and a national identity. It provides a glimpse of the cultural dynamism on the ground, against the backdrop of the awakening of a political consciousness that contributed to the determined struggle for de-colonisation and self-rule.

The exhibition will also travel to venues such as community centres, public libraries and schools after the launch at the National Museum of Singapore.

// SINGAPORE  
ART MUSEUM**Seeker of Hope: Works by Jia Aili (with parallel exhibition Lyrical Abstraction: Works by Jeremy Sharma & Yeo Shih Yun)**

• 6 July - 23 September 2012  
The Singapore Art Museum (SAM) is proud to present the works by Jia Aili, an accomplished Chinese painter whose works are a reflection of the dramatic changes to the Chinese society after 2000.

*Seeker of Hope: Works by Jia Aili* will showcase Jia's works ranging from monumental oil paintings and installations, to delicate paper works. The solitary figures in his epic-scale and visually stunning works seem to be

searching for hope amid the ruins of modern civilisation.

A parallel exhibition entitled *Lyrical Abstraction* will also be presented, where the works of two young Singaporean painters will be showcased – Jeremy Sharma with oil on metal panels and Yeo Shih Yun with contemporary ink and new media. SAM has commissioned the two artists to create monumental scale painting installations in the museum alongside Jia Aili.

**Art Garden at the Singapore Art Museum – Contemporary Art Fun for Children**

• Till 12 August 2012

• Singapore Art Museum at 8Q  
The much-loved *Art Garden* returns for the third year running, with an engaging range of contemporary artworks by Singaporean and international artists that will appeal to you and your young ones. *Art Garden* is the only exhibition in Singapore dedicated to showcasing art for children, and the exhibits are intended to stimulate topical and open-ended discussions. In addition, a series of inspiring short films and animations will be screened, including animated shorts from the *N.E.mation!* competition series produced by young Singaporean students.

Come experience contemporary art first-hand at the Singapore Art Museum and unleash your imagination as you explore the new and the familiar at *Art Garden 2012!*

*Art Garden* is held in conjunction with *Children's Season 2012* (jointly organised by the National Heritage Board and Museum Roundtable).

**Not Against Interpretation: Re-staging Jason Lim & Vincent Leow's A Flog of Birdies in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

• Till 28 October 2012  
*Not Against Interpretation* is an experimental platform to nurture an appreciation for contemporary art and to engage people from varied backgrounds. The projects created on this platform exploit the 'openness' of contempo-

rary art and the freedom to interpret it in many ways.

The first artwork presented under this series is *A Flog of Birdies* by Singaporean artists Jason Lim and Vincent Leow. *A Flog of Birdies* was first presented at the *TheatreWorks Black Box* in 1994, followed by the ninth *Indian Triennial of Contemporary Art* in 1997 and at the *Nokia Singapore Art Exhibition* in 1999.

The Singapore Art Museum (SAM)'s volunteers were invited to give their interpretation of this iconic artwork. Make your way to SAM to see how these responses differ from those of SAM curators!

**Panorama: Recent Art from Contemporary Asia**

• Till 25 December 2012

Contemporary art is often a dialogue with the social, economic and cultural issues of the present. The explosion of art produced in Asia since 2000 could thus be a window, allowing us a view or vista into the epochal changes happening around us.

PANORAMA offers a wide lens to examine our world and chart some of the issues pervading contemporary art-making in Asia today - the negotiation over values, social and political change, escalating urbanisation and the subsequent pressures on nature. Drawn entirely from the contemporary art collection of the Singapore Art Museum, this first edition of PANORAMA features 24 artists from eight Asian countries working in painting, sculpture, drawing, photography, video and installation. PANORAMA part two is scheduled for 2013/2014.

// SINGAPORE  
PHILATELIC MUSEUM**Imagine Dragons**

• Till December 2012

With 2012 being the Year of the Dragon, the Singapore Philatelic Museum (SPM) brings dragons to life with stamps and interactive displays. Designed for children aged five to ten years, 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 at SPM!

**Spice Is Nice**

• September 2012 - May 2014

This exhibition takes you on a journey, from the uses of spices by the ancient Egyptians and Romans, to European explorers who ventured into uncharted seas in search of exotic spices in the East.

It was the quest for spices that brought the Europeans to Southeast Asia. In 1819, Sir Stamford Raffles established a free port in Singapore that drew immigrants and many came by sea. Experience the cramped quarters on a Fujian junk like a passenger bound for 'Nanyang'. Go shopping for spices in an old street market and learn about the plants that produce these aromatic gems. Plus, discover age-old spice remedies from different cultures at a traditional medicinal hall.

Singapore food reflects our multicultural society. Although dishes and methods of cooking vary, the spices used are the same. Take a glimpse into the simple life of a bygone era where all meals were prepared on a wood-fire stove. Or try your hand at preparing some spicy local dishes in Mama's virtual kitchen. Also, test your festive food knowledge at the buffet table laden with mouth-watering dishes!

Take a ride with Toby, Tammy and their fun loving Uncle Al. Armed with an incredible magical device, the twins swop back in to Singapore in 1935. Set against the backdrop of Singapore's most awe-inspiring buildings, the twins end up on an adventure they didn't bargain for, but can't escape from.

Will they solve the mystery of the spinning clock tower? Can they fight off the fierce flames of a huge fire? Will they escape in time? Read on to be thrilled by this story of courage, friendship and fantasy!

*The Fearless Twins and the Magical Kaleido* is also the first ever illustrated children's book dedicated to Singapore's most famous landmarks. Be among the first to purchase this beautifully-illustrated book at a special preview price!

Be treated to a fascinating display of stamps and philatelic materials put up by primary and secondary school and tertiary students. These are the winning entries awarded Gold, Silver and Bronze for the *National Stamp Collecting*

*Competition 2012*. Visitors will discover a wide range of themes such as nature, culture and history, and be awed by the creativity of students who will tell different stories using the philatelic materials. The annual *National Stamp Collecting Competition* is organised by the Singapore Philatelic Museum, and supported by Singapore Post Limited and the Ministry of Education.

In addition, view philatelic exhibits from Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore at the *Tri-Nation Stamp Exhibition*. The exhibition is held at the Promenade, Levels 7 & 8, National Library Building, and organised by the Association of Singapore Philatelists.

// PRESERVATION OF  
MONUMENTS BOARD**Story-telling Sessions on The Fearless Twins and the Magical Kaleido: A Narrow Escape**

• 21 & 22 July 2012

• 10am - 10.30am, 12pm - 12.30pm, 2.30pm - 3pm

• Atrium, National Museum of Singapore  
• Suitable for children aged 7 - 12

• Free, on a first-come-first-served basis

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# NIGHT FESTIVAL

24 & 25 August 2012

31 August & 1 September 2012

7pm - 2am

Free Admission

Art and culture spill onto the streets at *Night Festival*, a nocturnal extravaganza of spectacular aerial performances, music, dance and installation artworks at the heart of Bras Basah Bugis precinct, Singapore's arts and heritage district. The main events will take place on the public green spaces of the Singapore Management University, with late night openings and special events at cultural venues like the National Museum of Singapore, Singapore Art Museum, the Peranakan Museum, The Substation, and more!

In conjunction, the Singapore Art Museum will be presenting *Night Lights*, an outdoor showcase of spectacular light installations, which promises to be a visual feast for all to enjoy.

## Featuring *Fuerzabruta* by Ozono Producciones (Argentina)

Breaking free from the confines of spoken language and theatrical convention, this is an event where worlds collide and reality takes a back seat.

**DON'T MISS** the mind-blowing visual effects just inches above and around you. This is an immersive experience that must be seen to be believed.

For more details, visit [www.brasbasahbugis.sg/nightfestival](http://www.brasbasahbugis.sg/nightfestival)

*Night Festival* is presented by the National Heritage Board



## FUERZABRUTA MYLAR

31 August & 1 September 2012

A translucent 15-metre pool suspended high overhead slowly descends to fingertip level. Coloured lights imbue the scene with ever-changing hues and tints as a rippling puddle of water ceaselessly sloshes across the pool's see-through bottom. Four dancers slip and slide in rapturous motion inches above your heads. A sensuous, unearthly, and nearly hallucinatory experience.

Image: © Ozono Producciones

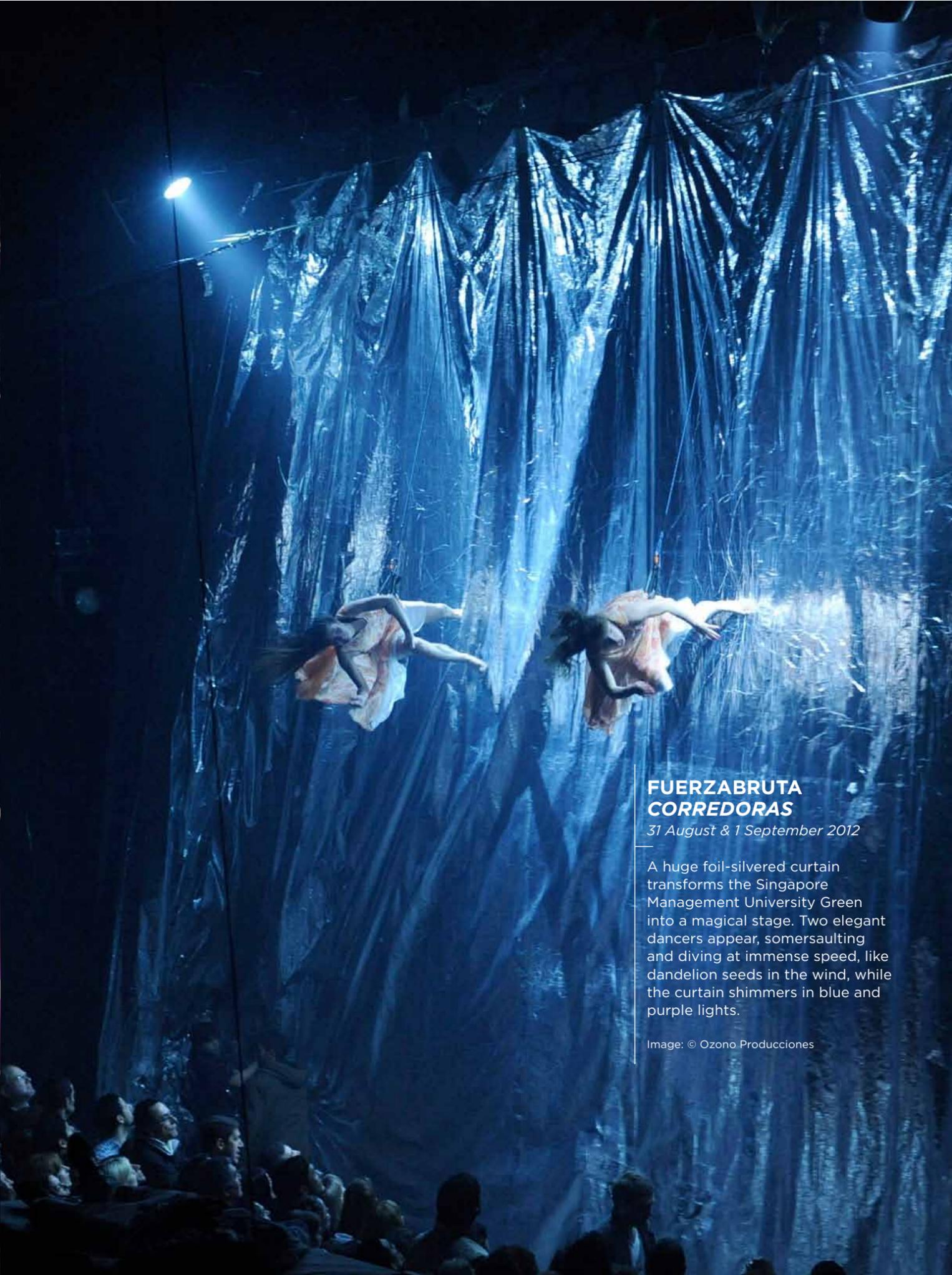


**FUERZABRUTA  
LA ARGENTINA**

*31 August & 1 September 2012*

A crane holds aloft a dancer of athletic proportions while musicians pound and strum on a variety of exotic instruments. This scene brings you to Buenos Aires in 2010, during the celebration of the Bicentenary of the Argentinean Independence. Over a million people filled the streets of Buenos Aires in joyful festivities.

Image: © Ozono Producciones



**FUERZABRUTA  
CORREDORAS**

*31 August & 1 September 2012*

A huge foil-silvered curtain transforms the Singapore Management University Green into a magical stage. Two elegant dancers appear, somersaulting and diving at immense speed, like dandelion seeds in the wind, while the curtain shimmers in blue and purple lights.

Image: © Ozono Producciones

EXHIBITION INFORMATION:  
**Seeker of Hope: Works by Jia Aili**  
Till 23 September 2012  
Singapore Art Museum

## PORTRAIT OF A CONTEMPORARY ROMANTIC ARTIST

UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF DENG XIAOPING and his successors, the opening up of the Chinese economy (*gaige kaifeng*) and other economic reforms have since transformed China into an economic superpower within a short span of some three decades.

Jia Aili's parents lived through this period of great transition, which saw the country moving from socialism to capitalism. This painful process, according to writer Lin Xiaoping in his book *Children of Marx and Coca-Cola*, could be termed "trauma" and was mirrored in countries like Russia and Eastern Europe. The socialist welfare and social security systems, Lin noted, need to be dismantled for a market economy to take place. This new situation and environment could be a "shocking encounter" to people who had been living in the former systems, and could result in "a violent intrusion of something which doesn't fit into a person's 'life world'"<sup>1</sup>.

This trauma had been manifested in the maniacal and hysterical grinning (or grimacing) characters of early Chinese contemporary art by artists such as Yue Minjun and Zeng Fanzhi on the back of the Cultural Revolution. Katie Hill, in her

essay *Why the Manic Grin? Hysterical Bodies: Contemporary Art as (Male) Trauma in Post-Cultural China*, highlighted that this period of art not only represented the trauma of transition through hysteria but also served "as a visual humanist language of discontent epitomising a search for self expression and one's roots"<sup>2</sup>. Hill noted that this trauma in fact fuelled the revolutionary process itself, by comparing the period of the Cultural Revolution to political hysteria, "of crowds of Red Guard youth shouting Mao slogans and waving the little red book", and the violence and destruction of historical buildings, artworks, books and religious icons during this period. This continued into the 1990s when China moved in the paradoxical directions of severe political repression versus ongoing movement towards international trade and contact with the Western World. Hill pointed to the paintings of grinning figures at that time as representing "the subtext of emotional experience", which in turn represented the body through a psychological and emotional lens. Starting with Geng Jianyi's *A Second State* (1987) of four grinning faces, Hill noted that the 'earless', cropped abstract faces suggest a purely conceptual and psychological state rather than a physiological one. The title of the work, she further pointed out, refers to Freudian terminology (*condition seconde*)

of a state of hysteria in a patient, "removed from normality". She cited other works that put forth such images of trauma, like Zhang Huan's *65kg* installation which saw the artist painfully suspending his naked body above a hot plate which sizzled with drops of blood dripping from his body, or Xu Zhen's *Rainbow* which depicted a person's back being slapped violently.

The China of today is marching towards a new cultural transformation as the nation further integrates itself into global capitalism and pursues the current programme of modernisation. The world Jia Aili lives in, post-Mao Zedong and post-Cultural Revolution, is a distinctly different one – a world which has seen rapid economic growth, in which material and economic concerns and the trappings of modern life dominate rather than ideological concerns.

Born in 1979, Jia Aili belongs to the 1980s generation of artists who grew up in the 'new' China, and as such "pay little attention to politics and socio-economics, instead they are much more interested in reflecting the attitudes and sentiments of their generation"<sup>3</sup>.

This generation is also marked by the one-child policy introduced in 1978, resulting in these children being the only child in the family, spoiled by parents and relatives since birth in addition to knowing no economic hardship or political trauma. This

<sup>1</sup> Jia Aili, "Untitled 无题", 2012, Oil on canvas, 50 x 40cm, Artist collection.





Jia Aili, "Untitled 无题", 2006, Oil on paper,  
93 x 122cm, Artist collection.

'ivory tower' treatment, however, left many feeling isolated and alone as they entered adulthood, made worse by the absence of siblings and therefore the huge family pressure to succeed<sup>4</sup>. Being the only child with no siblings to grow up with has made many of them fiercely introspective, focusing on their inner world – a markedly significant characteristic of the works of many artists from this generation, such as Chi Peng, Li Donghan<sup>5</sup> and Jia Aili, who focus their works on isolated, lonely characters that seem to be portraits of themselves.

At an exhibition that focused on this 1980s generation of artists, art critic Feng Boyi noted that "one of the most salient features of the young artists' work is that they are very sensitive to every change around them, (and) at the same time they are kind of self-loved [*sic*]"<sup>6</sup>. This new ideology is a form of self-centred introspection, coupled with the artists' reaction to and observations of the modern world.

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Born in Dandong, a tranquil seaside town in Liaoning Province (at the border between China and North Korea), the long and frigid winters of Jia Aili's childhood town seem to have pervaded his paintings of chilly horizons and boundless stretches of land.

Jia Aili's aunt discovered his flair for drawing and painting when he was a child. She worked at the Workers' Union headquarters in Dandong, and introduced him to the Communications Department which was in-charged of designing and making posters to display around the city.

The poster artists were Jia Aili's first art teachers. There were no computers at that time, and all designing and drawing of posters were done by hand. Soon after, seeing his skills and keen interest, Jia Aili's aunt and grandfather persuaded him to take up calligraphy and Chinese traditional painting. This became his foundation in painting, which comprised almost a decade of Chinese style traditional ink paintings<sup>7</sup>.

In 1997, Jia Aili went on to study foundations of oil painting at the Luxun Academy of Fine Arts, a school closely tied to the Soviet socialist realism of the 1950s, and till this day maintains active relationships and collaborations with Russian artists<sup>8</sup>. He became more influenced, however, by the techniques of classical artists such as Michelangelo and Caravaggio, and started to emphasise the deep perspective of the picture plane and the *chiaroscuro* treatment of light, shadow, shape and space, creating his own theatrical approach to painting.

The China Jia Aili experienced during his growing years was one of swift progression into a world superpower, rapidly building its strength and dominance. The launch of China's first astronaut into space<sup>9</sup> was a symbolic and inspirational event for Jia Aili and many others from his generation, and has become a symbol of the new China they live in as well as their generation and their country's meteoric rise in the world.

Yet at the same time, when Jia Aili was studying at the Luxun Academy of Fine Arts in Shenyang, the industrial town and its massive factories went bankrupt and millions of people were left jobless. The area, once a shining example of China's socialist economy, had to refocus itself away from heavy manufacturing to high-tech industries<sup>10</sup>.

All these have not been lost on Jia Aili. As a witness to the double-edged impact of modernisation and globalisation on both the national and the domestic front, these experiences have shaped his work. On one hand, a number of his works have focused on the symbols of China's modernisation and progress up till today, particularly China's first astronaut and first rocket launch which have been featured prominently, either directly or indirectly, in his works. On the other hand, he has also highlighted through works such as his video installa-



Jia Aili, "Untitled 无题", 2009, Oil on canvas, 160 x 120cm, Artist collection.

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Jia Aili, *Old Painter I 老画家*, 2008-2009, Oil on canvas, 230 x 400cm, Singapore Art Museum collection.



tion on the invention of the hydrogen and atomic bombs in China, as examples of technological 'progress' that contributed to the decline of mankind. Thus, in Jia Aili's large collection of works, desolate and bleak landscape paintings and frightful crash scenes feature prominently.

Jia Aili's practice is characteristic of artists in contemporary China, who merge the concepts of world art history with their personal experiences<sup>11</sup>. Jia Aili's bleak landscapes have been inspired by both western and eastern art, in which nature has been used to convey peace and harmony as well

as to represent the moral compass and timeless truth in humanity<sup>12</sup>. The portrayal of desolate landscapes in his paintings expresses the dire lack of peace and harmony in today's world; he uses nature in its bleak and tortured form to represent men's state of no return to this paradise and utopia.

Jia Aili, in conversations and interviews, shared how he sees paintings and nature as a form of utopic "enlightenment"<sup>13</sup> and that he views himself as a commentator of his age, thus calling to mind the Period of Romanticism - a movement that questioned the changes and

advancement of society during the 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century, when artists saw themselves as representing the voice of their time<sup>14</sup>. Certainly, Jia Aili and his peers share the same questioning of the age, of the changes and advancements they see in their society at this time. Like the Romantics who were ill at ease and felt repulsion for the time they lived in, partly due to a loss of faith in the world, Jia Aili's paintings have portrayed his world similarly in no uncertain terms. The *Serbonian Bog* (2007) series of paintings, while at first glance may look like a lake with water lilies, on detailed in-

spection look more like a swamp consisting of dank stagnant waters which may have unknown dangers lurking below. The sole character in these paintings wears a mask, which underscores the tension of survival, as if requiring the apparatus to live and without it the person may suffocate. Interestingly, the character in each of the paintings is carrying an object that seems to be a part of the person. For Jia Aili, the book and the television are symbols of good and evil (respectively) of this age. The television, in particular, features strongly in many of his paintings as a mesmerising

and all-controlling force which could put people under its spell<sup>15</sup>. Jia Aili admitted to having a love-hate relationship with the television, precisely because he loves watching TV but recognises that it "inflicts damage on people's attitudes, mental states, and the ability to think for themselves"<sup>16</sup>.

Jia Aili conveys his feelings of horror towards this age through his crash paintings, with the destruction of the symbols of technological advancement signalling a post-industrial age, and mankind situated in a chaotic and apocalyptic environment. Like Romantic paintings that captured the uncontrollable power and unpredictability of nature<sup>17</sup>, Jia Aili's work (*Untitled*, 2008) on an airplane crash is a trademark scenario for some of his earlier paintings that captured the uncontrollable forces of progress and technological advancement. His trademark bleak landscape is punctuated by a massive plane crash which looks faded and as if the event has occurred sometime ago - with the debris already disintegrating.

Jia Aili, of course, is not alone in expressing horror at humanity and the state of the Chinese society today. Artists like Wang Gongxin have also responded to the same contradictions and confrontations between "contemporary culture and the logic of capitalism". Wang's *Myth of Capitalism* (2007), for example, created nightmarish scenes of an auto junkyard, a metaphor for the "ghoulish results of humankind's pursuit of capital and the hegemony of industrialism". Similarly, Jia Aili used the junkyard and the discarding of modern inventions like refrigerators in his works like *The Wasteland* (2007), *Untitled* (2008) and *Old Painter I* (2008 - 2009) to illustrate this maddening pursuit of capitalism and industrialism.

If there is one underlying characteristic in all of Jia Aili's work, it is that of loneliness, of man's solitary existence as he wanders through life's struggles. The lone character in *Old Painter*, *Duino Elegies* (which has a fridge compressor component that quite literally reminds one of life's cold nature, of a portrayal of the Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke who wrote *Duino Elegies*), as well as the lone bed and empty streets or seascape in Jia Aili's *Untitled* series of paper works, all point to one's lone struggles against the odds. While there is a Romantic suggestion



of an exploration of the inner psyche and inner world, as well as a certain sad and contemplative quality to all his works<sup>18</sup>, the struggles and contradictions are clear from the vast expansive space and stage in all his paintings. Karen Smith, in her essay on Jia Aili, attributed this quality in his work to his childhood, during which books by Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and Balzac were present in his household and read by the artist in his youth<sup>19</sup>. It is this “tragedy of struggling” against the odds, and the knowledge that “human nature ... is not always destined to triumph” that underlies all his works<sup>20</sup>. The lone figures in his paintings are like a sad postscript to an apocalyptic chapter in the history of mankind. Also, symbols of *memento mori* (‘remember your mortality’) abound in his works like *Untitled* (2010) – two works of the same name and same year.

Thankfully, despite the struggles and odds, a glimmer of hope exists for the young artist. A belief in the quest for truth and hope are increasingly emerging from Jia Aili’s works. His most recent series of works in 2012 seem to portray China’s first astronaut as a divine saviour whose quest for the truth might be the answer to the state of crisis Jia Aili sees his generation being in (not coincidentally, the astronaut comes from the same province as Jia Aili). *Untitled* (2010 - 2012), depicting young children wearing astronaut helmets (which also makes them look like angelic beings, and the painting took inspiration from Leonardo da Vinci’s *Madonna on the Rocks* which originally had John the Baptist paying tribute to baby Jesus), also alludes to this optimism that seems to indicate a slight shift in Jia Aili’s take on life and society.

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Increasingly, the power and might of 21<sup>st</sup>-century China have been portrayed as being intrinsically flawed. Works by artists like Shen Shaomin, Huang Yongping, and husband-and-wife team Sun Yuan and Peng Yu have captured these ever increasing rifts and cracks in China’s stance of worldwide dominance amid its modernisation. Jia Aili and his peers are no different. Writer Liu Kang pointed out one reason for this rift - that the growing crisis is due to the forces of globalisation (which he defined as “the global expansion of capitalism”)

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Jia Aili, *Untitled* 无题, 2010-2012, Oil on canvas, 233 x 203cm, Artist collection.

coming to odds with the localised (and still present) ideologies of “revolutionary and socialist legacies”<sup>21</sup>. In that sense, Liu pointed to the struggles of China’s modernisation – started by Deng Xiaoping’s *gaige kaifeng* – as never fully accepting “the norms and values of global capitalism”. The “fragmented, piecemeal way of reform” and “partial” globalisation would have no choice but to go all the way, towards a full-scale integration of globalisation<sup>22</sup>.

Jia Aili’s apocalyptic landscapes and *mise en scene* of crashes and tragedies reflect this tension and growing crisis, as well as the state of uncertainty in China today. Despite growing up during prosperous times and in an open economy, his generation is increasingly aware of “the double-edged nature of economic and technological globalisation” – China as a country with a huge population and still low per capita economic productivity<sup>23</sup>, which creates a widening gulf between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’, greatly polarising its people. The question to answer, then, would be: “*What is (and is there) an alternative to capitalism in the quest of modernising China?*” This seems to be the unanswered question (and hope) in Jia Aili’s paintings, which his recent (and slightly more optimistic) works seem to be asking.

Yet, at the same time, while expressing the need and want to be modernised, Jia Aili played with words through the titles of his painting (playing with the words *fengjing* which translate as ‘landscape’ but changing the *feng* to the Chinese character that means ‘mad’), showing his acknowledgement of the Chinese literati tradition that has been around for hundreds of years. The work in the Singapore Art Museum’s collection, *Old Painter I* (2008 - 2009), is itself a moving tribute by the young artist to the widely acknowledged father of modern Chinese painting, Wu Guanzhong. Jia Aili commented on how the senior artist had once said that “painting knows no age”<sup>24</sup>, and he acknowledged the importance of that sense of timelessness and recognition of the past and traditions.

This struggle for balance and co-existence of cultures and traditions in modern times is what Jia Aili and his generation are essentially fighting for. These concerns are at the heart of their artistic practices, and their art.

David Chew is Curator,  
Singapore Art Museum.

<sup>1</sup> Lin, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Jiang, p. 72, 78.

<sup>3</sup> *80’s artists emerge with isolation*. (2009, Aug 18). Global Times (<http://english.sina.com/life/p/2009/0817/263861.html>), accessed 22 May 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Video interview with Jia Aili for the *Troposphere* exhibition, Beijing, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Ku, *Writing for Us at Thirty Years Old: The disappearing Rothko* – on Jia Aili’s work and background.

<sup>9</sup> *China Puts Its First Man in Space*. (2003, Oct 15). BBC (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3192330.stm>), accessed 25 May 2012.

<sup>10</sup> A famous Chinese documentary by filmmaker Wang Bing charted the decline of Shenyang’s Tiexi district. The nine-hour long documentary was named after the district itself, *Tie Xi Qu (West of the Tracks)* in English, and used three stories on the city’s inhabitants to illustrate its decline and demise (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0389448/>), accessed 23 May 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Zhu Zhu, p. 35 – 37.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, p. 127: French philosophers Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Francois-Rene de Chateaubriand, who respectively i) elevated nature as man’s only moral guide and source of innocence and timeless truth that stood against the march of civilisation; and ii) in a 1793 essay on art, criticised French painters for not loving nature enough, extolled nature and landscape’s moral and intellectual bearing.

<sup>13</sup> Azure Wu’s essay, *Painting as Existence*, 2010, in her conversation with the artist.

<sup>14</sup> The poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, in his *English Essays: Sidney to Macaulay, 1909-14*, The Harvard Classics, called artists the “unacknowledged legislators of the world”, who provided the moral and civil guidance for the innovations and advancements of society

(<http://www.bartleby.com/27/23.html>, accessed 12 May 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Karen Smith. (2007). *A Walk in the world of Jia Aili*.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> *Romanticism*. Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History ([www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/roma/hd\\_roma.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/roma/hd_roma.htm)), accessed 29 May 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, p. 37 and 42: “the role of the romantic artist was also one of solitude, the artist as a lone figure deep in tortured introspection, the artist standing outside society. Standing against the world, the heroic refusal to sell out was one of the proudest badges of the romantic artist.”

<sup>19</sup> Karen Smith. (2007). *A Walk in the world of Jia Aili*.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Liu Kang p. 5, 10.

<sup>22</sup> Liu Kang, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Liu Kang, p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> Jia Aili email interview, May 2012.

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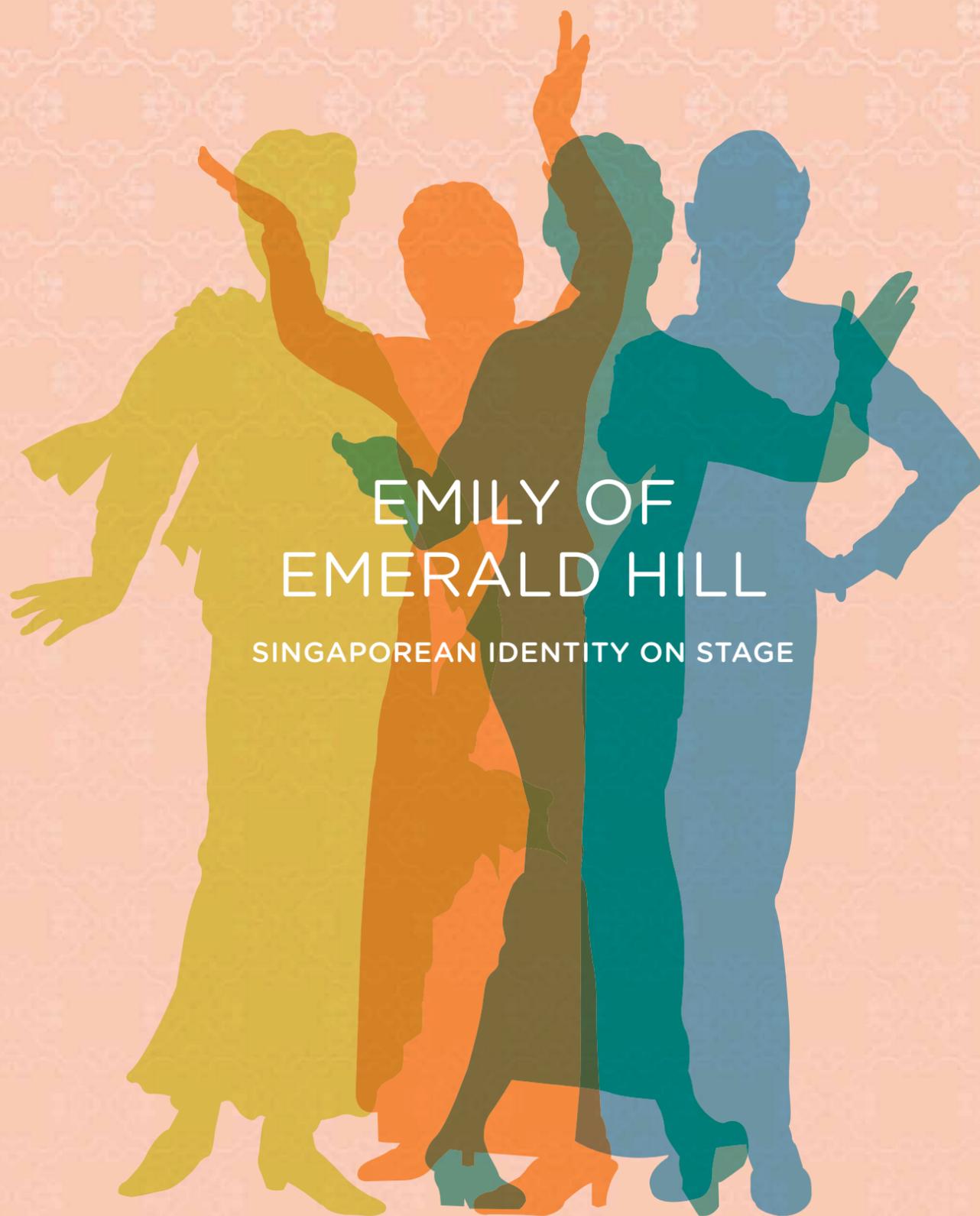
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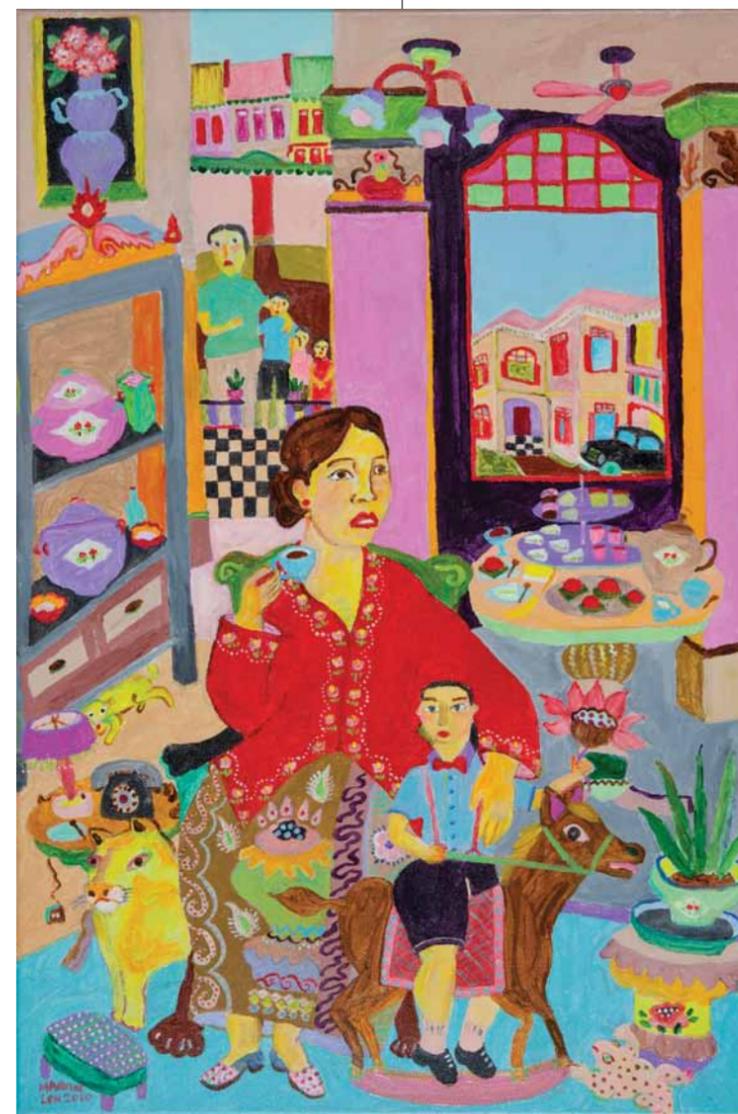
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# EMILY OF EMERALD HILL

SINGAPOREAN IDENTITY ON STAGE



Martin Loh, *Emily of Emerald Hill*, Singapore, 2010. Acrylic on canvas. On loan from Stella Kon.

STELLA KON WROTE *Emily of Emerald Hill*, drawing upon her Peranakan family background and experiences growing up in Singapore in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The play won the *Singapore National Playwriting Competition* in 1983. It is a monologue about the life of Nyonya Emily Gan, who became the matriarch of a wealthy household through determination and sheer strength of character. In its rich characterisation of Peranakan life, the play expresses a distinctly Singaporean identity.

A critical and popular success both locally and overseas, *Emily* is the nation's most-staged play. Critics embrace it for pioneering a convincing voice in Singaporean theatre, evoking strong local themes, familiar characters and recognisable patterns

of speech. Above all, the play resonates with theatregoers worldwide through the universal values of love and humanity.

The exhibition *Emily of Emerald Hill: Singaporean Identity on Stage* explores the origins and Peranakan roots of the play, and examines its performance history and legacy in the context of Singapore's Peranakan-language and English-language theatre scenes. On display are approximately 300 objects from over 30 individual and institutional lenders and donors, including Stella Kon, the three major Emily performers (Margaret Chan, Pearly Chua, and Ivan Heng), and leading local theatre companies such as W!LD RICE and Theatreworks.

A first in national museum history, the Peranakan Museum has built an exhibition around a Singaporean play and the story of local theatre. The museum is a space traditionally associated with the appreciation of material art forms. But this celebration of an intangible national treasure from the performing arts highlights the fact that, as surely as art and objects, *Emily of Emerald Hill* is a cherished part of Singapore's heritage.

#### STELLA KON: LIFE AND WORKS

In a cosy yellow corner of the exhibition designed to evoke a writer's study, visitors can get up close and personal with Stella Kon. The playwright discusses candidly her life and works in a recorded interview made exclusively for the exhibition. Her reflections are enhanced with displays of photos, glassware once owned by important family members and copies of her key published works.

Born Lim Sing Po (literally "star waves"), Stella Kon is a descendent of prominent Peranakan philanthropists, including Dr Lim Boon Keng (1869 - 1957), Tan Boo Liat (1875 - 1934) and Tan Tock Seng (1798 - 1850). Dr Lim Boon Keng and Tan Boo Liat co-founded the Singapore Chinese Girls' School; Tan Tock Seng contributed money to build the hospital named after him, and to build the Thian Hock Keng temple, the oldest Chinese temple in Singapore. In the play, Tan Boo Liat is reflected in the character of Emily's father-in-law.

Stella Kon is one of Singapore's earliest and most prolific female writers. Her works are concerned with distinctly Singaporean themes, and reflect her national and multicultural heritage. Besides plays, she has written short stories, novels, poetry, and since 2000, primarily musicals.

MUSEINGS.



(Right): Cupboard, Straits Settlements (Singapore, Penang, Malacca), early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Wood and glass. With European silver and Chinese porcelain. On loan from the family of Professor Lim Kok Ann.

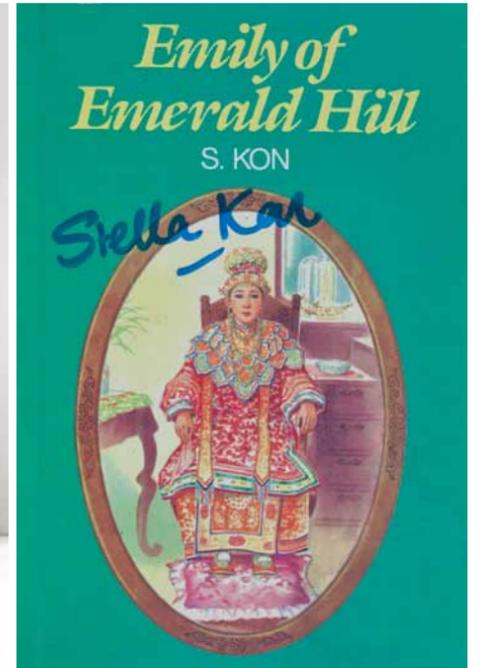
Made in the region, the cupboard adorned the sitting room of Oberon, Stella Kon's family home on Emerald Hill.

(Far right): *Emily of Emerald Hill*, first edition, Singapore, 1989. Peranakan Museum. Gift of Stella Kon.

As a pillar of local literature, *Emily of Emerald Hill* has been frequently referenced in academic works and thousands of youths have studied and dramatised it in school. While distinctly Singaporean, *Emily* has been interpreted as a symbol of Peranakan, Malaysian, Southeast Asian, and Asian identities. Above all, the play deals with the universal values of love and humanity.

« Seow Poh Leng family, Singapore, around 1930. Hand-coloured photograph. On loan from Dr John Seow, in memory of Professor Seow Eu Jin.

This photograph shows Stella Kon's grandparents and their children – the inspiration for parts of the play.



Wedding Garment, Malacca, Straits Settlements, late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Silk, gold thread, cotton. Peranakan Museum.

**PERFORMING EMILY:  
THE MANY FACES OF EMILY GAN**

The remarkable performance history of this landmark play includes over 300 performances over 30 years, across four continents, seven countries, and seventeen cities. Many acclaimed actors and directors have staged *Emily* through the years; some of the best-known actresses and actors are Margaret Chan, Pearly Chua, Ivan Heng, Leow Puay Tin, Neo Swee Lin, Claire Wong, Aileen Lau and Jalyn Han.

The exhibition focuses on the first three. Margaret Chan is often considered the “original Little Nyonya”, since she was the first Singaporean to portray Emily, and was given a coveted invitation to perform the play at the prestigious Traverse Theatre in Scotland in 1986. Malaysian Pearly Chua has made a career as Emily, and has performed the character over 160 times since 1990. Ivan Heng is the only man to play the role; the high regard he has for the play is reflected in his decision to launch his company WILD RICE with a staging of the play.

Original posters, photos, brochures, props and costumes of these three Emilys are on display at the exhibition within a space designed as a black-and-white dressing room. In this backdrop of dramatic intimacy, they share reflections of their *Emily* journeys via interviews recorded on video especially for the exhibition. A soundtrack of songs performed by the various actors in the play through the years plays softly in the background, providing audio to enliven the experience.

**STAGING A NATION:  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE THEATRE  
IN SINGAPORE**

*Emily* is regarded as a seminal work and a landmark event in the history of English language theatre in Singapore. A long wall of brochures and posters from key local productions in the post-war period through the 1980s provides context for the play. Local theatre was born in the 1960s and 1970s, but remained limited, largely due to a lack of trained full-time professionals, minimal funding, and no critical mass of audience comfortable with English. The 1980s marked a golden decade as these conditions improved, resulting in professionalisation of the scene and creation of influential local productions, including *Emily*.

**STAGING A COMMUNITY:  
PERANAKAN LANGUAGE THEATRE  
IN SINGAPORE**

Themes of family and nostalgia, and the technique of female impersonation (via Ivan Heng's performance) in *Emily* parallel issues in Peranakan language theatre, called *Wayang Peranakan*, in Singapore. It was performed in Baba Malay, a Malay creole with heavy borrowings from the Hokkien Chinese dialect. *Wayang Peranakan* emerged in the early 1900s and experienced a boom in the post-war 1950s. Casts consisted only of men (as it was considered socially inappropriate for women to perform onstage) until the 1960s, and the plays were usually staged for charities. After a lull in the 1960s and 1970s, the

scene became vibrant again in the 1980s amidst a background of heightened interest in Peranakan culture and community in Singapore. Since the success of *Pileh Minatu* (Choosing a Daughter-in-law) in 1984, *Wayang Peranakan* has been staged almost every year by Gunong Sayang, one of the oldest Peranakan associations in Southeast Asia.

**A PERANAKAN TALE**

At the heart of *Emily* is a Peranakan tale, inspired by the author's Peranakan background. The play makes several material references to Peranakan art of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. These objects reflect the varied roles of the character Emily Gan as woman, wife, mother, daughter-in-

law, hostess and socialite. Drawing from the museum's collection, key objects are displayed, accompanied by significant passages from the play. The objects are displayed in showcases spread out across a large book-like structure, representing visually the simultaneous identities of *Emily* as a script, a play and an exhibition. An Emily mannequin, dressed in a traditional bridal costume set on a mini-stage, plants the character within the setting. A strikingly unconventional bright pink provides the background, highlighting the contemporary aspects of the play. Pink was a favoured colour for Peranakan art at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**SETTING  
THE STAGE**

Stella Kon derived the setting of the play from her childhood experiences in the 1950s, growing up in a house called Oberon located at 117 Emerald Hill. In a part of the exhibition, Kon worked with museum curators to create a space that evokes the interior of Oberon. Mixing fact and fiction, the display re-imagines the setting of the play through a combination of original furnishings from the house and objects from the Peranakan Museum. A *sarong kebaya* worn by the playwright's grandmother (Mrs Seow Poh Leng, née Polly Tan Poh Li, 1898 - 1969) – inspiration for the character Emily Gan – greets visitors to this part of the exhibition. Three large objects

from Oberon, anchored in the memories of the family, dominate the space: an elegant cupboard packed with family porcelain and silver; a standing clock that was a gift to Oberon's matriarch (Stella's grandmother); and a grand, silver horseracing trophy that belonged to an honourable ancestor (Stella's great-grandfather). Close attention was also paid to key architectural details that evoke the look of Oberon: two large pillars were constructed and wall-coverings that mimic the exact floral wall tiles in Oberon were produced. Mother-of-pearl chairs, which were not part of the furnishings at Oberon, are also included in this imagined world of *Emily*. Embodying the spirit of the play, this installation blends reality and fantasy to set the stage.

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(From left): Margaret Chan as Emily, Ivan Heng as Emily, Singapore, 2011. Images courtesy of Orangedot and W!LD RICE and Albert Lim KS.



Gallery view of *Emily of Emerald Hill: Singaporean Identity on Stage* at the Peranakan Museum.

#### FROM PAGE TO STAGE

A theatrette was specially created for this exhibition to facilitate appreciation of *Emily* as a performing art. Only six out of the approximately 350 performances of the play are known to have been recorded. Highlights from these six performances were stitched together to create a 12-minute video that loops daily to provide visitors with a taste of the play. The full play can also be enjoyed daily at 3pm. This version comprises videos of five Emilys (Margaret Chan, Ivan Heng, Neo Swee Lin, Pearly Chua and Leow Puay Tin). Each actor has created his or her own interpretation of Emily and, in fact, the same actor portrays her differently with each new production. This underlines the temporal,

personal, and fluid nature of theatre as art. An additional treat in this part of the exhibition is the chance to sit in original theatre chairs kindly donated by the Capitol Theatre in Singapore. On 7 July 2012, a live performance of *Emily* by Margaret Chan was held at the exhibition.

#### THE EMILY LEGACY

*Emily* has inspired artistic creativity both locally and abroad. Some of the products inspired, including paintings, poetry, literature and plays, are displayed in the exhibition. A generation of local young people has studied and performed *Emily* in schools. As a role model for national theatre, the play has left an indelible mark on some of Singapore's leading theatre practitioners.

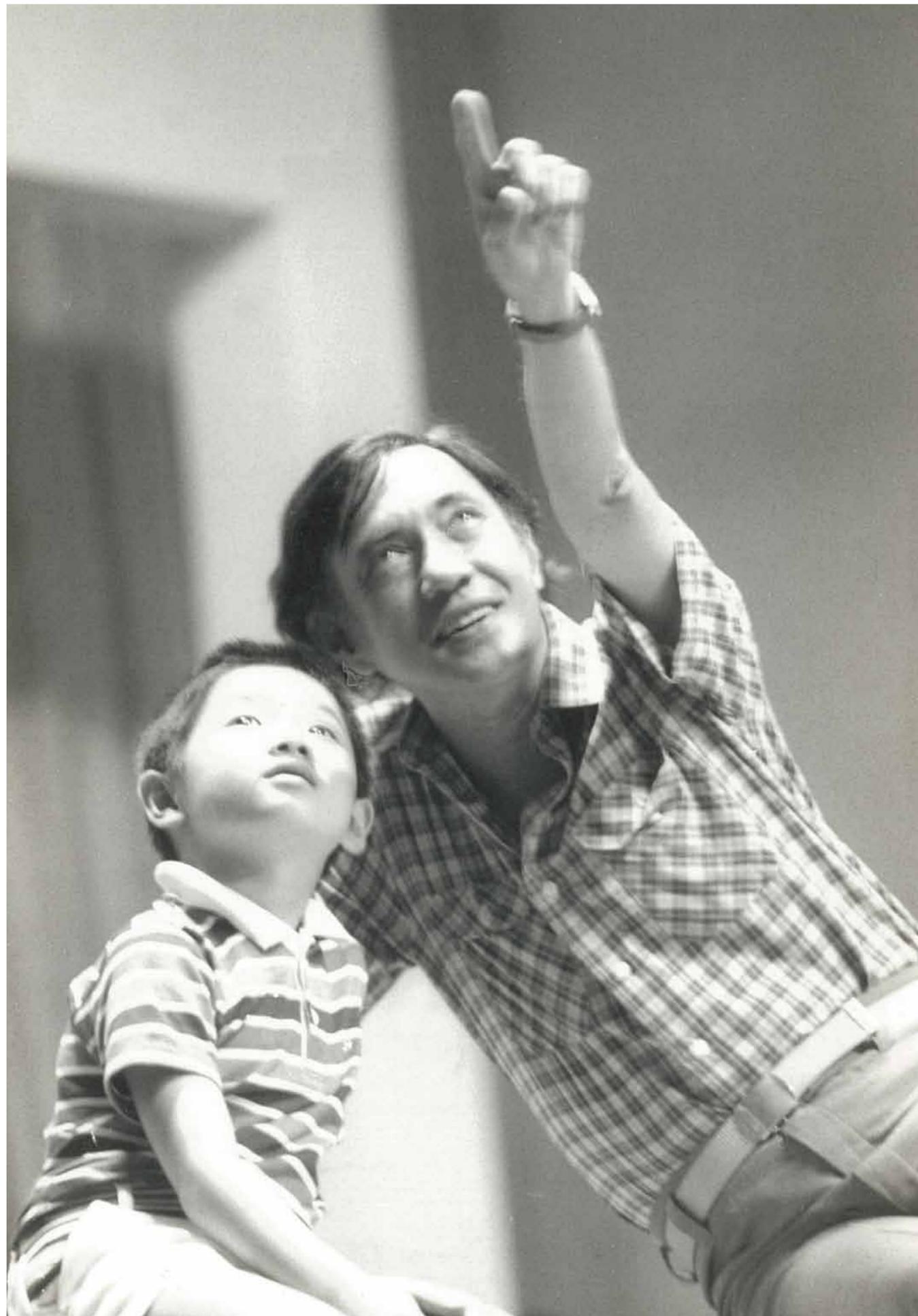
Translations into multiple languages, including Mandarin, Icelandic and Japanese, affirm its international appeal. More than just a play, *Emily of Emerald Hill* is embedded in the Singaporean consciousness and its cultural memory.

*Jackie Yoong is Curator, Peranakan Museum.*

The exhibition *Emily of Emerald Hill: Singaporean Identity on Stage* opens from 1 June 2012 to 17 February 2013 at the Peranakan Museum



(From left): Margaret Chan as Emily, Singapore, 1993. Image courtesy of Margaret Chan. Pearly Chua as Emily, Kuala Lumpur, 2005. Image courtesy of Chin San Sooi. Ivan Heng as Emily, Singapore, 2011. Image courtesy of W!LD RICE and Albert Lim KS.



# A LIFE OF PRACTICE »

## KUO PAO KUN

2012 MARKS THE 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE passing of Kuo Pao Kun (1939 - 2002), the Singaporean dramatist, art activist and public intellectual. Through a selection of photographs, manuscripts, letters, costumes and archival footages, excerpts of Kuo's life will be exhibited for the first time at the National Museum of Singapore come September 2012. Besides featuring the life and works of the man, the exhibition *A Life of Practice - Kuo Pao Kun* also aims to shed light on the development of arts and culture in Singapore.

TEXT BY  
LEE HUI YI LYNN

### RUMINATION ON OPEN CULTURE

The early works of Kuo include translated plays of remarkable classics from different parts of the world, such as *The Trial* (1966)<sup>1</sup>, *The Black Soul* (1967)<sup>2</sup> and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1967)<sup>3</sup>. The pioneering act of staging *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* introduced Bertolt Brecht and the Epic Theatre to the Singapore audience. Similarly, *The Black Soul*, a story about a black family, was also a bold attempt in putting forward a play that the Singapore audience might be culturally unfamiliar with.

Kuo was detained under the Internal Security Act in March 1976 for four years and seven months. While many viewed Kuo's detained experience as a watershed to his creative works, the distinct emphasis on multiculturalism in his post-1980 works was already evident in his translated works during the 1960s. Such contemplations consolidated and took shape in his post-1980 dramatic career when he produced salient works such as *The Coffin is too Big for the Hole* (1985), *The Silly Little Girl and the Funny Old Tree* (1987), *Mama Looking for Her Cat* (1988), *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral* (1995) and *The Spirits Play* (1998). One of his most iconic works, the multilingual play *Mama Looking for Her Cat*, transcended language and cultural boundaries and represented Kuo's rumination on an 'Open Culture'. In Kuo's own words, Open Culture had existed for a long time in the Singapore society, but only became a discernible, conscious public articulation in the mid-1980s; collectively, Singaporeans began to reflect an unprecedented openness, reaching for a diversity beyond the Singapore cultural setting of the pre-1980s; simultaneously, this global openness was distinguished by an overwhelming interest in things local and indigenous.

Kuo's rumination on Open Culture was apparent in the various roles he played in the society. These prominent roles of Kuo as a dramatist, an activist and intellectual will be examined in the exhibition.

«  
Stage shot of *The Little White Sailing Boat*, 1982. Courtesy of The Theatre Practice.

*The Little White Sailing Boat* was a concerted effort of 14 Chinese theatre groups, led by Kuo, who wrote and directed the play. It was a significant milestone for Chinese theatre in Singapore and for Kuo's career as a playwright. His next work, *The Coffin is too Big for the Hole*, was entirely different from the realistically staged *Boat* in terms of presentation, style and concept.

»  
Kuo Pao Kun and Goh Lay Kuan in Australia, 1960s. Courtesy of The Theatre Practice.

Goh studied at Victoria Ballet Guild in Melbourne while Kuo enrolled himself in National Institute of Dramatic Arts in Sydney. They founded the Singapore Performing Arts School after returning from Australia. The school officially opened on 1 July 1965, which was also the day the couple got married.



**ARTISTIC ESTABLISHMENTS**

Upon his return from an overseas education at the National Institute of Dramatic Art in Sydney, Kuo set up the Singapore Performing Arts School with his wife, Goh Lay Kuan, in 1965. The school was arguably the first in Singapore and the region that incorporated education, training and practice within an institution. Professionally managed, the school's Dance Wing was overseen by Goh Lay Kuan and the Drama Wing was supervised by Kuo himself.

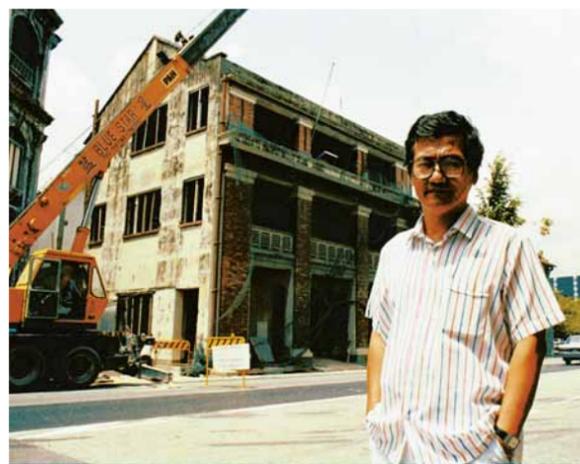
Two and a half decades after the establishment of the Singapore Performing Arts School, The Substation was founded with Kuo as its first Artistic Director. Positioned as the Home for the Arts, The Substation prides itself as a multicultural and multi-disciplinary arts centre with a wide array of programmes that encourage discussion, exploration and innovation.

The Substation also created the first Black Box Theatre in Singapore which propelled the local 'Little Theatre Movement'. This movement originated from the Théâtre Libre founded by André Antoine in 1887 in Paris, which heralded the Independent Theatre Movement that advocated non-conventional and non-commercial theatrical performances and organisations.

The Raw Theatre Season was started in 1991 at The Substation and it opened up a platform for practitioners to experiment and explore. Practitioners also attempted to venture into various art forms such as the Avant-Garde Theatre and Experimental Theatre. The Season was synonymous with the spirit of the 'Little Theatre Movement' in Singapore. Standards of the exploratory works from the Season were not necessary spectacular, but they were seen as breakthroughs in the theatre scene. Kuo aptly expressed the whole spirit of the Season as "Better to have a Worthy Failure than a Mediocre Success".

Rebuilding works on the old Substation, 1989.

With the support of the then Ministry of Community Development and a redevelopment fund of S\$1.07 million, the disused powerhouse underwent renovation works in the late 1980s. The Substation officially opened in 1990 with a series of shows and festivals. It is also Singapore's first independent arts centre.



The class of 1963, National Institute of Dramatic Arts. Courtesy of The Theatre Practice.

Kuo graduated with a diploma in theatre production in September 1964. He directed Paddy Chayevsky's *Marty* as his graduation project.

» Stage shot of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, 1967. Courtesy of The Theatre Practice.

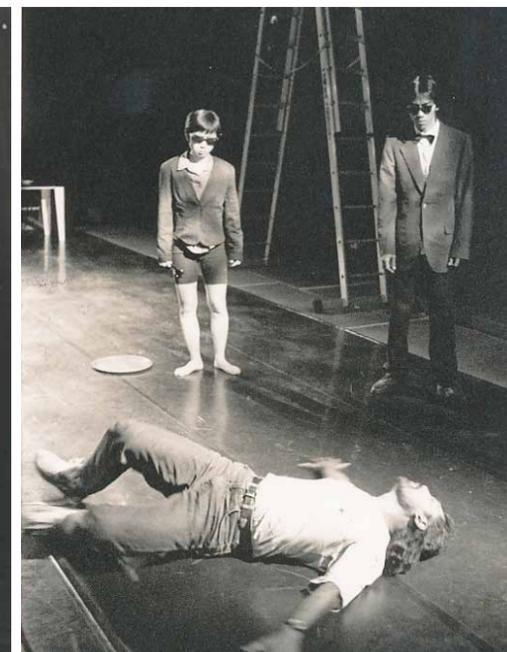
*The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is a renowned play by Bertolt Brecht, one of the most important theatre practitioners of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was the very first time a Brecht play was presented to the Singapore audience.

**EXHIBITION INFORMATION:**  
**A Life of Practice - Kuo Pao Kun**  
 15 September 2012 - 24 February 2013  
 Exhibition Gallery 2,  
 National Museum of Singapore



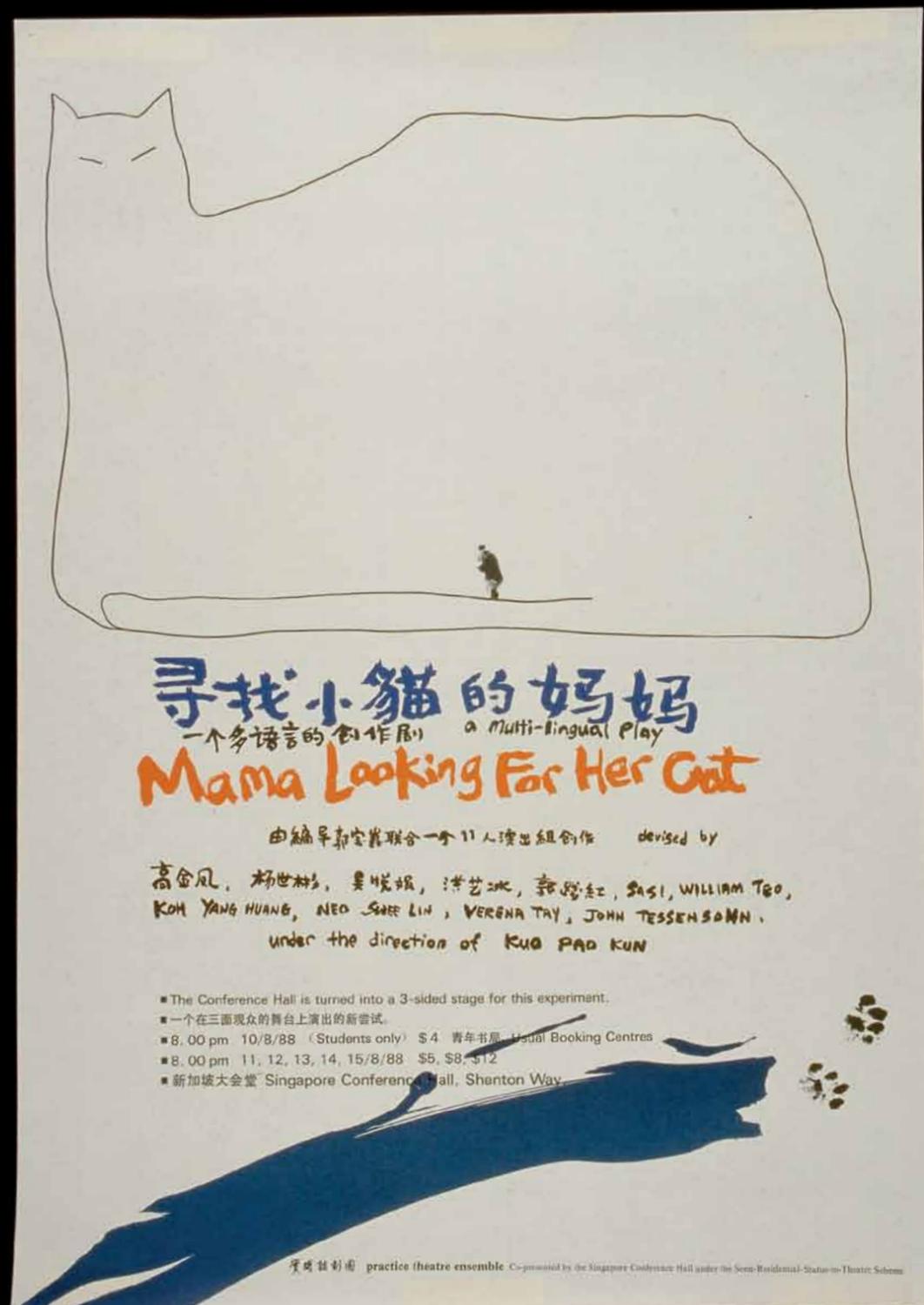
Kuo Pao Kun (left) with cast of *The Black Soul*, 1967. Courtesy of The Theatre Practice.

*The Black Soul* was a play translated from Lorraine Hansbury's *A Raisin in the Sun*. Kuo had hoped to illustrate the various personalities of a black family, the clashes of the old and new, and the exceptional courage the family had demonstrated.



Stage shot of *OZero01*, 1991. Courtesy of The Theatre Practice.

*OZero01* was a devised piece directed by Kuo to launch the Raw Theatre Season. *Listen to the Dolor of Dolores* by William Teo was also one of the pieces presented at the first Raw Theatre Season.



Chinese New Year greetings to family and friends while in detention, 1977. Courtesy of The Theatre Practice.

Kuo was detained in March 1976 under the Internal Security Act for four years seven months. During this period, he would design and draw greeting cards for family and friends during special occasions. This card expressed the sentiment that "The world owes us nothing nor does it forsake us."



Kuo Pao Kun with Wong Kan Seng at the Cultural Medallion Awards Presentation Ceremony, 1989. Courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore.

Kuo was awarded the Cultural Medallion in 1989 for his contributions and dedication to the local theatre and arts scene.

## ECOLOGY OF SINGAPORE'S THEATRE

The ecology of Singapore's theatre in post-1980 was in one way or another associated with Kuo's pursuits to construct an environment conducive for the growth of the arts in Singapore. For instance, the late 1970s saw the decline of Chinese theatre in Singapore, and Kuo turned this around and led 14 Chinese theatre groups in a production by writing and directing *The Little White Sailing Boat* in 1982. In 1983 and 1987, Kuo took charge in organising drama camps, inviting theatre veterans such as Danny Yung (Hong Kong), Yu Qiuyu (China), Gao Xingjian (China) and Stan Lai (Taiwan) to Singapore. These camps stimulated reviews and conversations on the theatre scenes both locally and internationally. In the year 2000, Kuo and T. Sasitharan co-founded the Theatre Training and Research Programme<sup>4</sup>, a professional programme with a structure that was largely inspired by the multicultural practice of Kuo. Students were immersed in four Asian Classical Theatre Cultures (Chinese, Indian, Japanese and Indonesian), as well as European Classical Theatres, with exposure to Contemporary Theatre methodologies.

As an instrumental figure in the development of the local theatre scene, Kuo assembled and fostered a critical mass, which subsequently blossomed into an indicative generation of multifaceted artists and practitioners. He established local, regional and international networks, thereby facilitating artistic exchanges.

As we look back, the creative path Kuo trudged was an interesting juxtaposition with the emergence of Singapore as an economic powerhouse, which further accentuated his invaluable contributions to the local arts scene.

Lee Hui Yi Lynn is Assistant Curator, National Museum of Singapore.

«  
Poster for *Mama Looking for Her Cat*, 1988. Collection of National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board.

*Mama Looking for Her Cat* premiered at the Singapore Conference Hall in 1988. Besides being a multilingual play, Kuo also experimented with the presentation by transforming the hall into an open stage. *Mama Looking for Her Cat* was also a devised piece (or collaborative creation).

<sup>1</sup> Translated from *The One Day of the Year*, written by Alan Seymour (Australia) in 1958.

<sup>2</sup> Translated from *A Raisin in the Sun*, written by Lorraine Hansberry (America) and debuted on Broadway in 1959.

<sup>3</sup> Completed in the summer of 1944 by Bertolt Brecht (Germany), one of the most important and influential theatre practitioners of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>4</sup> The Theatre Training and Research Programme suspended its teaching and training activity in July 2008 but classes resumed in January 2012 under a new name, Intercultural Theatre Institute.

## THE WEDDING DRESS: 200 YEARS OF WEDDING FASHION FROM THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON

THIS AUGUST, VISITORS to the National Museum of Singapore will be treated to a fantastic collection of bridal costumes and accessories from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London for the very first time. The exhibition tells the history of the wedding dress and its enduring popularity from the early 1800s to the present day, through fascinating accounts about the lives of the wearers, their fashion choices and the economic and social conditions of the time through the eight major themes outlined in this article. Also on display are gowns by celebrated designers, including Charles Frederick Worth, Charles James, Christian Lacroix, John Galiano, Norman Hartnell, Vera Wang, Vivienne Westwood and Zandra Rhodes. Sumptuous wedding dresses worn by celebrities such as Dita Von Teese and Gwen Stefani will also be on display. In conjunction with the exhibition, the National Museum of Singapore will also present at the Canyon a small display of its own collection of Western and traditional wedding costumes worn by the various ethnic communities in Singapore.

TEXT BY CHUNG MAY KHUEN

### CREATING TRADITIONS: 1800 - 1840

Today, the white wedding dress has become a universal symbol of the bride. It is worn by brides of different faiths and nationalities on their wedding day, even in countries where it is not a tradition to do so. However, in 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain, white was just one of the several colours worn by brides. While silk woven with gold and silver were preferred amongst the royal and aristocratic families, most women chose fabrics with colours and motifs on them. This was because many women would wear their wedding dresses again after the wedding day and white would hence be less practical.

Since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most weddings in Britain were conducted in the church or at home. Church weddings were conducted between 8am and midday and women had to cover their heads and arms. Families of high rank could purchase a licence to marry anywhere they wished, most of the time at home, where brides could put on short-sleeved dresses.

### THE VICTORIAN BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM: 1837 - 1901

White only became the dominant colour for wedding dresses in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Queen Victoria (reigned 1837 to 1901) wore white when she married Prince Albert in 1840. The veil and orange-blossom wreath also became popular at that time. In addition, fresh or artificial flowers like roses and the myrtle, chosen for their association with love, were used for headdresses and trimmings. Handkerchiefs and fans were also popular accessories. When honeymoon became more popular from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, brides would include a new bonnet, gloves and a bag as part of the accessories for their going away outfit. Many of these wedding items were preserved and some became family heirlooms.

While the bride's dress changed with fashion, the bridegroom adopted a standard wedding outfit consisting of a dark grey or black coat worn with light coloured trousers and a white waistcoat. It only became customary for the men to wear new clothes on their wedding day during the reign of Queen Victoria.



(Left): Wax and paper orange blossom (which symbolises fertility and virtue) wreath, British, 1857. Worn by Margaret Scott Lang for her marriage to Henry Scott in London in 1857. Given by Miss C. M. Higgs. V&A:T.10A, C-1970 ©Victoria and Albert Museum / V&A Images.

(Right): Kid leather wedding gloves with silk satin gauntlets trimmed with lace, British, 1833. Worn by an unknown bride on 31 March 1833. Given by Miss Stephenson. V&A:T.24&A-1935 ©Victoria and Albert Museum / V&A Images.



» Embroidered muslin wedding dress, lined with silk, British, 1834. Probably worn by Mary-Anne-Grace Quin who married Herbert Mayo on 3 November 1834 in London. Given by Miss Gaster. V&A: T.63-1973 ©Victoria and Albert Museum / V&A Images.



«  
Silk velvet wedding dress  
embroidered with pearl beads,  
British, 1927. Worn by Maud  
Cecil for her marriage to  
Richard Greville Acton Steel  
on 17 November 1927. Given  
by Oriel and Alicia Robinson,  
direct descendents of Maud  
Cecil. V&A: T.126-2009  
©Victoria and Albert Museum  
/ V&A Images.

#### ARTISTIC STYLES: 1900 - 1930s

Historical costumes were an important source of influence on bridal dresses at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These styles, described by some writers as 'picturesque', appealed to women who wanted to express their distinctive identity from other brides. Evening wear was another source of inspiration in terms of the fabric, cut, construction and decoration, especially after the First World War (1914 - 1918). To add a touch of glamour to these dresses, luxurious fabrics such as metallic lamés and lace were used. At the same time, a group of young and creative British designers like Norman Hartnell (1901 - 1979) began to set up couture houses in London. Paris however, continued to dominate women's fashion internationally.

Embroidered silk satin wedding dress designed by Norman  
Hartnell, London, 1933. Commissioned by Margaret Whigham  
for her marriage to Charles Sweeny on 21 February 1933.  
Given and worn by Margaret, Duchess of Argyll.  
V&A: T.836-1974 ©Victoria and Albert Museum / V&A Images.

#### THE SOCIETY WEDDING: 1920s - 1930s

In the 1920s and 1930s, weddings in British high society became occasions of great significance for the public as a result of intense media coverage in the form of photographs and gossip columns. One such display at the exhibition is the bridal dress which belonged to socialite Margaret Whigham. Designed by Norman Hartnell, the slender ivory satin sheath gown is characterised by embroidery, appliqué and cut work flowers embellished with beads and pearls. The dress also features a 3.6-metre train.

#### FROM AUSTERITY TO THE 'NEW LOOK': 1939 - 1951

In 1939, war broke out in Europe and clothes rationing was introduced in Britain in 1941. To cope with the shortage of cloth, resourceful ladies began to make wedding dresses from unrationed materials such as net curtains, upholstery fabric and even parachute silk. Some married in their service uniform or wore a smart suit or afternoon dress. When the war ended in 1945 and clothes rationing in Britain lifted four year later, women were fascinated by the feminine and luxurious 'New Look' introduced by French couturier Christian Dior.





Wedding dress designed by Vera Wang for her spring 2007 bridal collection. Tissue organza and satin faced organza. Worn by Katie Bella Turner for her marriage to Andrew Robert Hayward on 26 August 2007 in Setauket, U.S.A. Lent by the American Friends of the V&A.



Wedding dress and coat designed by John Bates for his Jean Varon label, London, 1966. Cotton gabardine trimmed with silvered PVC. Worn by Marit Allen for her marriage to Sandy Lieberson in London on 10 June 1966. V&A: T.26-1,2-2009.



Wool suit, shirt and tie, Dior, Paris, 2002. Silk faille wedding dress and silk net veil decorated with antique lace, John Galliano for Dior, Paris, 2002. Lent and worn by Gavin Rossdale and Gwen Stefani for their wedding in London on 14 September 2002.

#### INNOVATION AND INDIVIDUALITY: 1950s - 1970s

During the post-war years, quality ready-to-wear clothing competed with the high fashion market for consumers. Wedding dresses were available to women at department stores, the salons of bridal wear companies and bridal boutiques. By the time Europe's economy recovered in 1957, a group of young entrepreneurs, tastemakers and designers had appeared and transformed London into a city that was youthful, trendy and anti-establishment. Bridal designs catered to a group of younger consumers. While the design of the bridal dress changed according to fashion, it continued to be formal and suitable for church wedding.

#### NOSTALGIA, ROMANCE AND THE MODERN AGE: 1970s - EARLY 2000s

Brides of the 1970s had a preference for romantic dresses, inspired by the Victorian era to the 1940s. However, this was quickly replaced by the exaggerated fashion of the 1980s, when bridal wear was feminine with a fitted bodice, small waist, full sleeves and a sweeping skirt. One of the most iconic wedding dresses of this period was the fairytale wedding gown worn by the late Princess Diana who wedded Charles, the Prince of Wales, in 1981. It was only in the 1990s when the connection between wedding clothes and contemporary fashion was revived. One of the most significant bridal designers credited for this revival was American designer Vera Wang.

#### THE CELEBRITY WEDDING: 1990s - 2000s

Since the 1990s, the Internet and popular celebrity and bridal magazines have fuelled public interest in celebrity weddings. The intense media coverage of such weddings has boosted the demand for dresses with similar designs but with more affordable price tags. The wedding industry has also benefited from such celebrity wedding coverage which encourages women to spend more on their wedding celebrations. As women marry later, many already have an established career and hence could afford to spend lavish sums on their wedding.



The bride and bridegroom, Mr Lim Peng Quan and Miss Lee Cheng Chwee, cutting their wedding cake. Both of them were dressed in Western bridal attire, 1920s, Singapore.

» A *sarong kebaya* in *songket* worn by a Malay bride, 1960s to 1970s, Singapore. Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.

« A bride wearing a sleeveless brocade *cheongsam* in gold on her wedding day. The traditional Chinese *cheongsam* was supplemented with a Western tiara and veil to convert it into a bridal gown, 1960s. Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.



This 1953 traditional Chinese *qun gua* comprises a black blouse and red skirt embroidered with auspicious symbols such as the dragon and phoenix using the gold thread. Similar traditional costumes are still worn by brides at the traditional tea ceremonies today. Collection of the National Museum of Singapore.



## THE WEDDING DRESS IN SINGAPORE

In Singapore, the Eurasians and Straits-born Chinese were probably the first to adopt Western wedding customs, including the wearing of Western bridal costumes at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was followed by the Chinese and Indians who converted to Christianity in the 1920s and 1930s.

The wearing of the Western wedding dress in Singapore became popular only in the late 1940s after the Second World War (1942 - 1945). Prior to this, the different ethnic communities in multi-racial Singapore were dressed in their traditional and elaborate wedding garments, although some wore the Western bridal attire at the wedding dinner. Despite differences in culture, lifestyle and the clothes they wear, these communities share a similar view on the idea of marriage: it is regarded as important by all and as a means to start a new family and extend existing family

ties. It also marks a new beginning for two people and the marriage is celebrated at the wedding.

There are several reasons for the increased popularity of the Western wedding dress during the post-war period. First, with the influx of Western ideas and culture, it was considered modern to wear the Western bridal dress. Second, it was considered more practical compared to the elaborate and expensive traditional bridal garment. Many complex traditional customs and rituals have also been simplified or done away with to accommodate the changing lifestyles of Singaporeans. Moreover, since the introduction of the Women's Charter in 1962, monogamous marriages registered at the Registry of Marriages have been the only legally recognised and socially accepted form of marriage in Singapore.

However, traditional wedding customs and costumes have not disappeared completely. Instead, they have been integrated into the modern lifestyle of wedding couples in Singapore. Innovative couples would incorporate elements of the Western wedding attire into their traditional garments. For example, some brides would wear the Western tiara and the veil together with their traditional outfits. For church weddings, Indian brides would put on a white or gold *sari* richly embroidered in silver or gold and a veil over their heads. In addition, the wearing of traditional wedding costumes is still being observed at the wedding ceremonies of the different communities today. For instance, the bridal *sarong kebaya* in *songket*, a traditional Malay fabric embroidered with gold or silver threads, continues to be a popular costume worn by the Malay bride at the *bersanding* or sitting-in-state ceremony which confers social recognition on the marriage.

It is hoped that through this exhibition of Western and traditional wedding costumes, visitors would appreciate the common values shared by the different ethnic groups in Singapore, and also discover how the Western wedding dress has been integrated into the wedding customs and costumes in our multi-racial society.

*Chung May Khuen is Curator, National Museum of Singapore.*

# UNDERSTANDING ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE

TEXT BY CLEMENT ONN

*TREASURE OF THE AGA KHAN MUSEUM: ARCHITECTURE IN ISLAMIC ARTS* explores concepts of architecture and decoration in Islamic cultures through marvelous paintings, metalwork, ceramics and architectural elements. It aims to offer insights into Islamic civilisations and their art and, in the process, foster knowledge and better understanding between Islamic societies and other cultures. The exhibition features over a hundred works of art from various periods in the Islamic world spanning across Iran, India, Turkey, Syria, Spain, Egypt and China. All works of art are drawn from the collection of the Aga Khan Museum, scheduled to open next year in Toronto, Canada. Leading to the opening of the new museum, this exhibition travelled to three venues: the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg; the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur; and the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM).

At the ACM, the exhibition is divided into five sections that explore different concepts of space in religious and secular environments. Fortress and the City encompasses forts and fortified towns; Sacred Topographies uses drawings and certificates to explore sites and monuments of Islamic pilgrimage; Religious and Funerary Architecture examines the importance of mosques and shrines; The Palace looks at the residences and lifestyles of royal courts; and, finally, Gardens, Pavilions and Tents discusses the importance of outdoor aesthetics and being close to nature.

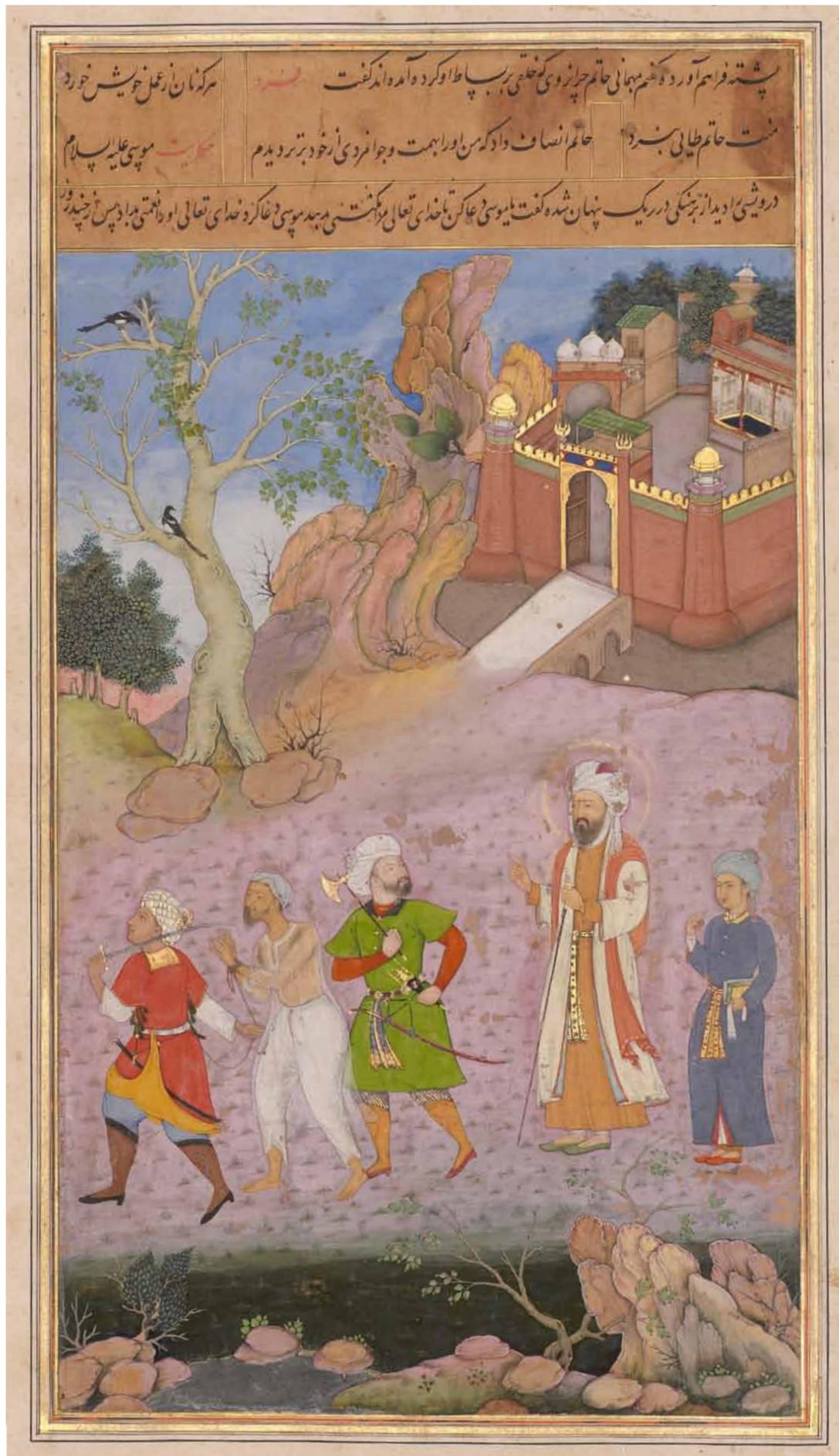
Dr Pedro Moura Carvalho, Chief Curator at the ACM and lead curator of this exhibition, restructured the exhibition from its arrangement at the previous venues to put greater emphasis on these five themes. The exhibition will give visitors an opportunity to learn more about Islamic manuscript paintings, in particular, and to understand more of the diverse Islamic artistic traditions. Visitors who saw the exhibition at the previous venues will be delighted to find the same works of art reinterpreted in Singapore.

## FORTRESS AND THE CITY

The exhibition begins by looking at the concept of fortified towns and medieval landscape development through paintings and various architectural elements. Images of forts, towns, enclosures, citadels and shrines are represented in the painting traditions of Ottoman Turkey (1299 - 1923), Safavid Iran (1501 - 1722) and Mughal India (1526 - 1858). Towns and palaces protected by tall walls and majestic gates often appear on the horizon in paintings. The scenes tend to be shown from a bird's-eye view, which enabled the painter to depict a large fortress in the limited space of a painting. Very often they were created from the imagination of the painter rather than from direct observation. These imagined fortified structures enhance the grandeur and awe of fabled towns and emphasise the city's impenetrability against hostile forces. Other paintings on display show urban landscapes depicting people, markets, houses, mosques and shrines inside towns.

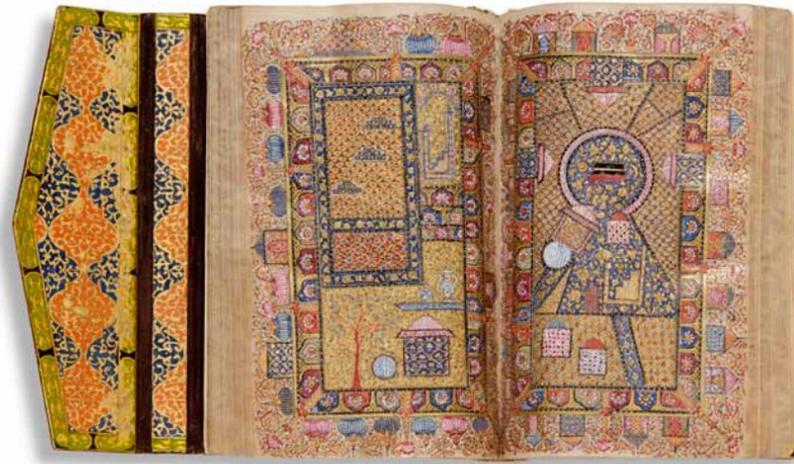
«  
**Moses regrets his Generosity towards the Intemperate Man**  
 Folio 93v from a manuscript of the *Kulliyāt* (collected works) of Sa'ī  
 Mughal India, about 1604  
 Watercolour, ink and gold on paper  
 © Aga Khan Trust for Culture.

**Shah Ramin and his companions before the city of Dar ul-Bekam**  
 From a manuscript of the *Tuhfet ul-leta'if* (Curious and Witty Gifts) by Ali ibn Naqib Hamza  
 Ottoman Turkey, dated 1002 AH / 1593-94  
 Watercolour, ink, gold and silver on paper, 35.1 x 21 cm  
 © Aga Khan Trust for Culture.



### SACRED TOPOGRAPHIES

The Kaaba in the Masjid al-Haram (sacred enclosure) at Mecca stands at the heart of Islam. It provides the focus for the orientation of prayer and for the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca that is a duty of every Muslim, provided they have the means and good health to do so. Other major pilgrimage sites include the Mosque of the Prophet at Medina, and the shrine of the Imam Reza in Mashhad, Iran. Representations of the Kaaba and other pilgrimage sites in manuscripts, manuals and certificates, and on ceramics were made as keepsakes for pilgrims and, in some cases, for verification purposes. In this section of the exhibition, the works of art are displayed in a stunning cubic structure which is five metres tall by five metres wide. This cube offers an intimate and serene space to view objects related to the hajj. Just as the Kaaba at Mecca stands at the heart of Islam, the cube aims to invoke a sense of the sacred topography and stands at the very centre of the exhibition gallery.

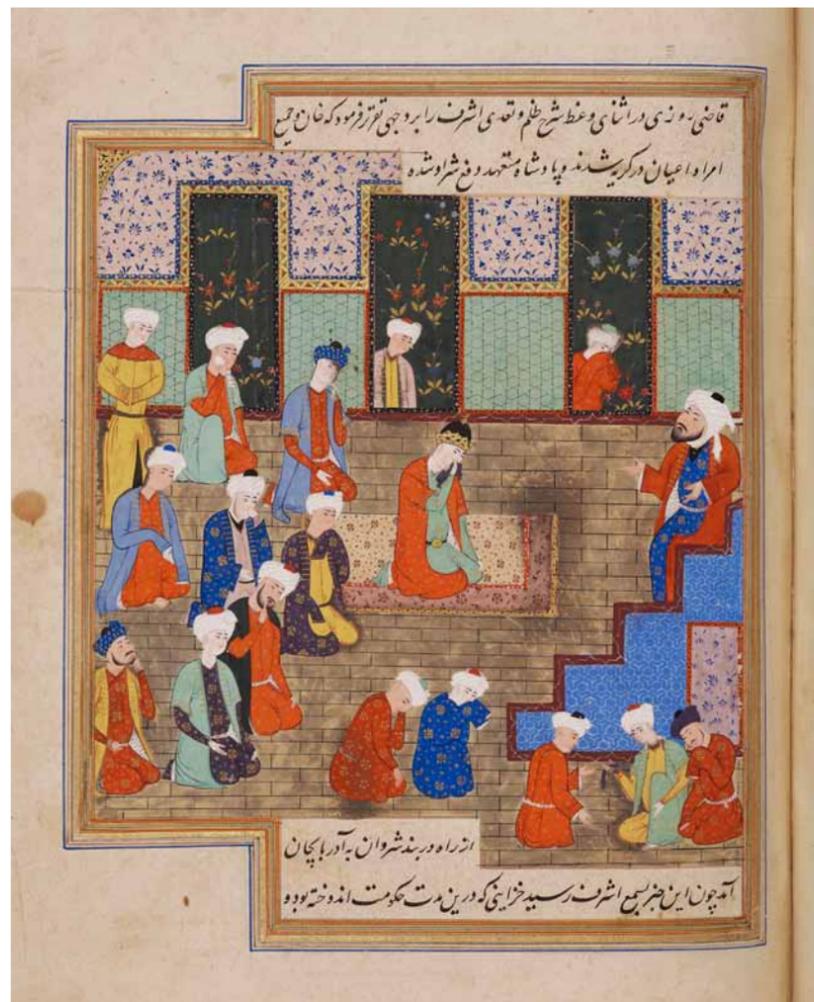


#### Plans of Medina and Mecca

From a manuscript of the *Dala'il al-khayrat* (Guidelines to Blessings) by Muhammad ibn Sulayman-al-Jazuli  
Probably Ottoman Turkey, dated Muharram 1233 AH / November 1818  
Watercolour, ink and gold on paper; lacquered and gilt leather binding, pages 13.7 x 8.5 cm  
© Aga Khan Trust for Culture.

#### (Below, Left): Hajj scroll (detail)

Hijaz or possibly India, dated 1202 AH / 1787-88  
Watercolour, ink and gold on paper, 918 x 45.5 cm  
© Aga Khan Trust for Culture.



### RELIGIOUS AND FUNERARY ARCHITECTURE

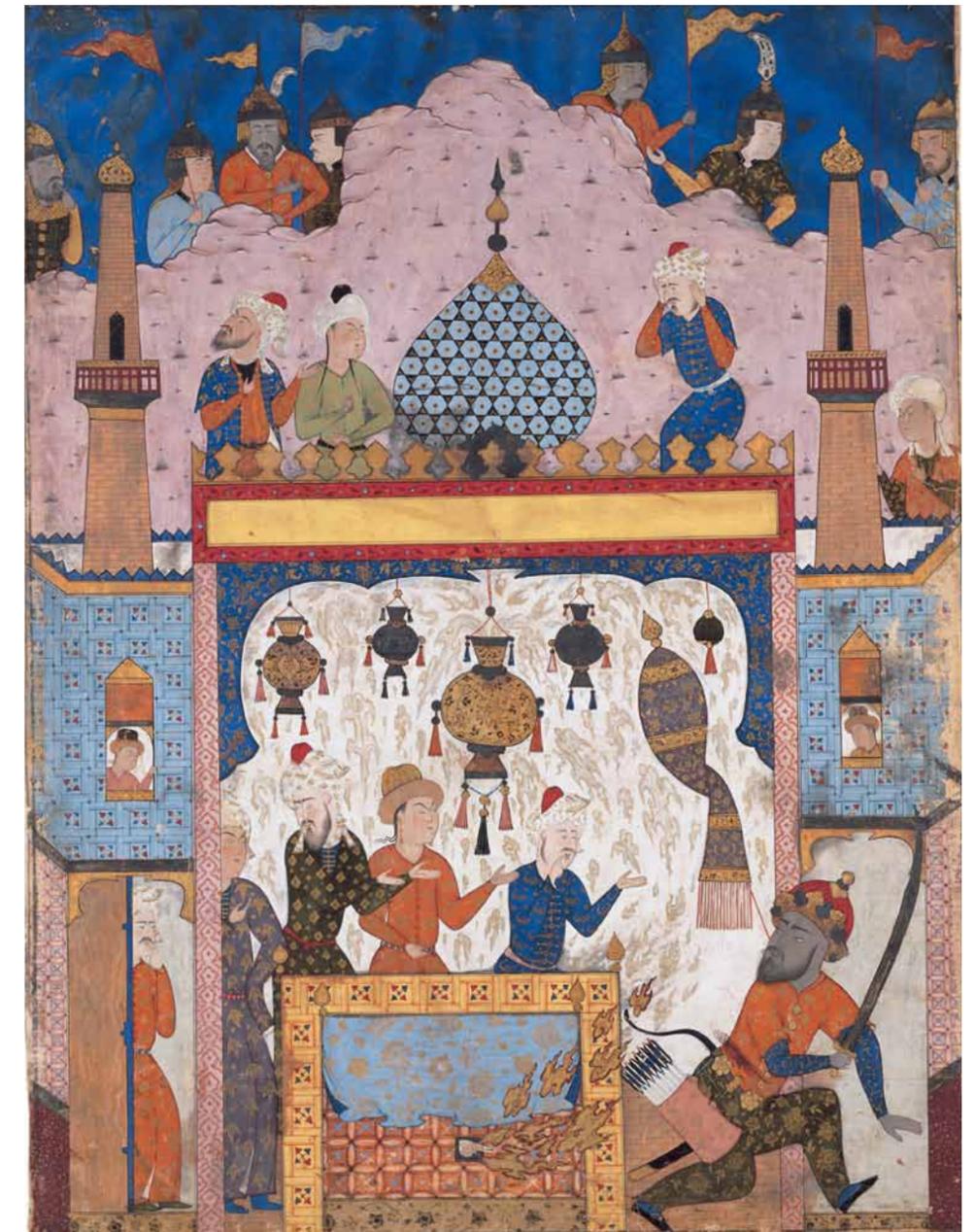
The practice of Islam does not require specific buildings for worship or to commemorate the dead. As long as they orient themselves towards Mecca, Muslims may pray in their own home or outdoors. Nevertheless, people have always turned to architecture to monumentalise their faith and to commemorate their dead. As a result, mosques, tombs and shrines represent some of the greatest monuments built in Islamic lands. The mosque is a space for ritual prayer and stands at the heart

of Muslim religious life, while tombs and shrines became the focus of pious visitation. Works of art in this section highlight the rich adornment of such architectures through paintings, textiles, ceramics and carved wooden beams, many of which are inscribed with Qur'anic verses, as well as complex floral and geometric patterns.

#### THE PALACE

The grand appearance of palaces, both inside and out, was intended to magnify the aura of kingship and create awe in visitors and residents alike. These magnificent

structures often exhibit the artistic and architectural creativity of local traditions. In paintings, palace scenes tend to depict the courtly pleasures of feasting, hospitality, performing arts and music in richly ornamented interiors. Decorative ceramics, painted stucco, textiles, along with carved stone and wood can be seen in painted representations of palace life, which suggests a luxurious taste for aesthetic beauty.



«  
**Prince hears a sermon in a mosque**  
From an illustrated manuscript of the *Nigaristan* (anecdotes on early Muslim figures) by Ahmad ibn Muhammad Ghaffari  
Safavid Iran, Shiraz, dated 980 AH / 1573  
Watercolour, ink and gold on paper, 38.4 x 23.7 cm  
© Aga Khan Trust for Culture.

**Imam Ali slays Murra ibn Qays (detail)**  
Folio from a dispersed manuscript of the *Fālnāma* (Book of Divinations)  
Iran, Qazwin, mid 1550s or early 1560s  
Watercolour, ink and gold on paper  
© Aga Khan Trust for Culture.

### GARDENS, PAVILIONS AND TENTS

Gardens are often referred to as an earthly version of the paradise promised in the Qur'an. *Surah al-Rahman* (Qur'an 55, on "The Merciful") mentions a paradise that includes gardens, pavilions, carpets, flowing springs, evergreen trees and fruits. Many early Muslim rulers hailed from arid lands, such as the desert of Arabia, North Africa and parts of Iran and central Asia. Perhaps because of this barren heritage, they developed a keen interest in garden cultivation, water irrigation and appreciation of nature. Permanent and temporary structures like outdoor pavilions and tents were used to bring people and their affairs into closer proximity with nature. The use of tents and carpets not only enhanced the beauty of the natural environment, they were essential for dynasties such as the Timurids, for whom they were reminders of their nomadic past. As a result, courtly audiences and ceremonies in pavilions and tents are commonly depicted in manuscript paintings from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

Among the highlights of the exhibition are pages from the *Shahnama*, the epic

### MUSEINGS.

historical poem written by the Persian poet Firdawsi in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, and reproduced in marvellous illustrated editions. A folio produced for the Safavid king, Shah Tahmasp (1514 - 1576), is one of the most celebrated works in the Islamic world; pages from it are on display, along with other manuscript paintings and folios. There is a rare 18<sup>th</sup>-century hajj certificate with an inscription that includes the name of the surrogated pilgrim and the requestor. Architectural elements are also featured, such as a *muqarnas* from late 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain, ornamental doors from 15<sup>th</sup>-century Timurid Iran and 16<sup>th</sup>-century Iznik tiles from Turkey. Other works of art – in ceramic, metal, stone, wood, and painted or drawn on parchment and paper – present an overview of the artistic accomplishments of Islamic civilisations from the Iberian Peninsula to China.

The exhibition *Treasure of the Aga Khan Museum: Architecture in Islamic Arts* is held at the ACM from 19 July to 28 October 2012. A fully illustrated 364-page catalogue published by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture is on sale at the museum.

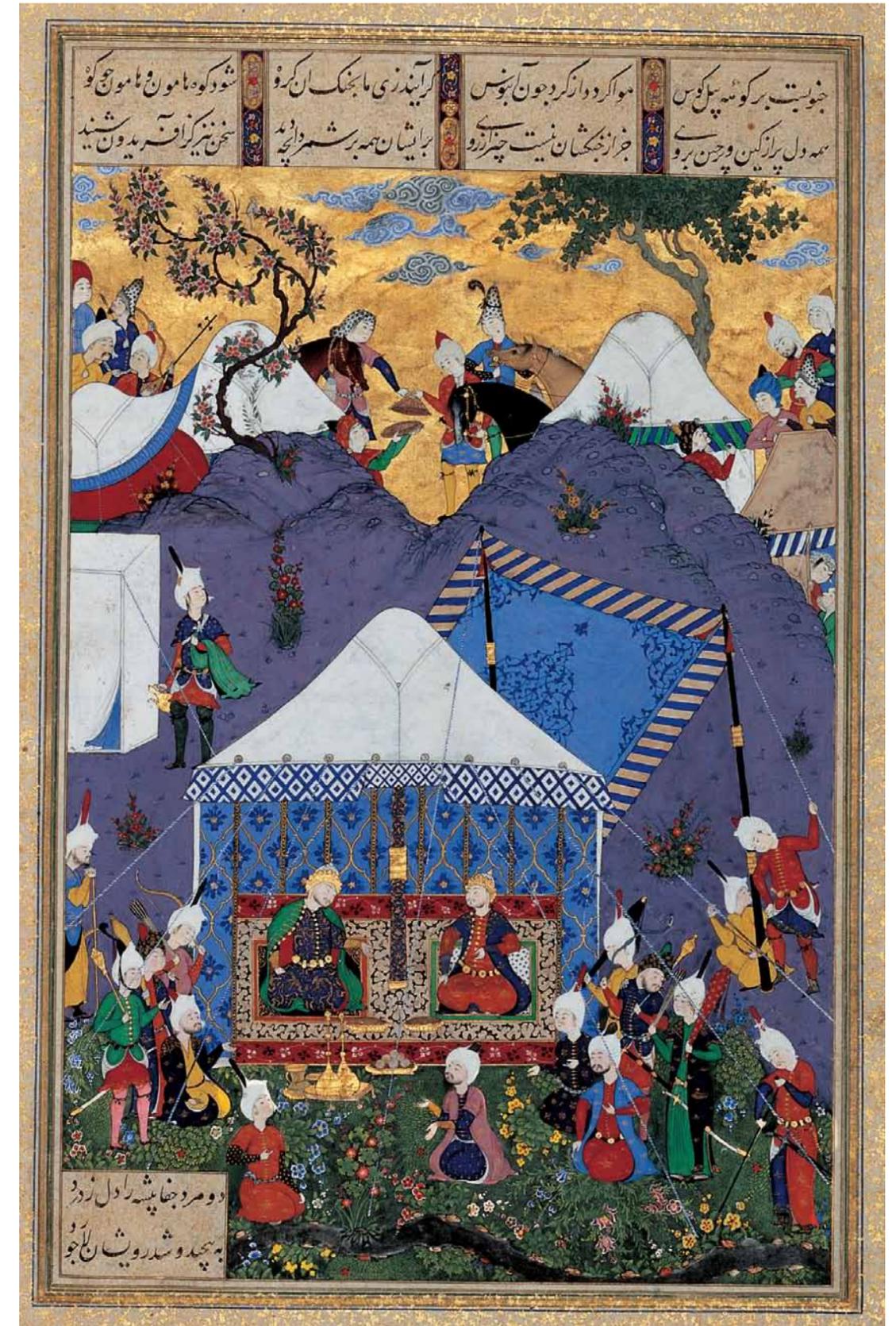
#### Tile with male figures

Iran, possibly Kashan,  
late 13th or early 14th century  
Glazed fritware © Aga Khan Trust for Culture.



#### Entertainment in a palace

Mughal India, Faizabad, about 1765 to 1770  
Watercolour and gold on paper, 50.2 x 69 cm  
© Aga Khan Trust for Culture.



Salm and Tur receive the reply  
of Faridun and Manuchihr  
From the *Shahnama* of Firdawsi  
Safavid Iran, Tabriz, about 1530  
Watercolour, ink, gold and silver  
on paper, 47.1 x 32 cm  
© Aga Khan Trust for Culture.



**Still life in a palace**  
 Qajar Iran, first half of the 19th century  
 Oil on canvas, 152.5 x 134 cm  
 © Aga Khan Trust for Culture.



(Left): Darul Aman Mosque. The mosque was constructed in 1986 in traditional Malay architecture style. The mosque features a wide, pitched roof commonly found in the Malay Peninsula. It was nominated for the *Aga Khan Award for Architecture* in 1989.



(Below, Left): Moulmein Rise Residential Tower. The building was completed in 2003 by Singapore-based WOHA Architects, known for designing local buildings such as the School of the Arts, Crown Plaza Hotel at Changi Airport and the Bras Basah MRT station. Moulmein Rise received the *Aga Khan Award for Architecture* in 2007.

### HIS HIGHNESS THE AGA KHAN AND THE AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

His Highness the Aga Khan, founder and chairman of the Aga Khan Development Network, is the 49<sup>th</sup> hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims. In the context of his hereditary responsibilities, His Highness the Aga Khan has been deeply engaged with development and education in Asia and Africa for more than 50 years.

The Aga Khan Development Network is a group of private, non-denominational agencies working to improve the quality of life for people in many parts of the developing world.

This exhibition is held in collaboration with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, one of the agencies in the Development Network. The Aga Khan Trust for Culture focuses on culture as a means of enhancing the physical, social and economic revitalisation of communities in the Islamic world. Some of its programmes include the *Aga Khan Award for Architecture*, the *Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme*, the *Music Initiative in Central Asia* and the upcoming project – the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto.

### THE AGA KHAN MUSEUM, TORONTO

Due to open in 2014, the Aga Khan Museum will house the art and objects assembled by His Highness the Aga Khan and his family, comprising some of the most important works of Islamic art in the world. The museum is dedicated to the collection, research, preservation and display of objects of artistic, cultural and historical significance from various periods and geographic areas in the Muslim world.

*Clement Onn is Curator, Cross Culture, Asian Civilisations Museum.*

**CROWD OF BYSTANDERS  
BY ZHOU XIAOHU**

ZHOU XIAOHU,  
*CROWD OF BYSTANDERS*,  
2003 - 2005, CLAY STATUES,  
VIDEO ANIMATION, 800 X 800 CM,  
EDITION 3 OF 3,  
SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM COLLECTION

SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

MUSEGALLERY.



Born in 1960 in Changzhou, China, Zhou Xiaohu studied sculpture at the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts. In his artistic practice, which includes painting and video, Zhou continually chronicles the reality of mass media in China and the role of government policies within the Chinese society. Zhou extracts media images that have left a deep impression on him and turns these actualities we see on television into entertainment.

*Crowd of Bystanders* comprised 10 videos which mirror events such as the trial of Saddam Hussein and the September 11 attacks, together with ceramic dioramas that are deployed in a consciously 'childish' manner. This seemingly infantile view of the

obscenity of violence is a contrast to the viewer's encounter with the exaggerated artworks, rendering the violence more real and more shocking.

Although *Crowd of Bystanders* is an apparent commentary on China, its interrogation of mass media and political development is relevant to the world, in which violence and social change are often communicated through television and mass media images.

The artwork is currently being featured as part of the exhibition, *Panorama: Recent Art from Contemporary Asia*, at the Singapore Art Museum.

